We’re All Pursuing Happiness. But What Kind?
Food for Lifelong Thought at the 2008 Bing Distinguished Lecture

By Simon Firth, Writer and Bing Parent

Scholars have ruminated on what makes us happy and why since at least the time of Aristotle.

“But it’s only been in the last two decades that psychologists have begun to study well-being and happiness,” Stanford’s Professor Jeanne Tsai told a packed house at Bing School on May 29th, where she delivered the 2008 Bing Nursery School Distinguished Lecture.

In introducing Tsai’s presentation Bing’s director, Jeanne Lepper, pointed out that Tsai herself has been in the forefront of that study and in the process has become, in Lepper’s words, “one of the world’s experts on the study of emotion.”

Tsai’s particular interest is in asking whether we do all really want to be happy and, if we do, whether we all want to be happy in the same way.

Do We All Want to Be Happy?
The answer to the first question turns out to be a pretty unequivocal yes, Tsai said. But that was far from a foregone conclusion when she first began her studies. Until recently, most cross-cultural research into emotions was descriptive rather than empirical. “And these studies,” explained Tsai, “really suggested that emotions are a culturally-defined phenomena?”

Tsai theorized that it arose from a difference between the emotions we actually feel (our “actual affect”) and the emotions we would like to feel (our “ideal affect”).

While what we feel is pretty similar across cultures, Tsai guessed, what we want to feel might vary depending on the culture in which we are raised.

“My work is to test this out,” she acknowledged, “but in psychology most of the research is really focused on how much people actually feel.”

How people want to feel, though, it turns out, is very much influenced by culture. In her research Tsai has found a particular difference between the kinds of happiness to which people aspire. Feelings of relaxation, calm, and peacefulness (known as “low arousal positive states”) are valued much more by people living in Far Eastern countries like China or Taiwan, for example. In contrast, people in the USA aspire to a kind of happiness defined by enthusiasm, excitement, and elation (“high arousal positive states”).

It Starts in Childhood
Tsai quickly established that this cultural difference in happiness preferences could not be explained by differences in individual temperaments. It also held for people of different socioeconomic backgrounds and from young adulthood into old age (even though you might expect older westerners to wish for a quieter life as they aged, that turned out not to really be the case).

If these differences really were cultural, Tsai reasoned, they should also be present at a very early age. And that brought her to Bing School.

At Bing Tsai looked at populations of children brought up in European-American and Asian-American environments and compared both groups with preschoolers growing up in Taiwan.

All were presented, explained Tsai, “with two smiley faces: an excitement smile and a calm smile, and we asked the preschoolers to tell us which one they would rather be, and which one they thought was more happy.”

Consistent with her adult data, she found that the European-American preschoolers preferred the excitement smile more than the Taiwanese-Chinese preschoolers, and the Asian-American preschoolers were right in the middle. Similarly, the European-American preschoolers perceived the excitement smiles as more happy, compared to the Taiwanese-Chinese preschoolers. And, again, the Asian-American preschoolers were right in the middle.

Children also listened to the story of two young friends enjoying a day swimming in which one floats calmly and the
other splashes and jumps in excitement. Which child would they rather be? “The European-American kids preferred the more exciting activities,” reported Tsai, “or said they were more like the character who liked to engage in the activity in an exciting way, compared to the Taiwanese-Chinese. And, again, the Asian-Americans were right in the middle.”

These differences again held when temperament (as reported by their teachers) was accounted for and, somewhat surprisingly, held true for both boys and girls.

**How It Happens**

If this cultural difference exists, there must be a cultural mechanism responsible for it and Tsai’s next series of studies at Bing looked at what that might be.

A content study of best-selling storybooks in Taiwan and the USA provided one clue.

“We looked at the top ten storybooks in one year,” Tsai recalled, “and we coded the emotional expressions of the characters. We looked at the degree to which an expression was an excited smile versus a calm smile. Then we also looked at the size of the smile relative to the size of the face.”

What she and her assistants found was that both the American and Taiwanese books featured characters smiling roughly the same number of times. But the characters in the American books far more frequently displayed wide-mouthed, excited smiles than their Taiwanese counterparts.

A third study at Bing and in Taiwan saw groups of children from different cultural backgrounds being read a story featuring either calm or excited play and then being asked to create a “perfect playground” in which they could have equipment that supported either calm and relaxing play (bean bags and wind chimes, say) or equipment that supported loud play (perhaps drums and trampolines).

Here, children who were read the exciting story chose more exciting things to put in their perfect playground compared to the children who were read the calm story—and this was true whatever cultural background they came from.

Together these studies suggest, Tsai reasoned, “that, at least in the short term, being exposed to a certain kind of content influences a child’s affective preferences.”

And, although it remains an inference, she imagines that the same thing happens to a much greater degree as children grow up in a particular culture—the more they see happiness represented as either a low or high arousal emotion, the more they wish for that kind of happiness themselves.

**A Theory of Affect Valuation**

Further content studies of cultural products (such as the faces of people in women’s magazines) have shown that differences in the depiction of happiness hold true throughout Asian and Western cultures.

“They’re even there, it turns out, when you examine the content of cultural bedrocks such as classic religious texts like the Bible or the Buddhist sutras.”

So what could account for these long-lived differences in the kinds of happiness, or ideal affect, that people in different cultures are looking to pursue?

Tsai’s supposition is that it’s a reflection of long-held cultural differences in interpersonal goals. Research by Stanford’s Hazel Markus has shown that American culture puts an emphasis on influencing others or influencing your environment.

“And, in order to influence your environment or influence other people,” noted Tsai, “you have to act on your environment or act on other people, and action requires high arousal states.”

In contrast, she said, “in many collectivistic contexts, like many East Asian cultures, the emphasis is really on adjusting to others. So, you change your own needs to fit with those of others. That requires assessing what other people want, and in order to assess what other people want, you have to suspend action, and the suspension of action is associated with a decrease in arousal.”

Subsequent laboratory studies have supported this explanation and suggest that it has power as a theoretical framework—in the form of what Tsai has dubbed Affect Valuation Theory—a theory that, if valid, has implications for a number of things important to our everyday lives.

One example is what it might tell us about what we do to make ourselves feel better—what psychologists call “mood-producing behavior.”

Take vacations. A number of studies have shown that cultural differences exist between what people of different cultures choose to do on a vacation to feel good (wanting to relax on a beach versus trekking through the rain forest, for example). However, explained Tsai, “there’s never been a really good theory about why this is true. We argue that it’s in part due to ideal affect.” If you know how people define happiness, in other words, you’ll be able to predict their ideal vacation.

**An Impact on Health**

Ideal affect might also have important implications for how we define health and happiness.

Tsai’s most recent research has shown that American measures of well-being and happiness, perhaps not surprisingly, are defined in terms of excitement states.

“That,” Tsai argued, “would be fine if they were only used in American culture with European-American samples. But, they’re actually used internationally, and this illustrates a cultural bias in terms of how people are defining happiness and well-being.”

Depression, she pointed out, is often defined in terms of an absence of positive emotional states. But if you are defining positive emotional states only as excitement states, you’re potentially bringing a cultural bias to your clinical definitions of depression.

Affect Valuation Theory might even improve the effectiveness of different clinical treatments by targeting a patient’s ideal affect, Tsai suggested.

“Bipolar patients in the United States are notorious for not complying with their Lithium treatment,” she explained, “because the Lithium treatment brings them from their high manic state to a lower calm state, and who wants that in American culture?”

But in Hong Kong, she said, bipolar patients have much lower non-compliance rates. “And we predict that that’s because the Lithium treatment is bringing them to the culturally desirable state.”
U.S. education policymakers would benefit from a visit to Bing, said Linda Darling-Hammond, PhD, Stanford’s Charles E. Ducommun Professor in the School of Education. She also serves as an education policy advisor to Senator Barack Obama. Darling-Hammond, who spoke to Bing teachers at a staff development day held in April, was noted by Education Week as one of the 10 most influential people in the field of education over the last decade.

A visit to Bing, acknowledged Darling-Hammond, would either introduce or reintroduce policymakers to the concept of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)—and, more importantly, its value. Unlike most K-8 classrooms, preschools tend to emphasize DAP, which shapes classroom experiences to each child’s stage of development. According to Darling-Hammond, DAP allows children to grow along trajectories in multiple modalities, including emotional, physical, social and moral. And a child’s development, especially in the social and emotional modalities, influences academic performance, the gold standard in our current educational climate.

Education based on DAP faces three challenges, according to Darling-Hammond: lack of effective professional training and advocacy, America’s obsession with immediate results, which fuels the urge for earlier and earlier academics, and lack of understanding on the part of policymakers.

Darling-Hammond challenged Bing teachers to educate their student teachers about early childhood development and to become even more outspoken about developmentally appropriate practice. Early childhood educators, Darling-Hammond observed, should “share upward” with K-8 educators, who are often not trained in DAP.

The concern for immediate results stems in large part from anxious parents. Darling-Hammond again pointed to parental education and grassroots organization as the keys to helping parents better understand America’s educational playing field, which is rife with inequality and features a generation of active children—especially boys—who are being misunderstood, labeled with deficiencies such as ADD and medicated. As a first-rate laboratory school, Bing is in a unique position, Darling-Hammond noted, to make a vocal case for play-based learning and DAP through grassroots parental organization, political and professional influence and available cutting-edge research.

Educational policy took center stage during our dialogue. Bing can shape the educational debate, Darling-Hammond reminded us, by inviting local and federal lawmakers to visit the school, where they can see the power of DAP through the school’s potent mix of research and practice. Educators can also reach out to the policymakers through phone calls, letters and other forums, both public and private. If teachers assert themselves as experts, policymakers might later turn to them for guidance when they fine-tune educational policy. To elevate the occupation’s status, work must be done to raise the salaries of early childhood educators, Darling-Hammond said. She reported that Senator Obama has promised that if elected, he will budget $10 billion for early childhood education and an additional $8 billion for teacher development and other K-12 school reforms.

Linda Darling-Hammond’s visit to Bing reminded us once again of the importance of our work as teachers and our responsibility to advocate for children by sharing our research and experience with students, parents and policymakers alike.
How do children learn that more than one mouse is “mice,’’ not “mouses’’? Or for that matter, that more than one tooth is “teeth,” not “tooths’’?

Inbal Arnon, a fourth-year graduate student in the Linguistics Department at Stanford, investigates how children acquire language, including explorations of mysteries such as how they advance from “mouses” to “mice.”

Bing Nursery School is part of the Department of Psychology at Stanford University and serves as a laboratory for research in child development and a site for training undergraduates. This past year, 15 studies took place at Bing. One of these was Arnon’s.

Arnon grew up in Israel, in a politically active family. Her parents are both academics—her father is an economist and her mother a psychologist—and Arnon was very involved in various human rights groups. She received her undergraduate degree from Tel Aviv University, earned a master’s in psycholinguistics from University of Edinburgh and then came to Stanford to study with linguistics professor Eve Clark, PhD.

Arnon shares Professor Clark’s view on language acquisition—that language, at its core, is a communicative task. “It’s influenced greatly by the input provided to children, by what parents say and by how children interact with one another,” Arnon elaborated. She pointed out that the approach differs from linguist Noam Chomsky’s theory that children have an innate knowledge and ability and that language acquisition occurs by evoking innate knowledge that is minimally shaped by the environment. Arnon and Clark place an emphasis on the importance of input and framing.

Arnon’s first study at Bing examined children’s understanding of relative clauses. For example she looked at their grasp of the sentence “the monkey I am feeding” as opposed to “the monkey the girl is feeding.” Both sentences feature a noun [monkey] that is modified by a clause. Previous studies claimed that children under the age of 6 have difficulty comprehending relative clauses.

Arnon and Clark argue that relative clauses with pronouns such as “I” or “you” rather than “the girl” are easier for young children to understand because they resemble what children actually hear and use in everyday life. Previous studies tended to use non-pronoun noun phrases such as “the woman the child is chasing” that are different from the type of relative clauses children hear and produce in real life.

To test her hypothesis in children ages 4 to 5, Arnon designed her props to include photos of her face. She then drew pictures of different situations that enable her to incorporate the pronoun “I” into the sentences. She also integrated colors in the tasks because she found this made the task more fun and engaging for the children. For example, Arnon showed children a drawing of herself and two women, one of whom was chasing the woman. The women wore hats, each a different color. Arnon asked the children, “What color is the hat of the woman that I’m chasing?” The data demonstrated that children were sensitive to the information provided in relative clauses with pronouns as subjects. Additionally, the color question gave children extra incentive to understand the sentence. Arnon applied the same design to a study of Hebrew-speaking children in Israel and obtained similar results.

Arnon’s second study at Bing investigates how children acquire irregular plural nouns such as “mice” and “teeth.” Previous studies that looked at children’s production of irregular plurals involved asking children to produce single words. Typically researchers show children pictures of an object, i.e., a tooth, and ask children to name it. Later, they show children pictures of teeth and ask children again to name them. Children tend to produce “tooths” rather than “teeth” under such circumstance.

First Arnon and Clark wanted to see how the production of overly generalized plurals (by adding “s” to the end of a word) is influenced by the frequency of the word and by the situation in which children are asked to produce. Children were asked to name pictures, teach a puppet English and correct a puppet’s English. For example, “Do you say ‘mouses’ or ‘mice’?” The results show that children are sensitive both to frequency and to situation. They produce more overly generalized plurals on less familiar items (e.g., “gooses” for “geese”) and when they are in a situation they are less used to (e.g., teaching English).

To demonstrate that input shapes learning, a follow-up study uses commonly used phrases incorporating the target noun—such as “brush your teeth.” Using the same pictures in the first study, children were invited to teach a puppet some words. Instead of simply asking children to name the object in the picture, Arnon’s research assistant provided a frame such as “brush your...” and invited children to finish the phrase.

This study showed that children were able to produce the correct irregular plurals much more frequently when provided with a sequence in which they often hear the word. The sequence helps children to access the single word in its correct form. It is akin to the idea that children often learn words in small chunks, as in this case—“brush your teeth.” While the results are significant with four-and-a-half-year-olds, Arnon and her research assistant are working with younger children to see
if the same effect manifests itself among them as well.

What are the implications of Arnon’s studies?

Both of Arnon’s studies demonstrate the importance of frequency and input as part of the mechanism that drives language learning. Arnon asserts that language acquisition is not that different from other cognitive abilities such as visual development. Humans are very good at noticing patterns and extracting irregularities. Language acquisition is no exception.

“On a different level, the fact that input is so important should also influence how we view, for example, the importance of very early preschool,” Arnon reflected. Different from the Chomskian view that language learning occurs naturally, Arnon highlights the importance of boosting language exposure for disadvantaged children and providing ample opportunities for meaningful activities with language. For example, a preschool environment that engages children in talking, reading, singing, making up stories and listening to stories can complement what takes place at home. There isn’t a real substitute for human interaction, Arnon noted. “There’s nothing like the negotiation that occurs when you’re talking to another person.”

Arnon enjoyed conducting studies at Bing Nursery School, she said. One especially memorable experience for her took place in the beginning of her studies at Bing, when she was reading a story to the children at snack time as a way to get to know them. In the middle of the story, a child stopped the reading and excitedly announced that she had new shoes and that they have wheels. The child then thought for a second and said, “You know, now I can’t walk anymore.” A teacher asked, Why? The child declared, “I can only wheel around.” As a linguist, Arnon keenly appreciated the exquisite demonstration of how nouns can be used as verbs.

Bing School is a very special place for children and a very wonderful one for research, Arnon said. “A lot of the research couldn’t have been done, of course, without the children but also not without the teachers and the kind of support researchers get.”

Children’s Play is More Than “Child’s Play”

By Adrienne Lomangino, Head Teacher

Bing was founded over 40 years ago as a play-based program. The founding director, Dr. Edith Dowley, held a strong belief in the value of play. To fully appreciate the Bing Nursery School approach to early childhood education, one needs to delve into the significance of play. This article explores the definition of play and the many competencies that children develop through play experiences. The presentation made at this year’s parent seminar, “The Importance of Play,” is based on this essay.

Although we consider Dr. Edith Dowley a visionary, various theorists, researchers, and organizations have emphasized the value of play. A few examples reveal the fundamental importance of play for children’s development. Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) asserted, “In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself.” (p.102)

Twelve years ago the National Association for the Education of Young Children established principles for developmentally appropriate practice. The authors assert, “Play is an important vehicle for children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development.” (NAEYC, p.8) The last phrase in this statement, which could easily be overlooked, needs closer consideration. How is play a reflection of development? Across domains, solving problems and innovations involve play. While adults typically play with ideas, these skills and ways of thinking begin for children in more concrete forms of play. In 2006, The American Academy of Pediatrics published a report promoting the value of play entitled The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. Emphasizing the need to view play as essential for growth and development, the report highlights that the United Nations recognized play as a right of every child (Ginsburg, 2006). At a time when children’s opportunities for play are frequently being restricted and children’s performance is being assessed at younger and younger ages, it is important to remind ourselves that “the spontaneous play of children is their highest achievement.” (Jones and Reynolds, 1993)

The importance of play in promoting human development is supported by work by the prominent psychologists Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky. Their work provides the following principles that guide the Bing School perspective on how children learn. Perhaps most important, children construct understandings of the world through experiences with the physical and social world. They do not simply soak in information, but rather have to build and refine their knowledge. Learning also involves culturally transmitted knowledge that is acquired during interactions. Vygotsky drew attention to the cultural knowledge children learn and explore through role play. Play provides many experiences for constructing knowledge through interactions with the physical, social and cultural world and is described by Vygotsky (1978) as “the source of development.” (p.132)

In order to promote optimal learning and growth in children, educators must...
Elina, Naomi, Kieran, and Charlotte reveal the satisfying, spontaneous, and active nature of play while fingerpainting.

attend to the fact that cognitive skills are intertwined with physical, social and emotional systems. In their principles for developmentally appropriate practice, NAEYC (1997) has asserted, “Understanding that children are active constructors of knowledge and that development and learning are the result of interactive processes, early childhood teachers recognize that children’s play is a highly supportive context for these developing processes” (p.8). Or, more succinctly: “it is myopic, if not futile, to dwell on the intellect and exclude its partners.” (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2004, p.4)

What skills, knowledge and competencies do children develop in the context of play? To fully appreciate the importance of play, it is important to examine more closely its influence on social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. Beyond children’s development across these areas, play also has a broader influence on children’s developing dispositions toward learning.

Social Development
Children’s experiences in play promote various aspects of social development. Imaginative play involves communication of one’s thoughts and wishes. During pretend play, children learn to communicate through language, gestures and symbolic objects (Segal, 2004). During interactive play, children gain experience and competence at taking turns and collaborating with others. In the process of collaboration, they develop skills for reaching compromises, which often requires flexibility in children’s intentions, thoughts and behavior (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2004, Gestwicki, 1999).

The interactive nature of play promotes the development of reciprocal relationships, which is essential for social development. Through their interactions in reciprocal relationships, children develop mutual understanding. By depending on others within play, and having them depend on one’s self, children develop trust (Kagen & Lowenstein, 2004).

Social development also involves developing an awareness of rules and the self-regulation to abide by social rules. The situations and scripts that children enact through sociodramatic play have inherent rules that frame children’s activity. They learn to follow rules in a context that is meaningful and satisfying (Berk & Winsler, 1995, Zigler & Bishop-Josef). During such play, children learn and practice social conventions, and perhaps test the boundaries of those conventions (Gestwicki, 1999). They explore the scripts that surround them in their social world, including family scenarios at home, weddings, trips and scenes from television and movies.

Emotional Development
Experiences in play are also vital for children’s emotional development. Play provides meaningful opportunities for expression of feelings and building awareness of one’s own and other people’s emotions (Kagen & Lowenstein, Gestwicki, 1999). Imaginative play allows children the opportunity to replay events and to express and deal with fears, anxieties and frustrations (Segal). It allows children to express and cope with feelings in a safe and acceptable context, without harmful consequences (Gestwicki, 1999).

Optimal emotional development for young children includes gaining a sense of confidence. Play helps children develop new competencies that lead to enhanced

What is Play?

Although definitions of play vary, the following eight characteristics are frequently included.

- Play is **satisfying**. It is often pleasurable and enjoyable. However, play is not always fun. Struggling with how to make a block building stand, or solve other problems, is not necessarily fun, but provides satisfaction in the effort.

- Play is **spontaneous and voluntary**; it is not obligatory but is freely chosen by the player. In order to be spontaneous and voluntary, play activity must not be necessitated by basic needs or social demands.

- Within play activity, players are concerned with the **process** of activities more than goals or products. Children may have goals for their play activity, however these are emerging, self-imposed, and modifiable.

- Play involves **active engagement** on the part of the player. Play is not a passive experience. Although in most situations, children are physically participating in play, in some cases children may be onlookers. These children are actively observing the play of others, although not overtly joining the activity (Parten, 1932).

- Play is **meaningful** for the participants. Within their play, children make connections to their own experiences.

- Play can be **symbolic** and nonliteral. “It represents reality with an ‘as if’ or ‘what if’ attitude” (Fromberg, 1999).

- Play is **rule-governed**. According to Vygotsky (1978), “whenever there is an imaginary situation in play, there are rules” (p.95). However, these are not externally determined, set rules. In play, the players and the situation determine the rules. For example, if you are the family dog in a dramatic play scenario, you probably cannot drive the family car and make dinner. In addition, the players can modify the rules as the play unfolds.

- Play is a child’s **private reality**. Children supply their own meanings to play activities and control the activities themselves.
confident and the resiliency they will need to face future challenges (Ginsburg, 2006). Imaginative play enables children to develop confidence and master reality. Play themes of protection, power and attack/destroy provide children a means of gaining a sense of mastery and control over their worlds (Gestwicki, 1999, Segal, 2004).

Perhaps, above all, play is simply a joy that is a cherished part of childhood. Many of our most treasured childhood memories are of play experiences, moments when anything seems possible.

Physical Development

During a range of play experiences, children also engage their physical selves. They use their large muscles to run, dig, push, carry, pound, swing and throw. They use their fine muscles to draw, paint, cut, pinch (for example, clay), sprinkle and pick up and piece together objects. Through such motor experiences, children develop dexterity, control and hand-eye coordination. In addition, as they move through space in play and coordinate their movements with those of their peers, children develop body-space awareness. Through repeated experiences in the physical activities of play, children develop physical confidence.

Cognitive Development

Pretend play is a cognitively demanding activity, requiring concentration, inspiration and symbolic thinking (Segal, 2004). Some of the many cognitive competencies children use and develop during play include problem solving, perspective taking, symbolic representational skills, memory and creativity (Kagen & Lowenstein, 2004, Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2004). Play also contributes to children’s ability to engage in flexible thinking, to play with ideas and solutions to problems. This is akin to “the way that adults talk through alternatives to problems they face and imagine consequences from varying perspectives” (Cohen et al., p.81). For example, if a child is building a house and wants a bed, but no bed is available, then he or she has to figure out how to create a bed with the available materials.

Piaget highlighted the many opportunities that play provides for cognitive tasks such as observing and testing cause-effect relations, categorization, generalization and concept acquisition (Kagen & Lowenstein, 2004). Experiences in pretend play also encourage discrimination of appearance and reality, which is a cognitive feat that preschool-age children are in the process of mastering (Taylor & Flavell, 1984, Gestwicki, 1999). As children transform objects during pretend play, they negotiate back and forth between what the object really is and what they are pretending it is (e.g., using blocks as “luggage”). Engaging in pretend play has been found to enhance children’s memory for narrative and lists of objects, as well as their ability to reason theoretically (Gestwicki, 1999).

Vygotsky particularly focused on the importance of sociodramatic play for fostering development of self-regulation. During interactive pretend play children share ideas, attend to other perspectives as they plan and negotiate conflicts, and create scenarios (Segal, 2004). They have to inhibit their impulses in order to follow the roles and script of the game. (If you are the bride in a wedding, you cannot also be the one conducting the ceremony.) Vygotsky describes children’s control over impulsive action in order to pursue plans and goals as, “the highest level of preschool development.” (Berk & Winsler, 1995)

Broader Implications

Beyond these specific areas of development, play is important for framing how children approach learning opportunities. Building knowledge and skills is of little use if children do not have the disposition to use them (Katz, 1994). It is therefore essential not only to foster knowledge and skills, but also to develop children’s confidence and propensity to use and build on their knowledge and skills. Engaging in play promotes initiative, task persistence and openness and curiosity about new tasks and challenges. The spontaneous, open-ended nature of play promotes invention and imagination (Kagen & Lowenstein, 2004).

The meaningful, self-imposed goals and non-evalutive nature of play encourages reflection on one’s activity. Children can examine their activities and consider alternative approaches without fear of being evaluated as succeeding or failing. Developing competence at reflecting on one’s activity is essential for becoming a self-regulated learner who will adaptively and strategically approach problems (Paris & Newman, 1990).

Finally, play activity fosters and draws upon children’s intrinsic motivation to explore the world. They engage in play activity due to the satisfaction they experience, not because they are told to do so. They sustain attention on a task and work hard, not for stickers or stars, but for the pleasure of exploring, trying and seeing one’s progress and success. Through this process they experience working toward goals for the intrinsic rewards of gaining a sense of mastery and accomplishment. We hope this will set them on a path toward lifelong learning.

References


Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning,” Fred Rogers of Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood once said. “They have to play with what they know to be true in order to find out more, and then they can use what they learn in new forms of play,” he added. The Bing staff set about to illustrate this point to parents at a seminar event, “The Importance of Play,” held May 5 and repeated May 7.

After coffee and dessert, the presentation began with head teachers Adrienne Lomangino, Kitti Pecka and Peckie Peters providing parents with a definition of play, explaining why play is valuable to children and describing the types of play often seen at Bing. They outlined how children’s play affects their social, emotional, physical, cognitive and language development.

After this overview, teachers led the attendees to the adjacent classroom, which was set up just as it is when the children arrive for class. The activities provided involved basic materials such as blocks, clay, paints, and water, as well as found materials, musical instruments and props for dramatic play. Then the teachers encouraged parents to interact with the materials and one another. Several members of the Bing staff, including Jen Aguilar, Jenna Ascari, Amy Blasberg, Lars Gustafson, Nancy Howe, Colin Johnson, Betsy Koning, Kim Taylor, Nancy Verdtzabella and Seyon Verdtzabella were stationed at these activities to encourage participants and answer questions. During this playtime, we heard frequent exclamations of surprise and delight as parents explored and experimented in ways their children do each time they come to school.

Many of the adults stated that they had not realized the challenges involved in working with certain materials or in simply choosing an activity and getting started. Also, many mentioned that they had not expected to enjoy the playtime so thoroughly.

The entire group reconvened at the end of the evening to share what they had learned and how they felt about their experiences. The resounding refrains from the participants included, “We want more time to play” and “I want to do this with my children.” One parent summed up her experience by saying that she now understood why her son comes home from school feeling fulfilled and tired, yet energized at the same time. She sees how this type of play “gets his juices flowing” and “makes him want to do more and more.” Other parents concurred when she added that it was a valuable lesson for her to experience this type of play herself. Fortunately, at Bing Nursery School, opportunities for these play experiences abound.
Art in Nature
By Beverley Hartman, Head Teacher

Inspired this year by our natural setting and the works of artist Andy Goldsworthy, the teachers in the East Mornings classroom led a project we called Art in Nature. We sought to guide children in an exploration of color, shape, texture and pattern, using materials from the play yard. We examined the art in nature, observing changes over time.

Nature study was a good fit for our curriculum because the play yards and gardens are rich with trees, plants and flowers. They also offer small stones, pebbles and sand as well as animal life. In a sense, the project was an extension of last year’s project, focusing on trees, which still resonated with the children and teachers. The children observed, collected, considered and designed with found materials in the process. This curriculum afforded ample opportunity to learn the characteristics of the objects, to investigate their scientific properties and to represent the ideas about art in nature that emerged.

Andy Goldsworthy’s outdoor installation Stone River at Stanford’s Cantor Arts Center is a huge serpentine sculpture built from sandstone recycled from campus structures. Teachers visited the site and invited families to do the same. Back at the school, teachers and children saw the sand area in a new light. It became a fresh canvas, providing opportunities to mold and shape the landscape in new patterns and textures. Children learned to add materials to their sand sculptures that enhanced the designs. Teachers watched the documentary Rivers and Tides about Andy Goldsworthy and also viewed his images and writings.

“My sculpture can last for days or a few seconds—what is important for me is the experience of making. I leave all my work outside and often return to watch it decay,” says Goldsworthy. This mirrors the young child’s interest in process and reminds the adults of the value in the immediate experience. For a small-scale experience, children used sand trays with an array of stones, shells and acorns to make patterns or represent ideas. On a large scale, children excavated boulders in the sand area and made their own stone river. Inquiry and activities promoted learning about color, shape, texture and pattern. We returned to these investigations to observe changes such as how water revealed the color of a pebble or how leaves crinkled and faded as they dried. Teachers found meaning in Andy Goldsworthy’s sketchbook entry: “Nature for me is the clearest path to discovery—uncluttered by personalities or associations—it just is. A perfect lever. People, like layers of leaves on a woodland floor—one generation after another—each layer adding a new level to human understanding and character.” Perhaps the study of nature is a universal path for discovery and learning.

The teachers displayed collections of natural objects, aiming to promote thoughtful investigation of the magic in nature. Rapunzel’s Supermarket, a book on building children’s relationships with art, also influenced the teachers. Its author Ursula Kolbe writes, “The sense of wonder that we are all born with sensitivity to the look and feel and sound of things—matters a great deal. If we try to look at things with children, if we value the moments when they stop and stare and wonder at the world, then we probably do more for their creative, aesthetic and artistic development than a host of specific art activities might ever do.” Observational drawing, painting, collage and assemblages are some of the conventional means the children used for studying color, shape, pattern and texture. Sand sculptures were formed with hands and tools, then enhanced with colored sand, pebbles, acorns, sticks and leaves. Placing specimens in a clear container or helping children construct a museum offered new ways to display objects. Reflections, overhead projection and refracted lenses inspired us to consider the items we examined. Looking near and far these experiences brought forth our sensitivity and sense of wonder.

Looking at objects with children has taken on important dimension and increased our perception. Teachers traditionally invite children to step back to look at their easel paintings and provide binoculars and magnifying glasses to look at nature. The intentionality of the experience of looking has increased during this study and we eagerly accept Andrew’s invitation to “Come up on the mountain and look at the sand sculpture!”

From left: Seth and Abby arrange natural objects on the tray of an overhead projector to see their silhouettes. Anyi uses the sand as a canvas and makes an imprint with a rake. “I’m drawing an ocean around my castle. It’s for the water fairy.”
In the Back 40, the large outdoor space in West room, Harlan and Kristopher are bent over a pot filled with pinecones, pine needles, grass and water. Paolo is standing close by, watching his friends work. Kristopher stands at the stove with his pot on a “burner,” holding a wooden spoon in his hand and stirring the contents of the pot, looking up every once in a while to urgently ask Paolo or Harlan for another ingredient.

KRISTOPHER: “Paolo! I need some more water!”

Paolo fills a measuring cup with water from a container on the picnic table, and pours it into Kristopher’s bowl.

KRISTOPHER: “I need more salt! Paolo, get me some more salt!”

Paolo looks around, uncertain.

KRISTOPHER: “The dirt is the salt.”

PAOLO: “Oh, yeah.”

Paolo grabs a fistful of dirt and adds it to Kristopher’s pot. Harlan continues to stir his own bowl, looking up occasionally when Kristopher or Paolo says something. The teacher asks Kristopher what he is doing, and he replies that he is cooking. She asks what he is making, and he answers:

KRISTOPHER: “I’m making chicken noodle soup. The pinecones are chicken. These [pointing to the pine needles] are the noodles. We also need water, and jalapeños, and salt and pepper. We are making two kinds of soup, chicken noodle and just chicken soup. OK, it’s time to eat!”

Paolo, Kristopher, and Harlan get the bowls from the play stove and set them on the table. Kristopher brings his pot of soup to the table and starts spooning the mixture into the three bowls.

These children clearly have some expertise in cooking, which grew at least in part out of the cooking project our class embarked on this year. This project formally began when teachers observed children cooking throughout the classroom environment: Making food for babies in the dramatic play area, creating deliciously messy concoctions in the sand area and hunting for natural items to add to “soup” in the Back 40. Children were clearly enthusiastic about cooking, but teachers hoped to broaden and enhance their experience by creating an environment that stimulated their interest.

We began by asking children what they knew about cooking. Almost all of their responses fell into two categories. Many children described scenarios in which they helped to prepare favorite food items. Bella makes pancakes this way: “I know how to make pancakes. First you put eggs, milk, flour, oil and butter. And then it tastes really good with sausage. You roll the sausage in a pancake and dip it in syrup and it’s yummy.” Max likes making pasta: “I love pasta. First you let the water boil, then put in the pasta, then you put it on the fire, then it’s done.” Riley prefers pizza, “I cook pizza. I put it on a plate and then I put it on the table and then I eat it.”

Simultaneously, teachers added a variety of cooking items to the environment. Aprons, potholders, rolling pins and play dough in the dramatic play area invited children to explore cooking in their play. On the discovery table at the entrance to classroom, cookbooks with photographs complemented molding sand (a sand material that sticks together when pressure is applied), small bread pans and measuring spoons. The outdoor kitchen areas included found materials such as berries and pine needles to stimulate creative recipes. We also committed to cooking on a daily basis in the art area so children would have sufficient time to hone their skills as cooks. Last, we decided to select a story each week that supported or reflected the cooking that was occurring.

The initial interest in cooking exploded. Children filled the cooking table to make favorites like corn bread and pretzels, becoming competent at measuring, kneading and mixing. Others liked to present story plays of their own versions of the books we were reading. In the sand area many invented their own recipes such as the following by Edie, Mari and Nina:

Snow Pasta
Mix sugar and salt.
Put it in a pastry pan.
Add tons and tons of snow.
Cook it all night.
Mix it and put it with sugar.

Up to this point, teachers had selected recipes based on their understanding of...
what children would enjoy. Now it seemed to make sense to ask children what they wanted to cook. Their ideas ranged from pasta to waffles to ice cream. Ben’s thoughts were more detailed. “I would like to barbecue, but I need my dad. He tells me the temperature, when to take it out. I help open the doors, carry all the plates and bowls. My dad does help me cook chicken.” James, perhaps assuming that we only cook “healthy” items at school, suggested: “Maybe Bing could change a little bit so we could make a cake.” Pizza was a group favorite so we decided to go next in this direction, first choosing simple toppings, then moving to more elaborate choices.

At this time, parents began to comment that their children exhibited a new interest in cooking at home. Some wanted to tell all about the recipes they cooked at school. Others wanted to help mom or dad create meals for their families. A few decided they were ready to prepare their own breakfast, without any adult help. Children’s excitement stimulated parents to get involved in the project, with several asking to share a favorite recipe with the class. Our repertoire expanded to include Chex mix, omelets, banana bread, fresh squeezed juice and apple pie. Each activity built on existing skills, scaffolding children’s learning to include a new level of expertise. The ongoing presence of parents in the classroom added a positive dimension to the classroom environment. One parent, Mary Arnone, introduced Chex mix to build on the children’s pretzel-making experience the previous week. When asked how they liked the recipe, Quinn resembled a food reviewer from a gourmet magazine: “Mmmm. It’s hot and buttery, but this part (holding a Rice Chex) I don’t like.” Max made the literal connection between the pretzels we had made and the book, Walter the Baker. Holding up a pretzel he exclaimed: “Walter!” (the name of the pretzel maker in the book).

Children became comfortable using electric appliances such as hand mixers, juicers and apple peeler/corers. In fact, they required only minimal adult supervision because the group had developed a sense of the importance of safety considerations, and reminded each other if that line was being crossed. Cooking vernacular became commonplace. “Pass me the teaspoon.” “Make sure that (flour) is level.” “I need to use the sifter.” “Can you help me with the apple corer?” Children’s comfort level with cooking, following recipes and using tools had become so high, as teachers we contemplated what avenue to explore next. The answer came from the children on the day we ran out of whipped cream for strawberry shortcake. “Let’s make it,” was their solution.

As the project continued, we made more foods we usually buy. After whipped cream, we moved to butter, then graham crackers. Many children asked: “Will we try making saltines (another common Bing snack) next?” But the end of the school year was quickly approaching and we wanted children to have an opportunity to explore their own recipes.

We jumped into the next phase by giving children a few ingredients they had used frequently, including flour, water and baking soda. At one level it seemed like we had returned to our roots. Children measured, mixed and kneaded their own sticky doughy inventions. “It’s like bread!” Ella noticed one day, so we decided to challenge children to invent their own bread recipes, adding salt, raisins, sugar or whatever ingredient they suggested. Snack time was filled with delicious smells and proud cooks who declared: “I helped make that one.”

In many ways this was our project’s culmination: Children had used their knowledge of ingredients to create their own recipes, which were not only edible, but also delicious. The following week we had a second culmination when children helped to prepare muffins for the upcoming potluck. Comments like: “We’re making these for the party” or “We know how to do this recipe” reflected children’s sense of ownership and their realization of themselves as cooks.

During the first week of June, just before the end of the school year, cooks were still hard at work in West Room. This time the chefs were using finger-paint. With both hands Kate skillfully mixes the “chocolate,” making sweeping circles on the table as she presses with her hands. Amelie calls for more white (paint) and joins Kate in the mixing. “We’re adding the caramel now. Ooh, it’s really sticky. They’re going to love this,” Kate grins and looks at the teacher, saying: “It’s chocolate. We’re making chocolate for everyone.” “With caramel,” adds Amelie, “but we’re not going to let them eat it!” “Where’s the sugar?” asks Kate, looking at the containers of finger paint on the counter. “It’s blue. Could we have some more blue?” Blue is added to the concoction and the cooks begin to mix again.

The children in West Room are cooks now. As teachers, we were pleased to see their competence expand and their interest grow. We built on this interest in several areas of the curriculum but the connection between home and school was the impetus for taking our investigation to a higher level. We are grateful for the support from families, which encouraged the children in West Room. This year, mud pies and apple pies; next year, our own restaurant?

Bella uses the apple corer to prepare apples for apple pie.
The Importance of Musical Play
By Nancy Howe, Matt Linden, and Kitti Pecka, Two’s Head Teachers

Music brings pleasure. Music fosters play. So it’s no surprise that musical play figures largely into the activities at Bing, where play ranks as one of our highest priorities.

Two-year-olds engage in interactive play after they have become comfortable in the environment, have established a bond with individuals and have acquired enough vocabulary to communicate their ideas verbally. Music fosters all of these conditions in the classroom.

A survey of the musical activities of Bing’s Two’s classrooms reveals the power of music in the lives of children.

The children in TTh AM Two’s built a sound sculpture along the fence in their yard, and in doing so illustrated that musical instruments wait to be discovered in unexpected places. For example, many babies discover the great “musical” possibilities of the pot lids in the kitchen cupboards. Inspired by Charlotte’s father, Mark Applebaum, PhD, a Stanford music professor and inventor of musical instruments, the children turned over metal pots and pans and plastic buckets used for sand play, leaned old-fashioned washboards against the fence, hung pot lids for gongs and cymbals and used wooden spoons to create a range of sounds on these found-object instruments.

There is a unique joy in watching two-year-olds achieve their first group participation experience. Their recognition of peer response and pleasure in joining together in activities that suit their stage of development is palpable. In the MWF AM Two’s classroom, two children, Sean and Langston, formed a tight bond at the beginning of the year. Their contagious joy for music brought others into their fold, their participation in musical activities strengthening their bond and connections to the other children in the classroom.

For the youngest children in preschool, musical activities are often chosen and led by the teacher. Teachers facilitating small or large groups encourage participation most effectively with music and movement. Many teachers also lead music interactions with large, colorful songbooks such as *This Old Man* or *Five Little Ducks*. The bright illustrations and predictable rhythms and patterns help to engage children in the interactive musical process.

Because everyone can contribute at the same time in their own preferred manner and degree, musical activities bring coherence while providing individual expression. Over time, children make more and more contributions. In fact, often the most beneficial music play originates from ideas the children bring to the activity. In the Two’s classrooms, making music together is by far the children’s preferred activity. The teachers, who have a wealth of musical expertise, provide the children with basic music training that can launch a lifetime love of music.

At Bing, we have the good fortune of having a full-time music specialist, Beth Wise, who brings music to the Two’s classrooms even when she’s working with other children. Beth will often lead a musical parade of older children out to the fence bordering the Two’s room. There, the older preschoolers serenade the Two’s with familiar songs. Beth facilitates musical interaction between the classrooms, and by doing so, creates a strong sense of community.

Parents are another wonderful resource for music making with young children. This year, several parents shared their musical talents, interests and hobbies. Oliver’s father, Peter Levine, led parades around the yard. He played the trumpet and the children followed behind with tambourines, triangles and drums. During the winter and early spring, Mark Applebaum played the piano and bass performer Saul Sierra, Sara’s father, collaborated on the bass as children danced with colorful silk scarves. Reetha Basaviah, Sahana’s mother, celebrated Dewali with the children and we danced to Indian music. Parent and enrollment administrator Svetlana Stanislavskaya, Anton’s mother, brought in her accordion, as well as several smaller toy versions for the children to explore and accompany her in playing *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*.

Lili M. Levinowitz, PhD, a professor of music education at Rowan University of New Jersey, Glassboro, writes, “Early childhood is…the time when children learn about their world primarily through the magical process of play. The substance of play in very young children is usually comprised of the environmental objects and experiences to which they have been exposed. If the music environment is sufficiently rich, there will be a continuous and ever richer spiral of exposure to new musical elements followed by the child’s playful experimentation with these elements.” At Bing we strive to provide the children with positive musical experiences, and expose them to as many forms and styles of music as possible. By engaging in these activities through play, they are free to experiment with movement, beat, rhythm and other elements of music that help to enrich their interactions in the classroom.
I’m Going to Mail Myself to You: The Mail Project
By Parul Chandra, Head Teacher

“If you don’t have a letter, you fold it up, then you put a sticker, but you can only see the words. For Valentine’s Day I did it. My letter has to go across the street and turn, go straight, straight and turn on the freeway. That is how mail gets to my grandmother.”

Reading the book A Letter to Amy at story-time sparked the children’s interest about mail and its workings. The teachers decided to support this curiosity by providing an assortment of paper, envelopes, stamps and dramatic play materials to represent items found at the post office. The mail-related objects on the discovery table appealed to children’s desire to play, and as a result provoked exploration and discussion. In other areas of the classroom, we read books about mail, sang songs, collected and showcased their ideas and theories at story-time.

As the project unfolded, children rediscovered the classroom mailboxes. Children’s mailboxes are small cubbies made of wood, marked with each child’s picture and name. Assembled on a shelf that can be wheeled around the classroom, teachers introduce mailboxes early in the year, aiming to help children identify their classmates and feel part of the community as they use them to write mail to their friends. These individual children’s mailboxes were great props for extending dramatic play revolving around mail. This play motivated the children to write their names and their friend’s names on their mail and then to identify the mailboxes both by photos and by names. The children were very interested in sending mail to each other. It was so exciting for them to receive a note from their friends. As they played out the mail theme they constructed their own rules, tested hypotheses and shared theories. For instance, some children directly delivered the mail while others identified and picked a mail person to do the delivery. They learned about different types of mail and the various methods of delivery. There were discussions about what goes on the envelope or package that is to be mailed. Some were satisfied with just the name of the recipient, others added addresses, while some designed and glued stamps onto their mail. Teachers observed and supported this wide range of dramatic play that represented the children’s understanding of mail. While playing, children observed and assimilated ideas from each other to enrich and extend their play: Elaborate scripts unfolded, and roles were assigned involving negotiation and collaboration. Through this contextual and meaningful play children gained confidence in themselves as learners. They were thinking, innovating, negotiating and playing out their understanding of the mail process.

Children experimented with skills like drawing, folding, enclosing and designing stamps and delivery route maps. Some children took on the leader role in spearheading the project. In their enthusiasm to explore, play and investigate, they exhibited curiosity, creativity, cooperation and sustained interest. By highlighting and appreciating these dispositions, the teachers were able to make others aware of these children as models. Children had an opportunity to respond to the teachers’ questions about mail with their own theories that were raised in small groups. Some examples: How does mail get to you?

Leon: “The mailman go over there and put it in the mail slot in my door.”

Nolan: “The mailman goes and takes the mail at 10. He picks up the mail and puts it in the bag. I see him when I come to school.”

Children discussed what needs to go on a package or envelope for the mail to be delivered. Gabey exclaimed, “He needs an address otherwise the mail will not go.” He understood that just a person’s name on the envelope was insufficient. Humza agreed: “If it does not have a stamp he will take it back.”

Children were invested in playing out the process with dramatic play props such as postal uniforms, mailboxes of different styles and sizes, and a variety of stationary. Children sang songs as they delivered mail to their peers; they designed maps and delivery routes for the mail carrier. Writing became meaningful and in context to their dramatic play. Research has shown that children will write when they have something on their minds. Receiving and delivering mail was a real motivator in this process. Children started
writing notes to other snack tables and waited in anticipation for a reply. Excitedly Madeline said: “They are responding!” as she watched the other snack table returning with a reply.

Our discussions about the topic were rich as the children formulated their understanding of mail, shared misconceptions, listened to others’ theories and played out and made accommodations with their existing theories. Here are some more questions that we explored together:

• What is a ZIP code?
• How does the mail carrier know where to take the mail?
• What if you don’t have a mailbox?

We saw the children use a variety of social skills as the project unfolded—exchanging ideas and opinions, sharing responsibility for posing questions, offering each other suggestions and encouraging each other to try something again. We bridged connections within our community by receiving and writing mail to each other.

As children continued to play out “mail,” the teachers prepared a culminating event. We took walks with the children to the mailbox near the school to mail the children’s invitations to their families for the end-of-the-year potluck. A few days later, children returned to school excitedly sharing the news that the mailman had brought their mail to them! Although we are done investigating this as a classroom community project, children continue to use mail and writing as a tool to communicate with their peers. Our mailboxes are always full of mail, for children will write when they have something on their minds.

Photo not available online.

The Tool Project
By Nancy Howe, Head Teacher

“...I like tools. I have a big drill. I have a mask. I have a chopper. A screwdriver. And another drill. And bolts. And silver nails. And wood.”

—Lucas

From the beginning of the year, teachers in the Center PM classroom noticed that many of the children were curious about the tools around them. Simple hand tools play an important role in all Bing Nursery School classrooms, from pencils and paint brushes to scissors, staplers, hole punches and even hammers.

As teachers observed and questioned children using tools, they discovered that while knowledge and experience with tools varied, most of the children had been exposed to hand tools at home and, like Lucas, enthusiastically shared their experiences.

Once it became apparent that the children were fascinated by tools, we initiated The Tool Project, a collaborative effort to deepen and share our understanding.

At the self-help art table, children can use a variety of tools for cutting and adhering. For many, this is their first experience working with scissors, hole punches, staplers and tape dispensers. Children learn how to use these tools by experimenting with them as well as from their teachers and one another. As they work on individual projects, more experienced children model skills and techniques for less experienced classmates.

Woodworking is another very popular tool-based activity at Bing. Throughout the year, children become familiar with a variety of hand tools. At the beginning of the project, teachers displayed common hand tools on the art table to stimulate children to observe, pose questions, share their ideas and understandings, and represent what they saw through drawing. Observational drawings are a powerful medium that teachers use to encourage children to focus their attention and deepen their understanding of a particular object. When children really look at an object closely and draw it, they form an intimate connection. As children observed and drew a hammer, pliers, a screwdriver, a C-Clamp and a drill, they asked questions about each tool’s structure, shape and size and hypothesized as to how each tool worked and what it was used for. Teachers encouraged all ideas and wrote them down children’s thoughts and theories as well as their misconceptions. Children regularly shared their ideas about and experiences with tools in small groups at snack time as well as at story time. Books such as Albert the Fix-it Man and songs like This is the Way (“This is the way we cut with the saw…so early in the morning,” sung to the tune of Here We Go ‘Round the Mulberry Bush) also helped children recognize the prevalence of tools all around them.

As the project progressed, teachers began incorporating tools into all curriculum areas, both inside and outdoors. In Center Room’s redwood grove, children used pretend tools for dramatic play; they built

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Elina and Maya drop their mail into our classroom mailbox.
houses with hollow blocks, repaired the boat and painted the little red house using tinted water with real house painting brushes and paint cans.

On the patio, the children were very interested in using some tools for the first time: a drill, screwdriver and handsaw, measuring tape and sandpaper blocks. Some children drew their ideas before starting their project. One of the children decided to make a boat. He made a drawing of his boat first, then sawed off a piece of wood, drilled a hole for a mast, found a stick and attached a paper sail to it. Sharing his boat at story time inspired other children to create boats of their own. After constructing them, many children wondered if their boats would really float. They tested their structures in the water table. Another day on the patio, children used a hand jack to lift up one of the large wooden trains. Later that day, at story time, the hand jack and train became props in a story play based on the book, *Albert the Fix-it Man*.

As spring approached, Center Room’s garden began to bloom and the children enjoyed watering the daffodils with watering cans. Some of the children used metal trowels to dig for worms and create a small wormery. Later, they used the trowels to plant potato eyes. Cooking projects, like mashed potatoes, pizza and vegetable soup provided another opportunity to use kitchen tools and utensils: potato peelers, potato mashers, rolling pins, garlic presses, cheese graters and ladles. Parents and teachers brought in lemons and oranges for the children to make fruit smoothies and a hand-cranked pasta maker. Another popular tool was an eggbeater for making “bubble soup.”

Children like to do real work with tools. They use sponges to help wash tables in preparation for snack time, scrub brushes to wash mud off the wooden carts, brooms to sweep chalk dust off the patio and washboards and clothespins to wash the doll’s clothes and hang them out to dry. Three children had a conversation while washing clothes with a washboard and hanging them on a clothesline with clothespins.

**Daniel:** “We’re using washboards!”

**Junh Yuk:** “It’s much harder than using a washing machine.”

**David** (as he hung up a doll’s shirt to dry): “At least we don’t have to worry about lint!”

In the art area, children used cooking tools like ravioli and cookie cutters, potato mashers and pastry wheels to print interesting patterns. They also used traditional printmaking tools including a wooden stylus for etching a design into a foam base, a rubber brayer for inking their design and a baren for rubbing their design onto paper to create a monoprint, a single print.

In the sand area, children used an old metal kitchen scale to weigh sand cakes and a post hole digger to dig deep holes. They also explored a pulley to lift a bucket filled with water out of a “well.” Later, they expanded on the pulley idea with a long clothesline wrapped around two climbers. They discovered they could attach messages to the line with clothespins and deliver them up and down the hill—and over the fence to interested East Room children!

When the lock to the rabbit’s cage became difficult to open, several children took a field trip to the workshop of resident Bing carpenter Wilhelm Grotheer, and brought back WD-40 to fix it. Several vintage tools have captivated the children’s attention: an old check canceling machine and a vintage railroad conductor’s ticket punch.

Teachers and children frequently use our classroom computer as a research and documentation tool. When the children discovered a cluster of millipedes under leaves in the redwood grove, they used the classroom computer to google millipedes for more information and then printed out images they found to take home.

Several parents, as well as our carpenter, came into the classroom to share their knowledge and tool expertise with the children. One parent brought her tools for printmaking, while another showed the children how to use screwdrivers and pliers to take apart an old telephone. Another parent made tortillas with the children using a stone metate and wooden tortilla press.

As teachers, we support children’s active participation in developing an understanding of their world. This project provided an optimal opportunity to help children become more knowledgeable, adept and confident with tools, whether peeling a carrot, jacking up a “car,” sawing a piece of wood or asking a tool expert a question. We hope the project deepened children’s understanding of tools and created a lasting relationship with them.
We waited, and waited, and waited. Day after day, we crossed off another number on the chicken calendar in East PM. This year our patience certainly was rewarded! We hatched 31 chicks. “It’s a chick party in there!” a child aptly exclaimed. Hatching chicks has not only drawn children’s attention to the wonders of nature, but has provided opportunities to integrate different areas of learning and development.

Before the chicks hatched, children shared their knowledge and ideas about chicks, chickens and chick development inside the egg. They also drew pictures of what they thought the chicks would look like. During the hatching days, children counted how many chicks had hatched, and how many had not. After the chicks hatched, children drew more pictures, which in several cases contrasted with their images of what they had initially thought the chicks would look like.

The chicks varied in coloring, size and plumage patterns. The children were especially fascinated by the Turken, a cross between a chicken and a turkey, which has a featherless neck. The diversity of appearance provided the opportunity for children to express and examine their assumptions about chicks. For example, while watching the chicks in the brooder during the second week, Maya raised the question about the black and brown chicks: “When will the others turn yellow?” Other children offered ideas about whether or not the chicks would change color. While the chicks’ feathering did change, the dark chicks never turned yellow.

Each day, children and parents commented in amazement about how fast the chicks were growing. A common question—one we never did answer—was “How did they get so big?” Other observations included, “One looks silly like an emu” and “one stretched his leg like human gymnastics.” They also offered theories to explain the chicks’ behavior, such as Tommy’s comment: “The chicks have wings, but they can’t fly yet so they just flap them.” After Adonis noted that a chick was sleeping, Maya explained: “It’s tiring to get out of an egg.”

While many children watched the chicks, some children also enjoyed taking photographs of them. The act of photographing and reviewing the image encouraged examination of the chicks’ behavior, with observations such as: “They’re all curled up.” “Another cute picture.” “One is bumping the other one” and “It’s like a little village of chicks.”

Besides making visual observations, we measured the chicks’ height and weight. After initially using a digital scale to weigh the chicks, we used a balance, with a chick on one side and blocks on the other. (The chicks were remarkably amenable to this teeter totter experience.) Several children planned their own investigations using the balance. Daniel E. suggested putting a chick on each side, hypothesizing that the balance would be even. However, the balance tipped in one direction. “They’re not the same!” he exclaimed.

Exploration of chickens and eggs included reading and generating both nonfictional and fictional texts. The text, *The Life of a Chicken*, proved a valuable resource on chick development. We also read narratives at story time involving chickens and eggs. Children expressed their knowledge about chicks and chickens, and also created collaborative narratives. Several children thought up songs, and even created a dance, about the chicks.

Although the children had limited prior experience with chickens, they revealed impressive knowledge about the chicken-and-egg life cycle. They described the eggs as coming from chickens, and more specifically from female chickens. As Ella explained, “The mama chickens came from the farm. The mama chicken laid the eggs and the eggs hatched and it happened over and over again.”

Once children had the opportunity to observe and touch the chicks, an interesting shift occurred in their descriptions. During snack time, a child referred to “the chick without fur on its neck.” This comment prompted the teacher to inquire whether the chicks had feathers or fur on their bodies. Most of the children thought the chicks had both feathers and fur, particularly those children who had touched the chicks. While perhaps seeming like a misconception, this view revealed their close attention to the chicks’ plumage. The downy feathering of the chicks was soft and fluffy, while the plumage emerging on the chicks’ wings had a more defined feather shape.

During the chicks’ second and third weeks in the classroom, the children constructed “playgrounds” for the chicks out of craft sticks, cardboard tubes and other found materials. They also built enclosures of blocks for the chicks on the grass. While some children enjoyed watching the chicks from outside, others were eager to handle the chicks. This was an exercise in patience, coordination and...
control. They learned to squat low, move quietly and close their hands around the chick, gently but firmly.

Since the children had not had a chance to see the chicks reach maturity, Featherstick, one of the chickens that we hatched in East Room last year, came to visit. Children gathered around the enclosure, watching her move and listening to her cluck, eager to have a turn to pet her. Then Featherstick gave us an unexpected gift. While Ben was sitting calmly in the enclosure with her, Featherstick stepped away from him and crouched down. When she stood up again, a pale egg lay in the grass!

The children’s reactions revealed their attentiveness to the recent hatching process. They immediately suggested that we put the egg in an incubator. Then, they continued, we needed to make a new chicken calendar, ask Buffy to bring the brooder back, as well as the microscope with a light for looking inside the eggs. Admittedly, the importance of fertilization was overlooked, however that had not been part of the children’s experiences with hatching.

Although we had hatched chicks in East room before, this year we also had an incubator with emu eggs. During all of this activity with the chicks, we continued marking off the days on our emu calendar. Emu incubation time is 50-56 days, a long time in the life of a young child. Waiting for the emus to hatch has provided many opportunities to practice counting how many days we have waited, and how many days are left to hatching.

Children have also expressed their emotions about this protracted waiting experience, from the joy of “we’re getting closer!” to “feeling frustrated” that they have not hatched.

The addition of these very different eggs provided many opportunities for comparing and contrasting these types of birds and elaborating on emerging understandings. When asked to express their ideas and questions about emus, children revealed relevant, specific knowledge. Their questions included: How do the emus grow their feathers? How fast do they run? Why do emus have blue eggs? What do they look like when they first hatch? How do they grow up?

In the final days of spring quarter we waited hopefully for the emus to hatch. The final day in the hatching window came and went without a pip. Thus, our hatching experiences ended with a lesson in the vagaries of nature. Given the weeks of anticipation, the children coped remarkably well. Amelia B. even reflected, “It was our first time,” elaborating that sometimes you can’t do something when you try it for the first time. Further reflecting the hope and optimism that we treasure in young children, Delaney shared with the class, “Last night I was dreaming one of the emus hatched. I was there to watch it. At the end of school all the emus hatched. The next day we got to hold the emu.”

Since then, Buffy has expanded upon the experience each year, adding new technology, unique breeds and astounding numbers of eggs, incubators and chicks. This year, with the Vintons’ twin daughters Alexa and Amelia finishing their final year in East PM, Buffy was delighted to bring the project to all three nursery school classrooms for the first time, hatching over 60 chicks, reporting: “I’m one of those people that can’t just stop at one!” Seen each day caring for the eggs and chicks, she is now a famous face at Bing.

“Never gets old,” she says, “seeing it again through the children’s eyes every time you do it.” Buffy hopes to lead projects next year, and we look forward to the wonderful experiences she continues to bring to our community. Thanks Buffy!

By Colin Johnson, Assistant Teacher

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The Egg Was Kept in the Person

Once upon a time an egg shot on to another egg. And he fell and cracked. It was an owie. The eggs fell into a river. The egg cracked again. And then there’s birds that did not know what to do. They tried to swim, but they couldn’t. They fell and they were washed. And a bird caught the other birds. That was a close one! And the big bird brought the little birds to their mom. They were in the nest, but there were only two of them. Six more birds were shot onto the hill. All of them got washed, and they were gurgling out of an egg. Then the last egg cracked, and there’s a teeny baby chick and a person popped out. And the chick said, “Tweet tweet.” And the person said, “Oh, I’m gonna bring the chick home, and it is gonna say, “Tweeeet,” and it is gonna be a surprise. The End.

A chick. By Lucy A., 4 year 10 months

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The Chicken Lady

Affectionately known as “the chicken lady” to many at Bing, community volunteer Buffy Baker has supported our hatching projects for four years. Buffy is a chicken raiser from way back. She raised them as a child but took a long break until 2002 when the urge struck again and she started raising them at home. Two years later, Buffy, who works as a nanny for Henry and Serena Vinton, brought her hatching expertise to Bing when the Vinton’s first child, Elena, began at Bing in East PM. She brought the project to Elena’s classroom and the West Room as well.

By Colin Johnson, Assistant Teacher
The children in the West room afternoon program explored paper. The exploration began during the winter quarter when one of the teachers brought in the book *600 Black Spots: A Pop-up Book for Children of All Ages*, by David A. Carter. This artistic book leaps off the page with paper sculptures punctuated with paper dots. The children were fascinated by the book’s three-dimensional images and wanted to figure out how they, too, could make paper stand up. For several weeks, the children spent time nearly every day making their own three-dimensional projects using paper strips, dots and string (just like in the book).

As the interest in paper gained momentum, we explored different techniques. Teachers rolled paper into long, narrow tubes for children to use for large-scale, collaborative sculptures. It was interesting to see these projects evolve over the course of several days.

Around Valentine’s Day, another type of work with paper caught the children’s interest: cut outs. This took off when they were cutting hearts out of paper using the folding technique. The children enjoyed singing “I’m Going to Make a Paper Shape,” while watching a teacher cut one out in real life and then reveal it at the end of the song. The children continued to explore this paper cutting technique, which has inspired many to learn to use scissors.

With paper playing such an important role in the group’s activities, our classroom began generating much more paper waste than before. This led to some unexpected learning opportunities and activities. Teachers encouraged the children to reduce waste by putting paper scraps in the recycle bin. In addition, the children used some of the paper waste to make their own paper, which they later used for art projects. To make paper, the paper waste from the recycling bin was torn into small bits and soaked in water overnight. The following day, it was put through a blender until it took on a pulpy consistency. The pulp was poured over a framed screen, flattened with small rolling pins and left to dry. The children added dried pressed flowers and leaves to the paper for a decorative touch.

Making paper helped the children to make sense of the recycling process. Now they enjoy reusing the untouched paper plates from snack time in their self-designed art projects. They are beginning to understand that some items that might be typically thrown away can be reused instead.

The children have explored many other paper techniques, including paper mache, creating stationery and folding paper into airplanes, hats and simple origami shapes and using them in their play. In a papier-mâché project, children glued paper strips around balloons until they were thickly covered. After the glue dried, they painted over the papier-mâché, using tempera paints. A teacher cut the “balloon” shape in half, creating bowls, which were then used to store tissue paper scraps we used for collages, another type of paper craft.

One of the teachers in our classroom knows how to make stationery products. She brought in some of her beautiful materials such as paper, buttons and other embellishment for the children to use in making their own cards. It was very impressive to see how delicately the children handled the fine products and how their work reflected the beauty of these materials.

Some of the children’s parents and grandparents have also taken an interest in our paper topic, working with the children in the classroom to make Valentines, Mother’s Day cards, fancy paper crafts, paper snowflakes and origami shapes. The topic has been a fun way to involve families.

It is always fascinating to follow the lead of children in exploring topics. As teachers, we had no inkling that the interest in paper would develop into a topic that spanned two academic quarters. The pop-up book, *600 Black Spots*, sparked children’s interest and stimulated examination. Once children’s fascination began to grow, the skillful teachers provided opportunities for them to explore materials that interested them enough to inspire yet further investigation. With paper, the opportunities to explore seemed nearly endless.
For a week in July, the multi-purpose room at Bing School was once again transformed into a recording studio, as we recorded our third CD, which will be released at the Harvest Moon Auction on Saturday, October 18. This year’s CD, Let’s Sing At Bing, was a group effort beginning with the design for the CD cover and face. Ameer and Donald of East PM began the process by observing the previous CD covers and discussing what was needed to produce a new CD. Both children were interested in the technical aspects of how it would be printed, when the final product could be expected and just how the design would be replicated on more than 400 CDs. After a period of reflection and thought, the designs were underway and represented the first concrete step in the production of our new CD.

Sound engineers Lars Hidde and Heidi Verlaine skillfully set up their recording equipment in the multi-purpose room in a way that invited children to sing and interact with teachers, while at the same time producing high quality recordings of their voices. We included the use of puppets, flannel books and props to enhance the learning experience for the children and create an additional way to reinforce the songs and lyrics. The use of puppets helped give the children a focal point as well as injecting some humor and delight into the experience.

We invited each class to bring interested children to a singalong during music time, following snack, each day of that week. Bing teachers provided accompaniment—playing instruments including the violin, guitar, ukulele, electric bass, banjo and several percussion instruments.

Many parents also participated and offered a rich and varied sample of songs from around the world. This year’s CD not only features songs traditionally sung in the classroom, but samples of music sung in French, German, Igbo, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, Tibetan and Urdu. The lyrics for each song as well as a translation will be posted on the Bing Web site to help interested families learn the songs. One Bing parent shared a delightful anecdote about her daughter, describing how she proudly reported to family friends during a gathering that she could speak many languages, and then proceeded to sing the songs from the last CD, Live At Bing 2006.

Each CD, Live At Bing 2005, Live At Bing 2006 and the upcoming CD, offers different song selections. The first CD is composed of traditional songs sung in English and the second and third CDs offer a combination of traditional songs and folk tunes from around the world.

Music is a natural part of the children’s lives at Bing. Children sing while at play—narrating ideas and dramatic play in a lyrical manner that comes so naturally to them. The availability of instruments will sometimes prompt other children to join in on xylophones, wooden rhythm sticks or other basic instruments. Daily classroom activities include music time, right after the children have their snacks. And at story time, teachers introduce two to three new songs each week, repeating them throughout the week to reinforce them as part of an enjoyable, shared experience for the whole class.

The efforts behind the CD project will benefit our community in many ways. The CDs are for sale in the Bing office, with the proceeds going directly to the scholarship fund. These CDs provide parents and children an integrated way to learn familiar songs and build a repertoire of shared music. Above and beyond all, the gift of music and the joy of singing unite children and families in a way that strengthens ties and builds a rich foundation of memories and emotions. Hope-fully, we will all remember to sing together, whether at home or at school, to build a culture of song within our own families.

Songs of a Community
By Beth Wise, Music Resource Specialist and Head Teacher

Children and teachers prepare a song for the new Let’s Sing At Bing CD, to be released at the Harvest Moon Auction.

A shared moment of laughter during recording.

Photo not available online.
Winter Staff Development Day
By Katie Smartt, Assistant Teacher

What’s going on at Bing? Each quarter, one day is set aside to further staff development, and this year’s winter staff development day took place on February 17. Bing teachers learned from colleagues, who described class projects, and from researchers, who reported on studies they’ve based at Bing. This quarter’s event also featured a child psychologist who spoke about promoting emotional resiliency and emotional development in children.

The morning began with team presentations of their classrooms’ fall quarter projects. Everyone rotated from room to room to view bulletin boards, which provided a vivid illustration of the hard work involved. The project topics were diverse, ranging from bugs to photography, and it was gratifying to see the children’s energy and enthusiasm displayed on the bulletin boards. It was also exciting to see projects that began over the summer or even last year that continued to hold children’s interest. This session inspired teachers to experiment and adapt creative ideas from other classrooms.

Next, five Stanford researchers with projects based at Bing updated teachers on their findings. Linguistics graduate student Inbal Arnon explained her work on the link between comprehension and production of language. She is investigating children’s common errors with irregular plurals like “teeth” and “mice” and whether using these words in phrases like “brush your teeth” and “three blind mice” will reduce production errors [see page 4 for more information].

Psychology graduate student Andrei Cimpian discussed his work on how language affects how we think about the world. He is specifically interested in the difference between generic and non-generic sentences. For example, he studies the difference between: “Bears have a good sense of smell” and “This bear has a good sense of smell,” and asks whether these distinctions affect how children think about entire categories, i.e., the entire category of bears.

Quin Yow, also a psychology graduate student, is interested in the communicative sensitivity of bilingual children, particularly whether bilingual children are better able to use social cues such as tone. Because bilingual children must choose which language to use in any given situation, these children may pick up on more subtleties, like tone, than monolingual speakers who do not need them, Yow hypothesizes.

A third psychology graduate student, Caitlin Fausey, presented her work, which investigates intentional language versus unintentional language. She wants to determine whether children are sensitive to the subtle differences between sentences like, “She did it” and “It happened.”

East PM Head Teacher Adrienne Lomangino talks about children’s use of digital cameras and shows a book with children’s photography.

Bing alumna, Dawn Maxey, a Stanford undergraduate, described her senior honors thesis on examining emotional perspective taking. Some researchers believe that children are able to take another’s perspective only by projecting their own feelings onto that other person. Maxey will investigate whether it is more difficult for a child to take another’s perspective if their preferences differ, for example, if they themselves prefer chocolate, but another person prefers broccoli to chocolate.

The day ended with a presentation by child psychologist Rachel Robb Avery, PhD, who is head teacher Peckie Peters’ sister and has extensive experience working in a clinical setting helping children develop emotional resiliency. She reminded us that we are doing important work here at school, especially in helping children use words to express their feelings and to organize their experiences.

The event was an essential day of sharing and growing for the Bing community. It offered not only a full day of information and learning, but also helped build community, as teachers and staff shared their experiences and discussed issues and ideas that contribute to the mission and heart of this school.

Visitors From Abroad
Four administrators from the Poppins Preschool in Japan visited Bing in November 2007.

Leaning together in front: Bing research coordinator/head teacher Chia-wa Yeh (left) and Poppins managing director Rumiko Kitamura. Standing (left to right): Bing head teacher Nancy Howe, assistant director Jennifer Winters, head teacher Karen Robinette, head teacher Adrienne Lomangino, and Poppins business developers Kumiko Naemura and Kimihiko Sugiuira, and liaison Michiko Okimoto.

Self portrait. By Alexis Q., 4 years 7 months
Spring Staff Development Day
By Liz Prives, Assistant Teacher

If there’s one thing Bing Nursery School teachers take very seriously, it’s play. So the spring staff development day was serious stuff for the teachers, especially since it went beyond theory to actual practice. This spring, the event took place on April 28 and focused on the importance of play.

A highlight of the day was a presentation by Bing head teachers Adrienne Lomangino, Kitti Pecka and Peckie Peters, who gave the 40 other teachers at the event a preview of their parent seminar. The seminar inspired a discussion on the role of play in early childhood education, and also helped teachers think of new ways to support play in the classroom.

The presentation began with a video of children engaged in play with building blocks followed by an explanation of the characteristics of play. Play, Lomangino emphasized, “is the right of every child.” She then went on to describe the characteristics of play. According to Lomangino, play is satisfying, spontaneous, meaningful, and voluntary. It is a process rather than a product. Play is a child’s private reality. It is rule-governed and can be symbolic. After defining the characteristics of play, she discussed the relationship between play and child development. She highlighted how play leads children to develop socially (turn taking), emotionally (reading peers’ body language, feelings and emotions), physically (muscle development) and cognitively (memory, expression and reasoning) [see page 7 for more information].

After Lomangino discussed the importance of play and its role in child development, Pecka addressed how play is introduced to children at Bing Nursery School. For many children, Bing is their first experience with play outside of the home. According to Pecka, the ideal environment for young children to learn how to play is one that is stress free and encourages interactive play. Examples of interactive play include painting on easels side by side, and dancing to music.

Following Pecka’s portion of the presentation, the teachers had the chance to go into a classroom and engage in free play using the basic materials. In the block area, teachers took part in the various stages of block play—carrying, bridging, building enclosures, creating decorative patterns, and naming their structures. Parallel play led to cooperative play as teachers connected their buildings. The teachers shared a laugh when their structures came crashing down. They then worked together to rebuild.

After lunch, the focus turned to other topics, starting with Linda Darling-Hammond, professor at Stanford’s School of Education and co-director of the School Redesign Network, who discussed the need worldwide for adequate teaching training and preparation [See page 5 for more information].

The day concluded with a presentation by current Bing parent Tandy Aye, MD. Aye is the mother of Emmett Chung, and is a pediatric endocrinologist at Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital at Stanford. She talked about the most common childhood birthmarks (stork bite, café au lait, Mongolian spot, port wine stains and eczema) and rashes (ringworm, cold panniculitis and impetigo and molluscum contagiosum). She also showed slides to help teachers identify the birthmarks and rashes on children in the classroom.

At the end of the day of learning and play, teachers saw more clearly than ever the importance of play and how it contributes to child development. We came away with new ideas on how to stimulate and guide young children’s play at Bing.


Thanks to the contributions of Bing parents, friends and our staff members, we met our goal of $250,000 to help support our annual budget. In addition, we received gifts exceeding $149,000 to add to our Bing Nursery School Endowment. We’re deeply grateful for this generous support. We would like to extend a warm round of thanks to the parent fundraising chairs Kathy and Geoffrey Gurtner, Kathy and Chad Hurley and Martha Blackwell and Peter Levine and their committee members for their efforts and support. In 2007–2008, the participation of our current Bing families reached 60 percent. In 2008–2009, we are striving for 100 percent participation!

The annual fund is an important part of the school budget. We depend on this fund to support staff development, additional assistant teachers in each classroom, specialists and scholarships. No gift is too small or too large. Our goal is for every family to participate in supporting the school. Please join us as we maintain the excellence that makes Bing such a special place for young children. A big thank you to all.
More than 20,000 early childhood professionals from around the world gathered in Chicago last November for the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the world’s largest early childhood conference. Fifteen representatives from Bing Nursery School were among the attendees.

The conference supports educators’ commitment to improving the quality of the programs they provide through the sharing of knowledge of best approaches to early childhood education. Also, as NAEYC works to improve the profession of early childhood education, the conference illuminates the dedication to young children and families held by its members. Without a doubt, ongoing professional development of Bing Nursery School teachers and administrators edifies the care and instruction the school provides.

Seminars explored topics for educators of all levels, while various tracks of focus (i.e., curriculum, leadership, professional development, diversity and equity) allowed participants to cultivate deeper understandings of the topics related to the context of early childhood education. For example, teachers new to the profession or looking for strategies to improve their classroom interactions with students could join Carol Garhart Mooney, author of *Theories of Childhood: An Introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget and Vygotsky*, who discussed how the way educators speak to children affects their learning and behavior. Other seminars encouraged early childhood professionals to think deeply about familiar topics. For example, Vivian G. Paley, author and retired teacher formerly of University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, and Lilian G. Katz, University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, were among a panel of speakers that led one of the most popular and significant sessions at the conference. They restated “how play works” and focused on the role of child-initiated learning in early childhood programs. The impetus for play has borne long-standing support in research, yet as many policymakers and parents apply pressure for educators to emphasize the direct instruction of measurable skills and knowledge, play is disappearing from many early childhood programs. Gillian Dowley McNamee, of the Erikson Institute, punctuated this session with a reminder that adults best understand children’s learning by listening to children, not trampling their ideas with our own, and that adults can best encourage children’s learning by giving them the time and space to play. Fundamentally, it is in play that children practice thinking.

Brian Mowry, teacher and researcher from the Austin Independence School District, delivered timely information related to the pressure to assess young children’s skills and knowledge. In his session, “Assessing counting strategies: How preschoolers demonstrate understanding of number concepts.” Mowry illustrated his research and used videos to show vivid examples of the developmental patterns in young children’s understanding of counting. He pointed out that “being able to count accurately requires a child to regulate and perform a multitude of skills: rote counting, one-to-one correspondence and keeping track.” While educators must recognize and respect the underlying principles of counting in order to best describe what children understand about counting, they should not conclude that direct instruction is the best practice for how young children master these skills. Pamela Schiller, Wright Group/McGraw-Hill provided age-appropriate strategies for supporting young children’s acquisition of mathematical learning in her session “Under construction: Beginning math concepts.” She highlighted that young children must have time to explore materials and build a mathematical vocabulary, understand spatial relationships, begin classifying objects and recognizing patterns before they begin what can be assessed as counting. Play can facilitate all of these pre-counting skills, and best practice in an early childhood setting dictates that educators provide children the time and resources to explore, discover, hypothesize and test their thinking about objects, space and the relationships that exists between them.

Among the wide assortment of seminars were two offered by Bing teachers. Head teacher Nancy Howe and teachers Todd Erickson and Matthew Linden shared in the presentation of “Bringing literacy to life: Using music, visual arts, and drama to expand repeated storybook readings.” Using vivid photos of storybook materials and video samples of actual storybook readings, Howe, Erickson and Linden outlined how and why they repeatedly read the same storybook to children over the course of several days. They explained that children increase their knowledge and understanding of a storybook with each reading. As children demonstrate their learning through collaborative conversations with the teacher, they become more involved in how the storybook is presented in a large group setting. The stories in the storybook come to life in the minds of children as they take on roles to support dramatic interpretations of the storybook reading or participate using music or props.

Another session, “Beyond waterwheels and shovels: Presenting activities that invite children to learn” presented by Chia-wa Yeh.

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*The Bing Times*  October 2008
A fear of nature is hazardous to children’s health, said child advocate and journalist Richard Louv, the keynote speaker at this year’s conference for the California Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC). This past April, teachers from throughout the state gathered in sunny Long Beach, Calif., to learn more about a wide range of topics such as brain development, self-reflective teaching, curriculum ideas, the importance of play and many others.

A performance by a popular children’s music group from Santa Cruz, the Banana Slug String Band, kicked off the conference. The crowd of about 1,000 was dancing and singing along to the group’s nature-inspired rhythms and melodies. The performance drew attention to the wonders of the world and inspired appreciation of its beauty. The band offered a nice segue into the meat of the address.

Louv spoke about his book, Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder. He describes this self-coined condition as the wide range of behavioral problems children experience as a result of decreased time spent outdoors. He noted that children used to play outdoors for hours on end, but these days don’t get outside as much as they used to. He cited the trend of decreased recess time in primary schools and the 25 percent decline in National Park attendance since the mid ’90s. He blamed sensationalist media coverage for creating a generation of fearful parents. As a result, children have learned that nature is an unsafe environment.

Louv explained that the benefits of outdoor experience are numerous. He said, “Nature offers children an older, larger world separate from parents.” It offers them the opportunity to create their own games and make their own rules. This helps with conflict management skills because these rules can be negotiated when playing with other children. He added, “Time spent playing make-believe helps children develop executive function.” This is defined as “the collection of brain processes whose role is to guide thought and behavior in accordance with internally generated goals or plans.”

Children also become healthier when they get more exercise, and they tend to eat healthier too. Moreover, nature has a calming effect that has been shown to improve the symptoms of attention deficit disorder.

He related a story about the photographer Ansel Adams, who was expelled from school because he had difficulty paying attention. His parents decided to help him by giving him a natural education. Together they visited many California State Parks and gradually his symptoms eased. The rest is history.

Louv ended his address by stating the importance of sending children a more positive message about nature. We’re constantly hearing about the present state of the climate and grim predictions about the future due to global warming. He suggests we show children the wonder of nature and allow them the time to get out and enjoy it. He borrowed a statement from Martin Luther King Jr. by saying, “Any movement will fail if it doesn’t paint a picture of a world people want to go to.” He also suggested that although parents’ fears won’t decrease easily, those concerned can support organizations that encourage natural experiences, such as schools and parks.

Another workshop focused on the indoor and outdoor classroom environment and how to make it an attractive, comfortable place in which learning can be maximized. The presenters were Jean Barbre, EdD, an early childhood education coordinator for the Orange County Department of Education, and Ingrid Anderson, adjunct faculty in the Human Development Department of Irvine Valley College. They began by leading the group on a visualization of spaces from childhood.

First they asked the participants to imagine a place where they felt comfortable. The common characteristics here included a relationship to nature where there was plenty of space to roam, and a feeling of ownership over that space. Workshop attendees felt secure enough there to create their own games and rules, and act independently.

Then the group imagined an uncomfortable space, which produced feelings of darkness and disorder. The presenters noted the importance of creating an indoor environment that is free of clutter and too much visual stimulation. Keeping shelves stocked but not overstocked decreases the visual stimulation into a realm that helps keep a child’s brain more at rest, and thus more able to learn. Using more muted and neutral colors as opposed to primary colors also achieves this goal.

Finally, the participants imagined a space that held a special connection with an adult. In this space they felt a sense of belonging to a community. They felt trusted and safe in this space where the rules were flexible enough for them to make choices of their own.

The conference exhibition hall was full of new educational materials, books for children and professionals, and music. It provided an informal setting to connect with colleagues in the field and share experiences.

Another workshop focused on the differences between male and female brains. The presenter was Christine Griswold,
adjunct instructor at the Citrus College Child Development Center in Glendora, Calif., and mother of two children, a girl and a boy.

Griswold started out by stressing the idea that the information she was about to share wasn’t intended to classify all girls and boys into two completely different columns. On the contrary, she would be noting general gender trends that tend to be true. With that in mind, she said that girls and boys come to school with different strengths. Not only should teachers encourage them to use these strengths, but they should also help them overcome their weaknesses.

From there she talked about brain development and structure. The right hemisphere of the boy’s brain typically develops more quickly than that of a girl’s brain. This means that they can have a strong degree of mechanical and spatial reasoning early on. This is why many boys like to understand how things work and also why they can be so physical in their play. Giving boys more space for their physical play allows them an outlet for their physical energy and also helps them develop self-regulation skills.

Conversely, the left hemisphere of the brain tends to develop more quickly in girls. This side is responsible for language skills like reading and writing. This is why some girls learn to write and to recognize letters early on. They seek out these experiences because their brains are wired for them earlier in development.

Griswold went on to discuss further differences between the sexes, but continued stressing the importance of giving boys and girls the same opportunities. Doing so allows them to explore the areas in which they need more experience.

This conference provided an amazing opportunity to learn more about children and how to support them more effectively. It also connected people in the field to each other and provided a stimulating and rewarding experience.

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invite children to learn,” was presented by Bing head teacher and research/multimedia coordinator, Chia-wa Yeh. Yeh used photos and video clips collected at Bing to illustrate that children learn best through hands-on experience with thoughtfully selected open-ended materials and the support of skillful teachers. She provided lots of examples of purposeful presentation of materials and resources to extend children’s activities, thereby promoting children’s development.

Foremost, the annual NAEC conference rejuvenates educators, offering many opportunities to learn, collaborate, grow professionally and associate with educators from all around the world.

Conference attendees from Bing included teachers Jenna Ascarri, Minjae Bae, Michelle Forrest, Beverley Hartman, Quan Ho, Betsy Koning, Katie Miller, Peckie Peters, Kimberly Taylor, Nancy Verdzabella and myself, as well as the presenters Todd Erickson, Nancy Howe, Matthew Linden and Chia-wa Yeh.
A City That Values Its Children
By Svetlana Stanislavskaya, Enrollment Administrator

In the middle of July, Parul Chandra, Karen Robinette, Chia-wa Yeh and I traveled to Massachusetts to a conference about the extraordinary childhood education program in a city in Tuscany. With 90 other American educators from 12 states, we listened to the experts in the field, viewed slide show presentations, asked questions and participated in discussions and creative workshops.

During the two-day event we learned about the city-wide system of schools and educational spaces of Pistoia, Italy, from leaders of that city’s education system. Professors Susan Etheridge of Smith College and Jeanne Goldhaber from University of Vermont, both fortunate beneficiaries of sabbaticals in Pistoia, also shared their experiences, while Lella Gandini, U.S. liaison for the Italy-based Reggio Emilia child education program, helped us bridge our cultural contexts by providing translations and interpretations.

Why was Pistoia chosen as a focus of the conference? What makes this small town stand out as far as services for children? Why is the mayor of Pistoia well versed in describing the importance of preschools and the teaching that goes on in them? Why is he concerned how children grasp, elaborate and modify the elements of knowledge that their environment offers to them?

Pistoia has been experimenting in the field of comprehensive, family-centered education and care for the last 40 years. Presentations made by leading policy experts, researchers, teachers and the city’s pedagogical coordinator provided a portrait of a distinctive and evolving approach to creating an education based on relationships. The result is an educational project rooted in community and giving children a sense of belonging.

A picture (in this case a slide show) was worth a thousand words. A slide show with a passionate narrative represented Pistoia with enthusiasm, skill, precision and insight that made our hearts and eyes smile. The stories of children’s various urban experiences unfolded and we saw teachers and parents accompanying children, walking hand in hand into a museum, library, theater, church, city hall, bakery, and chestnut mill. Then they brought their memories and impressions of these trips back into the classroom for more reflections, conversations, drawings and discussions.

Pistoia has recognized that the city, so full of life and culture, is a great resource for children’s education. Participants learned that behind the scenes, the city council’s pedagogical coordinator and director of education meet with the teachers and have long discussions on topics. These include the experiences that helped the children grow emotionally and intellectually, learning opportunities that exist outside the classroom walls and how to assure that the themes embrace the interests and cultures of families in the schools as well as take into account the individuality of each child.

As a result of these explorations, the city published Per Mano (Hand in Hand), a guide to the city as seen through the eyes of the children. It contains photographs of old town squares and streets, children visiting various neighborhoods and buildings, individual and collaborative drawings, as well as children’s words that show Pistoia’s multiple dimensions. One child says, “You meet other people” (in a piazza), “and you can go on a bicycle like lightening.” Another child observes, “In the past there were guards, now there are TVs to watch all the people.” The guide reflects the children’s understandings and ideas about how their city relates to their own lives.

The conference took place in a unique setting—The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art—located in Amherst, Mass. The museum was conceived and built with the aim of celebrating familiar and beloved images and fostering connections between visual and verbal literacy. As we walked through the museum’s Great Hall, the colors of Eric Carle’s prints and original drawings brought back memories of the Eric Carle gallery in our school. Similarly, colorful Carle prints donated by Helen and Peter Bing welcome children and adults who walk through the school’s Two’s hall. Both our school and the museum foster appreciation of art and childhood, and both have benefited greatly from the vision and patronage of Helen and Peter Bing.

A beautiful art studio at the museum provides visitors of all ages with the opportunity to explore their own creativity. Before leaving, participants enjoyed using the studio during a “hands-on, minds-on” session. The activities highlighted for them the interconnectedness of art and expression with learning and development and led to appreciation of the creative process and various art forms.

The conference time allowed the attendees to visit the Hampshire College Children’s Center and Fort Hill Center at Smith College. The teachers reflected on their programs and shared documentation of their on-going work inspired by their recent visits to Pistoia.

Last year, Bing Nursery School went through an extensive self-study process in preparation for National Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation, which involved a detailed analysis of the quality of the program at Bing. As a result, Bing has been re-accredited by NAEYC, meeting all standards of excellence. Having gone through this experience recently, it was valuable to hear the thoughts of the Italian educators on the continuing improvement of their services for children. Participants concluded that the search for high quality—continued on page 27
Dialogues for Quality in Education: The School as a Place of Research
Report of NAREA Conference

By Mary Munday, Teacher

"Viewing the ‘The Hundred Languages of Children’ exhibit is like going to the Grand Canyon,” began the opening speaker, Beth MacDonald, former co-chair of North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, at the group’s 4th annual NAREA conference this June in Boulder, Colo. “You arrive, become overwhelmed by the immensity, and then attempt to understand why millions of people travel to visit each year. After all, it’s just rocks. After spending more time taking in the vast canyon, you begin to understand and appreciate the magnificence and grandeur.” The premier exhibit, “The Wonder of Learning: The Hundred Languages of Children,” created a similar experience. It was an overwhelming amount of documentation and interpretation displayed to provoke the observer to ask questions, discuss and analyze with their peers and colleagues.

At first you think, well, these are amazing projects, but what is the purpose of displaying such work? After spending time reading and analyzing the documented work, you realize how much the children learned through each experience and feel the sense of magnificence of so much time and thought put into the documentation. The true joy of the children’s learning is validated through images and videos, and the immense respect for young children is clearly evident.

Educators from Reggio Emilia, Italy, brought the exhibit and collaborated with teachers from the Boulder Journey School, Colo., to present the NAREA conference, “Dialogues for Quality in Education: The School as a Place for Research.” Interest in the conference and exhibit drew 600 people from all over the world, including Japan, China, Canada, Mexico, Israel, Italy and the United States. Bing teachers Andrea Hart Rees, Nancy Vertzabella, and I attended this five-day event.

The philosophy of Reggio Emilia has been recognized worldwide, and many schools in the United States are inspired by the approach and are implementing the ideas in their programs. Key principles of this philosophy include a) children must have some control over the direction of their learning, b) children must be able to learn through experiences of touching, moving, listening, seeing and hearing, c) children have a relationship with other children and with material items in the world that they explore, and d) children must have endless ways and opportunities to express themselves.

During her presentation, Carla Rinaldi, president of Reggio Children, the International Center for the Defense and Promotion of the Rights and Potential of All Children, explained that Reggio is not a recipe and not a method. She said that Reggio is an experience based on values that can be constructed only within the community. Her presentation, “The Competent Child,” specifically focused on how children have great potential and proficiency. She emphasized that a teacher’s image of a child determines our relationship with him, and therefore, teachers must choose to see children as capable communicators who are “fully engaged in being part of the world, competent in living and learning since the moment of birth.”

The presenters discussed the tenets of the Reggio approach. Among them:

- The physical space is directly relational to the quality of the interactions within the space.
- Within a school, children “observe, experiment with hypotheses, formulate theories, transfer understanding from one experience to another, collaborate with others and take risks.”
- The role of the teacher is to observe, facilitate and interpret the children’s work and collaborate with colleagues to examine the significance of the children’s comprehension.

A key element to the Reggio approach is the studio, known as the atelier in Reggio Emilia. The studio space was particularly appointed to support the use of materials and media as languages for expression and learning by the children. The space can contribute to the importance of project work. It is a space where documentation could be organized and reorganized before being displayed formally. The addition of this space gives educators a place to explore the possibilities of a large, well-organized variety of materials, while collaborating freely with others and gaining a firm foundation about the meaning and process of documentation work. Having the space to support the importance of materials and documentation is a key component to the Reggio approach.

The exhibit was the focus of the conference and the inspiration for dialogue. Amelia Gambetti, coordinator of Reggio Children and liaison for consultancy to schools studying the Reggio Emilia approach, spoke with words of inspiration about the new exhibit. Her hope was that the interactive display be a “provocateur of dialogue.” She wished that this experience would bring about hope, optimism, continuous discussion, ongoing research, imagination and collaboration resulting in more quality education. The interactive display took place on two main floors at The National Center for Atmospheric Research, as well as on one floor in the main conference building at The University Corporation for Atmospheric Research.

The display included a great variety of thoroughly detailed projects with detailed documentation from the project’s onset through to its culmination, which included large-scale collages made by the children, videos, audio recordings, teacher notebooks of a project’s progress, drawings, quotations, photographs, interpretation by teachers and insight by relevant experts such as poets, architects, and artists.

Group discussions were held following
the exhibit to discuss the various interpretations. Teachers were inspired by the detail and were pleased that they could revisit the exhibit for further analysis the following days.

The host of the conference, Boulder Journey School, is one program that has been inspired by the Reggio approach. As a result of a partnership with the University of Colorado at Denver and the Colorado Department of Education, all teachers working at the school earn an early childhood education teaching license and a master’s degree, and complete a teaching practicum through the university. The entire school was truly an inspiration. It was an exhibit within itself, with documentation on every wall and well-thought-out classrooms with many ongoing projects and expertly placed materials for exploration. The school’s programs offer endless possibilities for creativity, investigation and learning for children ages six months to six years of age.

For this conference, the teachers from Boulder Journey School set up provocations and inspirational materials for the study group to explore. Provocations included questions to inspire the participants to test out different materials and theories. For example, participants saw materials such as tape, wire, paper, water, ramps and inclines placed on a table. Nearby were some questions, including: How could you put these materials together to form a water wheel? Will the wheel spin in the water? Will the materials you choose stay together when water touches it? The group experimented with the materials and tools and further examined the documentation displayed throughout the school. Exploration led to much dialogue in all of the classrooms.

After exploring provocations at Boulder Journey School, the Bing teachers returned to the conference room for a presentation by Gambetti and Lella Gandini on the history in North America of “The Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit. The exhibit first came to North America in 1987, and from 1987 to 2000 traveled to 38 different sites in 23 states. The new digital edition premiered in the year 2000 and has been at sites and 6 states. Each exhibit communicates through visual and written documentation. Vea Vecchi, retired art studio teacher of the Diana School, Reggio Emilia, spoke on the importance of the exhibit as a tool for professional development and documentation that includes visual listening, visual culture and an aesthetic dimension, which Reggio pedagogy embrace as a significant element in learning by children and adults. The exhibit allows us to experience a deeper look at the meaning of the children’s work and experiences. It is a democratic way of sharing what is happening in schools and is a reminder of valuing children, families and the community and the importance of education. The exhibits are always growing and evolving through discussion and sharing, and the work is displayed to provoke questions, investigation and curiosity.

The overall purpose of the conference was to discuss children as investigators and researchers, and educators as interpreters, documenters and supporters of learning. The presentations and exhibit left teachers with feelings of inspiration to share, listen and collaborate with colleagues throughout the conference, and after they return home to their programs. Teachers from Bing were grateful to have had this experience, and look forward to collaborating and exploring new ideas with colleagues in the years to come.

—continued from page 25

is driven by collegial collaboration and continual professional development as well as a need for improving documentation of children’s ideas, activities and discoveries as tools for assessment and advocacy.

While the challenges of creating a child-friendly city seem daunting, it was essential and energizing to learn about the international trends in early childhood education. All conference participants applauded the citizens of Pistoia for promoting social responsibility for children and respect for their teachers.

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Learning & the Brain Conference
By Beverley Hartman, Head Teacher

A conference on applying brain research to education inspired and invigorated the Bing teachers who attended. The conference, organized by the online academic community Learning & the Brain, focused on enhancing learning, attention and memory.

Head teacher Kitti Pecka and I were among the nearly one thousand educators, parents and clinicians at the February conference in San Francisco. With the great array of renowned speakers, it was difficult to decide which sessions to attend.

Stanford University’s own Carol Dweck, PhD, spoke about the impact of mindset on brain processes, motivation and learning. She has conducted some of her research on this topic at Bing. Adults can use this understanding to encourage a child to keep trying when faced with a challenge. In particular, Dweck asks us to consider carefully the use of praise and type of guidance offered so that we promote a growth mindset. These ideas are presented in her book Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, 2006.

Another prominent presenter was Geraldine Dawson, PhD, the newly appointed Chief Science Officer of Autism Speaks, the nation’s leading autism advocacy group. Its mission is to increase public awareness and provide funding for research on autism. Prior to this position, Dawson was the founding director of the University of Washington’s autism center. She was well spoken and informative about research, specifically about the need for early recognition and importance of intervention.

We left the two-day conference recharged and motivated to apply what we had learned. There’s no doubt that our work with children, families, and colleagues is enhanced when our own knowledge in the field is increased.

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A sea snake. By Lorenzo R., 2 years 9 months
The transition from preschool to kindergarten can be a challenging process for families. Parents want to make sure their children attend the right school and children worry about the difficulties of making new friends. Indeed the stress of this time can be overwhelming for the whole family, so Bing holds an annual kindergarten information night to try to ease parents’ concerns.

At this past year’s event, held in January, we had the privilege of welcoming Palo Alto pediatrician Rick Lloyd, MD, as well as Susan Charles, the principal at Ohlone Elementary in the Palo Alto School District. Several Bing teachers and one parent were also present to answer questions regarding the shift from preschool to kindergarten.

Lloyd, a pediatrician for over 30 years, began the evening by explaining the common characteristics of the five-year-old child. “The five-year-old child wants to be good,” he explained. He added that school is where they primarily focus this intent. There they are gaining a better sense of themselves, their abilities and their relationships. They become more enthusiastic about life, as they can be heard saying things like, “I love my friends,” or “I love school.” Increased emotional warmth and more affection are typical at this time as playmates transform into more meaningful friends.

However this impulse to be good can lead to frustrations at home because they put so much energy into their school lives that they drop their guard within the familiar home setting. Discipline works well at home when negative behavior arises, and time-outs can be effective. Usually a five-minute time period is appropriate for a five-year-old, suggests Lloyd.

There is also a lot of excitement about learning during this time. The five-year-old wants to accumulate facts and show off what he knows to others. This is something that can actually help the child with the transition. By reciting this information they are calming their own fears by proving their intelligence.

In terms of cognitive development, the child is still developing his abstract thought. Since he doesn’t have a true understanding of the past or the future, time consists of here and now. Magic is very real in his mind, as it is understood as truth. His belief in God is akin to his belief in Santa Claus, both being abstract beings. Also, when someone close to him dies he will not truly understand what has happened. He may cry and be sad, but only if he sees his parents grieving.

Lloyd went on to talk about children’s physical development. Regarding sleep, he suggested 11 hours per day, an amount that should give them enough rest to carry sufficient energy through the day. He also mentioned that although children of this age are usually fully toilet-trained, about 15 percent of boys and 5 percent of girls continue to wet the bed. Also their play can become more competitive as friends as well as to hold on to some old ones. Be flexible.

Next was Charles, who stressed the importance of creating free time in a child’s life. “There is a huge new social environment for your child in kindergarten, and while it is important to pursue new friendships, it’s just as important to clear time in your child’s schedule every day,” he said. Having time with children at the end of the day can help them process all of the day’s events, allow them to take a breath and also keep parents informed about what is happening in their lives.

Lomangino added that giving children advice on navigating new friendships could ease their nervousness. Tell them how to start conversations and enter play sequences.

Lomangino reassured the parents that children will take the friendship skills they learn at Bing with them into kindergarten.

What can we do as parents to ease our child’s concerns about kindergarten?

“Teachers see increased stress coming from the children this time of year,” said Robinette. She advised parents to talk to their children about kindergarten now, but to keep the discussion as low key as possible. Many children think that they will begin kindergarten immediately upon turning five, so to dispel this notion, tell them it will happen a long time from now. Be calm about it, she said, because whatever stress and uncertainty parents show will be mirrored in the behavior of their child. She suggested that parents give the child an orientation of the kindergarten they will be attending when the time comes. She also noted that it might take a month or so for the child to adapt to the new school setting come September.

Charles added, “Please think about the way you convey the information, because when your children hear your concern, and they, too, will feel uneasy.”

How can I support my child socially in a new school?

Chandra thought it best to embrace new friends as well as to hold on to some old ones. Be flexible.

Erickson agreed and spoke of the importance of creating free time in a child’s life. “There is a huge new social environment for your child in kindergarten, and while it is important to pursue new friendships, it’s just as important to clear time in your child’s schedule every day,” he said. Having time with children at the end of the day can help them process all of the day’s events, allow them to take a breath and also keep parents informed about what is happening in their lives.

Lomangino added that giving children advice on navigating new friendships could ease their nervousness. Tell them how to start conversations and enter play sequences.

Robinette reassured the parents that children will take the friendship skills they learn at Bing with them into kindergarten.

Should I keep my child in preschool another year, or will it be OK if they end up repeating kindergarten?
Lomangino stressed the idea that things won’t necessarily click into place if parents wait a year. Charles agreed, stating the term “holding back” is one that connotes negativity. Kindergarten age requirements are for adults’ convenience, not for the child’s. All children develop differently and at different paces, and that’s OK. She also said it’s important to trust the school to which parents are sending their child. “There is so much pressure on children. Stop being afraid and be open. Trust them,” she said.

Q How is kindergarten different today compared to when we were that age?
Chandra noted that there is much less playtime now than in previous generations. Children need unstructured playtime, but academics continue to be pushed upon younger and younger children. She urged the audience to help children by scheduling free time for them at home.

Charles added, “Play is their work. They learn from their play. We’re tiring them. We want them to remain excited.”

Q Should my child attend a “young fives” program or a kindergarten program?
Charles said there are 30 spaces in the “young fives” program in the Palo Alto Unified School District, but that over 1,000 children apply each year. She reassured parents that most children are ready for kindergarten when they are five. All children have strengths and weaknesses, and kindergarten teachers take each child as he is. Most children end up moving on to first grade from kindergarten, meaning most of the time things end up working out for children who seem unready earlier in the year.

Quinn related her child’s experience in kindergarten. In November the teacher was concerned because the child didn’t know all the letters in the alphabet. Soon enough this problem cleared up. Then the teacher was concerned because the child wasn’t reading at an appropriate level. But that, too, came in its natural time and now the child is excelling in school.

It is worth mentioning that the only kindergarten requirement of children is that they are five years old by December 2.

Teacher in Profile: Andrea Rees
By Karen Robinette, Head Teacher

Many people know Andrea Rees as a dedicated teacher at Bing Nursery School. But few know about her contributions to the local early childhood education community. Andrea has been actively participating in the Peninsula Association for the Education of Young Children, a local chapter of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, since 2003. NAEYC is the world’s largest organization working on behalf of young children.

The mission of the Peninsula AEYC, a Santa Clara County volunteer organization, is a reflection of NAEYC’s: to advocate and act on behalf of the needs and rights of young children, families and early childhood professionals through educational services, professional growth opportunities and leadership development.

Andrea’s involvement in the PAEYC began in 2003, when she received information about the organization in the mail and signed up to volunteer, hoping to broaden her early childhood connection. The first year, she sat in on board meetings and participated in events. The following year, she served on the board and was elected vice president of support and services. She has also served three years as chair of the educational programs committee.

One of Andrea’s accomplishments includes organizing a conference for local early childhood community members held at Bing Nursery School in 2006. Andrea invited several Bing teachers to give presentations on a variety of topics such as block building, clay, water and woodworking with young children. Over one hundred early childhood professionals attended and greatly valued what they learned. The Bing teachers benefited too, as the event connected them to the wider community of colleagues.

Another of Andrea’s accomplishments in the PAEYC has been to organize a tour of early childhood programs and family childcare settings in conjunction with the 2007 conference of the California Association for Early Childhood Education, held in San Jose. Bing was one of the demonstration education sites on the tour, and was a highlight for many of the 46 administrators and teachers who visited. Indeed, many commented that the teacher-guided tour of Bing’s beautiful classrooms and grounds and learning about Bing’s philosophy, practice and history was a highlight of the entire conference!

Andrea’s further PAEYC responsibilities throughout the years have included organizing workshops and roundtable talks, participating in community events such as San Jose’s Month of the Young Child Fair, coordinating the Santa Clara County Early Childhood Professional Conference in 2006 and 2008, writing for the PAEYC newsletter and meeting and connecting with other local early childhood groups, such as 4C’s and Preschool for All.

Currently, Andrea maintains her role as a participant on the educational programs committee for the PAEYC, though she no longer serves on the board. She has enjoyed her dual role as board member and classroom teacher and feels that Bing greatly supported her by allowing her to use its resources, connect with the larger early-childhood community and allow her the flexibility to engage in her volunteer activities with PAEYC.

Over the years, many other Bing teachers have volunteered with the PAEYC. Recently, several Bing teachers have presented workshops on the stringent NAEYC re-accreditation process, which the school successfully completed in 2007. Matt Linden, a Bing head teacher, has served as vice president of membership for the PAEYC.
The Firebird Family Performance

Bing Nursery School and the Stanford Lively Arts hosted the rehearsal of *The Firebird* as part of the university's Stravinsky Project—lectures and concerts celebrating the 125th anniversary of the composer's birth. At this free event, held March 8 at Dinkelspiel Auditorium, the Stanford Symphony Orchestra performed the suite with a puppetry troupe to a full house. Eight-foot silk puppets controlled by puppeteers with rods harnessed to their bodies acted out the famous Russian folktale on stage with a narrator. Jindong Cai, pictured in inset, is the conductor of the orchestra and professor of music at Stanford. Both of Cai's children, Sebastian and Cecilia, attended Bing.

Sol y Canto A Thank You Concert

Sol y Canto, a Latin musical ensemble, performed for Bing families on November 19, 2007. Bing hosted the concert to thank all parent volunteers for their participation in the Harvest Moon Auction. The band was accompanied by two local musicians: Saul Sierra, the group's former bass player and current Bing parent, and Daniel Steinberg, director of the community chorus, World Harmony Chorus.

Bing Children’s Fair and Alumni Breakfast

Our Spring Community Event

Below: Special thanks to co-chairs Jill Malott (left) and Norma Alvarez (right) and all the volunteers for a successful fair on May 19, 2008. More than 100 alumni and their families attended the alumni breakfast preceding the fair. Right: Children explore with water at the waterworks station.
Harvest Moon Auction 2007
By Jennifer Winters, Assistant Director

Bing Nursery School’s annual Harvest Moon Auction raised $280,000 for the Bing Nursery School Scholarship and Enrichment Fund this past year. And once again, Helen and Peter Bing made a generous gift of $50,000 to the fund. Bing, one of the few U.S. nursery schools that offers a scholarship program, provides financial aid for more than 20 percent of its students. The scholarship program is an important part of the mission of the school and enriches the experience for everyone at Bing.

This year, the auction’s theme was “Moon Over Paradise.” As guests arrived, parent volunteers greeted them with a warm mahalo and a colorful lei. Tiki bars served up exquisite Mai Tais and Hawaiian dancers brought down the house with their colorful costumes and graceful movements. The island-inspired food by Jimmy V’s catering was the perfect complement to the evening. The Stanford Alumni Center’s McCaw Hall was truly transformed into a lush tropical paradise!

This success was made possible by the many parents who put in countless hours for the event. They helped by soliciting donations, entering donations into the data base, putting up bulletin boards, coordinating great entertainment, organizing the auction inventory and packing and moving it to the event site, picking up items, assembling gift baskets, decorating and setting up the event, checking guests in and out, keeping track of finances and tickets and of course the ever important job of cleaning up.

Exciting items to bid on during the live auction portion of the event, which raised a record-breaking $21,000, included an Eric Carle signed poster, Vegas, Napa and Maui getaways, a case of Silver Oak wine, a child’s birthday party produced by Bing teachers, a ride in a Tesla electric car and a Bing children’s playhouse.

In addition, attendees could sign up for a wide array of events: the ever-popular Texas Hold ‘Em Poker Championship, a Hawaiian luau, The Great Bing Campout, A Bollywood party, a wine tasting: Cabernet vs. the world, a Teddy bear picnic, a ladies afternoon tea, a cocktail party, a field day with teachers Sean and Colin, A Scotch tasting, a trail run in Portola Valley, Bing’s Amazing Race, an Academy Awards party, a children’s cooking party, a ladies game night, a Bunco night, and a football throwing event with Steve Young.

We had over 500 silent auction items to bid on including adventures and getaways to Tahoe, Reno, Yosemite, Grand Wailea, San Francisco, Monterey, St. Helena, Seattle, Maui, Mammoth Lakes and Martha’s Vineyard. Children’s activities and parties included a membership to Coyote Point Museum, teacher tuck-ins, a Mr. Fix-It birthday visit, aquarium tickets, ice skating lessons, swim lessons, theatre tickets and camps. Children’s items such as hand-made and one-of-a-kind clothing, children’s books and craft sets were also offered. There were creative class gift baskets that were filled to the brim with imaginative and inspiring items. The culinary delights included gift certificates to restaurants ranging from In-n-Out Burger to Chez Paul in Maui. The fine wine selection was filled with hard-to-find wines from California to France. And to top it off, we auctioned health and fitness items to help us all get in shape: from pilates and yoga classes to family fun at the YMCA.

We want to give tremendous thanks to Dale Race-Hampton and Katrien Burlinson for the hundreds of hours they put in as the auction co-chairs in order to make this event such a success and to Laurie Quinn and Bob Burlinson for their incredible auctioneer skills. We also want to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to all who donated, volunteered and participated and we look forward to seeing everyone at this year’s auction, “Starry Safari” on October 18, 2008.
STARRY SAFARI
Lions and Zebras and Bing, Oh My!

20TH ANNUAL HARVEST MOON AUCTION
BING NURSERY SCHOOL, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Saturday October 18, 2008 at 6:00 p.m.
at the Frances C. Arrillaga Alumni Center,
Stanford University campus.

Join us for a thrilling safari adventure.
Grab your binoculars and pith helmets
and hop aboard for a wild safari.

Celebrate the evening with African delight cocktails and graze on exotic food.
Some exciting auction items include urban safari getaways,
rare/unusual wines, parties with Bing teachers and so much more.

All proceeds benefit our children:
The Bing Nursery School Scholarship and Enrichment Funds.

ASANTE!
Clare Libraro and Nicole Nokes
2008 Harvest Moon Auction Co-chairs

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