In July 2009, after a national search, Jennifer Winters was named the new director of Bing Nursery School. She has nearly 25 years of experience in the field of early childhood education. She earned a bachelor of science in special education and elementary education from the University of Maryland and a master’s in child development from San Jose State University. This is Winters’ 15th year at Bing. She has been a teacher and head teacher, and for the past eight years has served as assistant director and acting director, and as a lecturer in Stanford’s department of psychology. Prior to Bing, Winters served as a special education teacher in Maryland and Texas public schools, the director of a nursery school and kindergarten in Bowie, Md., and the curriculum director for a Jacksonville, Fla., non-profit with over 20 early childhood programs for at-risk children and families.

On a personal note, Winters describes herself as an avowed “foodie,” an avid cook and an enthusiastic singer. She’s ready with a song for nearly every occasion—though she can often remember only one line, she jokes. She and her husband Phil Winters, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and the Stanford Graduate School of Business, recently celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. They have one son, Christopher. Winters grew up in Maryland and has also lived in Texas, Hawaii and Florida. She now calls the Bay Area home, having lived here for nearly 20 years. She comes from a family committed to both early childhood education and to higher education. Her mother was the longtime director of a pre-school and kindergarten and was later instrumental in implementing the initial accreditation system at the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Her father was a professor of physics at Catholic University. Both of her sisters are professors of fine art and are accomplished artists. Her older brother is an economics professor and her younger brother has a career in business.

There really is no place quite like Bing. What makes it so special is the profound positive impact made on so many lives through the different things we do here. Most visibly, our play-based, child-centered programs provide a wonderful initial educational experience for young children and their families. Bing is also a renowned laboratory school for research studies, which are often cited in the textbooks of psychology, linguistics and education curricula. And we provide the ideal setting for undergraduate courses in child development, with students observing children first hand.

It is incredibly rewarding to know all the positive and far-reaching ways in which Bing touches so many lives. For example, seeing Dawn Maxey, now a first-year medical student at Johns Hopkins University, addressing last year’s Stanford’s Phi Beta Kappa graduating class with a speech describing her educational journey at Stanford, beginning and ending at Bing.
She started as a three-year-old at the nursery school and went on to become a Stanford undergraduate who took classes at Bing, conducted a study at Bing for her honor’s thesis and also worked at Bing as a student teacher. And hearing from University of Virginia professor Vikram Jaswal, a former psychology doctoral candidate and researcher who spent countless hours at Bing telling of the joys of being a new parent. And seeing Bing alumni parents and their children—very often at the farmer’s market—now in elementary, middle or high school so fondly recall their experience at Bing. That is what makes Bing so special.

What do you enjoy most about coming to work each day?

That’s easy. Seeing the children interacting with each other and our staff is always the highlight of my day. The early childhood wisdom, knowledge and experience that our staff brings to work each day is unmatched anywhere and it’s a daily joy to see them interacting with the children.

You mentioned the teaching staff. You’ve been here for 15 years—what can you say about the staff?

Our staff of teachers is the foundation of our extraordinary early childhood program. They are incredibly knowledgeable, experienced and committed. The average professional experience of our head teachers is 15 years, and all have master’s degrees. Our teachers average 10 years of early childhood experience, and many also have master’s degrees. We couldn’t have a better teaching staff to serve our children and families.

You often mention the “Bing community.” What do you mean by that?

To me the Bing community consists of the young children and their families, our staff, the professors and researchers, our advisors, our alumni, our donors, supporters and volunteers. In essence, it’s everyone who is involved with Bing and cares about Bing. I would be remiss if I didn’t take this opportunity to acknowledge the two most long-standing members of the Bing community—Helen and Peter Bing. They truly are the founding members of our Bing community and after 43 years of unwavering support for our school and our mission, they still set the standard for being involved and caring about Bing Nursery School. I have never seen a group as passionate, committed and involved as the Bing community.

Tell us about the Tower House. It’s a beautiful building, how will it be used?

This is the first school year the Tower House, the beautiful building next door, is part of Bing Nursery School. The renovation of the building for our use was a very generous gift from the Arrillaga and Bing families. It was dedicated and opened in June. It is a wonderful space and is already in use for staff development activities, documenting our teaching, preparing presentations and teaching our undergraduate courses. [See the article on the history and renovation of the Tower House on page 8.]

What is your vision for Bing going forward?

I am very committed to building upon the excellence in all the things we do here at Bing—in our early childhood education programs for children and families, in supporting the important research conducted here and in the undergraduate courses we offer for Stanford students.

I am also very interested in pursuing strategies for widening the distribution of the vast body of early childhood knowledge, wisdom and experience that resides here at Bing. I believe the Tower House is an excellent new resource for sharing what we know and do here. I envision it as the site of an institute for early childhood excellence, where we can serve the Bing community and the local, national and international early childhood education communities with seminars, events and programs.

Children are our most valuable asset, and I can’t imagine a more worthwhile ambition than reaching as far as we can to promote children, families and the field of early childhood education. There is tremendous potential ahead for Bing and I look forward to working with the entire Bing community in building upon the excellence and expanding the reach in all we do.

Meet the New Assistant Director

Beth Wise took on the position of assistant director in September 2009. Wise has worked at Bing for over 20 years and served as a head teacher in Center PM, East AM and several Two’s programs. For the past seven years, she served as the music specialist and a head teacher for the Friday Two’s program. Wise has also worked on the management team at the Santa Clara County Office of Education and as a kindergarten teacher at The Nueva School, a school in Hillsborough, Calif., for gifted children pre-K to 8th grade. From 1988 to 1994, she was an artist in residence supported by the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, providing musical experiences to low-income children throughout the Bay Area. Most recently Wise has been working with the Jumpstart program at Stanford, which helps bring Stanford students into the preschool classrooms at Ravenswood Child Development Center in East Palo Alto.
Long Life in the 21st Century
By Christine VanDeVelde Luskin, Writer and Bing Alumni Parent

Next time you visit Bing Nursery School, look around at the boy building a tower of blocks in East room and the girl laughing on the tire swing in the redwood grove and the toddlers gathered for story time. They will likely be among the first centenarians of the 22nd century.

Today, the majority of children who are born in developed regions of the world have the opportunity to grow old—a change unprecedented in the history of humankind. That’s because in the 20th century, life expectancy nearly doubled in industrialized nations around the world. A new stage in life has been created—old age—and we’re only beginning to come to terms with the implications.

On May 6th, Stanford University Professor of Psychology and founder of the Stanford Center on Longevity, Laura Carstensen, presented to the Bing community in the 2009 Distinguished Lecture her overview of long life in the 21st century and beyond—how we got the fabulous gift of an extra 30 years for the average person, and what we need to do now in science and technology to ensure these added years are good years.

Best known for the development of socioemotional selectivity theory, which posits that the perception of time plays a fundamental role in the selection and pursuit of social goals, Carstensen founded the Center on Longevity to combine such research with swift entrepreneurial action and to deliver products and policy that will improve the quality of life for an aging population.

But before considering the question of creating a world that is going to allow today’s children to become healthy, happy, fit, independent and secure as they live long lives into the next century, it’s necessary to understand how we arrived here.

For most of human history, life expectancy hovered at around 20 years. That’s barely enough time to reproduce and then stay around long enough to insure offspring would survive. Things were touch-and-go for a long time for the survival of our species.

Life was extended by natural evolution. Longer-lived people were selectively advantaged, so life expectancy inched up in the way evolution acts—that is, very, very slowly. By the mid-1800s, life expectancy in much of the developed world hovered around the mid-30s. By 1900, in the United States, life expectancy was 47. But by the end of the 20th century, life expectancy had risen to 77—thirty years in just a century! At the same time that life expectancy was rising, fertility rates were falling. On average, the number of children born to American women fell from 4.2 in 1900 to 2.1.

These two factors—longer life and decreased fertility—created an unprecedented change in the distribution of age in the population. In 1900, about 4 percent of the U.S. population was over 65. Today it is about 13 percent. By 2030, 22 percent of the population in the United States will be over 65.

But why are people living longer lives? The demographic changes that are occurring in the United States have nothing to do with a fountain of youth. In fact, the story of how society launched into this era of long life doesn’t begin with a discussion about older people at all. It begins with a story about babies.

The dramatic increase in life expectancy in the 20th century occurred not because old people lived longer, but largely because fewer people died when they were young. In 1900, 25 percent of the babies born in this country died before they reached the age of 5. Many more were orphaned by the time they reached 18, and many more were permanently disabled because of chronic diseases. Remember polio? Life was very, very hard for young people.

But medicine only gets some of the credit for these changes—for dealing with the spread and impact of disease at a fundamental level. And natural evolution had nothing to do with the changes seen in the 20th century. The true story is much more complicated and interesting.

In fact, garbage collectors should get as much credit as doctors for the 20th century’s increase in life expectancy. Because the earliest and largest gains in average life expectancy came about because of community-wide efforts to improve sanitation and the safety of the food supply.

There were many changes: Waterways were purified, food-borne pathogens were...
identified, and surveillance of the food supply was implemented. Governments in Europe and the United States built vitamins and nutritional supplements into the food supply that improved the health of young people, and these food-fortification programs nearly eliminated major nutritional deficiencies like rickets, goiter and pellagra. After electricity came into common use, there was refrigeration. Heating and cooling systems were incorporated into daily life, which, again, improved people’s chances at long life. But it was access to these technologies—as much as their discovery—that led to these changes. For example, if it had only been the wealthy who had refrigerators, the safety of the food supply in the entire population would have remained precarious, even for the wealthy.

The long life people are enjoying right now is really an amazing triumph of culture. “Culture” doesn’t just connote the foods people eat and the languages spoken, but the way that people transmit knowledge across generations, the social practices that are encouraged, and the collective efforts of people to improve the well-being of entire populations. Nobel Laureate economist Bob Fogel of the University of Chicago describes what happened in the 20th century as “technophysio evolution”—that is, evolution not by natural selection, but by changes in societies and culture. In other words, culture operated on the individual, influencing human biological capacities.

At the same time that these changes in public health were occurring and fertility rates were falling, societies were also increasing the investment made in young children through initiatives such as public education and child labor laws. Developmental science was identifying how children think, considering how they best learn and the optimal way to frame information for them. So today the world is exquisitely attuned to the needs of the very young. And this world that was developed to save the lives of the youngest among us is also responsible for long life.

The result is that we are at a point in human history where very soon there are going to be more people in the developed world over 60 than under 15. The shape of families is changing, with four, five, and even conceivably six generations alive at the same time—again, something unprecedented in the history of humankind.

The implications of these changes are only beginning to be contemplated. Primarily, the public is voicing concern—that so many old people in a population will take from the young and leave fewer resources for schools and children, that aging societies will break the bank on health care and retirement, forcing young people to bear undue burdens. There is fear that eventually society and individuals will be forced to make stark choices between providing support for children and their parents, and the aging. It’s common to hear among policymakers that a crisis is on the horizon that will cripple society.

There are serious problems with aging as we know it. To the extent that societies are comprised of people who are cognitively impaired and suffering from serious diseases, it will threaten the future. But the remarkably good news is, on average, people are getting healthier at the same time as, on average, they are getting older. In the 1980s, when it became possible to accurately predict what the population was going to look like, there was concern that any added years would all be sick years. So people would live longer but be sick longer. That hasn’t come to pass. In the last 50 years, each elderly cohort that has arrived at age 65 has been healthier than the preceding one.

But there is some bad news. Disparities by social class are profound and the gap is widening. There will be two old ages: one for the wealthy and educated, and one for the disadvantaged. “The Americans’ Changing Lives Study” by James House of the University of Michigan showed that more than 90 percent of people over age 60 who have 16 or more years of education report no functional limitation. Even at age 75, there is not much change: 80 percent of this group shows no functional limitation. But for those who don’t graduate from high school, there is a decline in health that begins at age 30 and progresses steadily downward throughout adulthood.

Crisis is usually the catalyst for scientific breakthroughs. So to the extent that there is fear that a crisis looms because of an aging population that can be used to direct energy and attention to solutions. If the same ingenuity and commitment that was used to improve the lives of children in the last century can be used to improve the health and well-being of people 50 and older, then longer-lived populations could inspire major breakthroughs in science and technology that will improve life at all ages. Science and technology got the population here, and science and technology will lead the way forward again, transforming human aging from an object of fear and loathing to a goal that people aspire to.

The work of Carstensen and her colleagues at the Center on Longevity will be part of the answer. Just as 60 years ago researchers and scientists were studying children’s minds and how they access information, today, the quest is to understand the ways that information can best be presented to and processed by

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Observational drawings of food items as part of Center AM's cooking project

A big piece of mac and cheese with butter. By Pierce G., 3 years 8 months

Parathas. By Zoya M., 3 years 9 months

Spaghetti and meatballs. By Emmett C., 3 years 11 months

Apples. By Zachary B., 4 years 7 months
older learners.

Although it doesn’t disable people, cognitive decline is a major public health problem. Setting aside dementia and Alzheimer’s disease, there is clearly general deterioration in memory and comprehension that occurs with age. While such deterioration is offset by increases in knowledge, cognitive decline is an important area of inquiry in the quest to improve the quality of longer lives. Among the questions being explored at the Center on Longevity are whether increased knowledge can be used to offset decline in the speed of processing information and how information can be framed so that older individuals retain it better.

Carstensen’s theory of socioemotional selectivity—holding that people set goals in temporal contexts, and those contexts change as we get older—is the basis for much of the inquiry into the psychology of the aging. When the future is perceived as expansive and open-ended, when mortality or endings aren’t contemplated, individuals feel like they have all the time in the world. Under those conditions, people are motivated to collect things: people, information, knowledge. People are willing to take risks because they’re acquiring knowledge and banking it. Even if it’s not important now, they reason to themselves, it could become important down the road.

But as people begin to see the future as less open-ended and more constrained, they are motivated to achieve emotional balance, placing more value on experiencing satisfying relationships and other pursuits. In part, that’s because these goals are realized in the doing, in the present. So as people age, goals change, and they care more about emotional experiences than gaining information.

One of Carstensen’s key findings is that as people age, there is a preference for positive information. In a study in which subjects were shown positive, negative and neutral images and asked to recall as many as possible, it was found that young adults remembered exactly the same number of positive and negative images; middle-aged people remembered more positive images than negative; and older individuals had a significant response to positive information, remembering far more positive images than negative or neutral. This bias—not any lack of basic mental competence—may explain why older people can be more susceptible to swindles and scams.

So Carstensen and her colleagues then set out to see if the preference for positive information could be circumvented by re-framing goals. Further studies established that when the goal is changed from remembering as many as possible to being as accurate as possible, the difference across ages was eliminated entirely. This is one of the many ways that communication and learning in older age is being studied so that cognitive performance can be enhanced and the quality of life continues to improve as people age.

It’s interesting that younger people often think the psychology of older people must teeter between terror and depression as they age. It’s actually the opposite. Older people’s mental health is better than younger people’s—there is less depression, less anxiety, less incidence of all psychiatric disease other than dementia. In some sense that’s because older people are relieved of the burden of the future. There are all sorts of “what ifs” in life, and humans are not good at dealing with “what ifs” emotionally. Humans are good at adapting to the cards they’ve been dealt once they’re known, but it’s psychologically difficult to not yet know what those cards are. So the best years actually do seem, for most people, to come later.

And the best news is that today the potential of science and technology to further improve our later years—both in small ways and large—is breathtaking. Engineers at Stanford are developing shoes that slow the progression of osteoarthritis. There are new medical fields: for example, regenerative medicine—the possibility of growing new tissues from an individual’s own cells—that didn’t exist 20 years ago. Economists like George Shultz and John Shoven are coming up with win-win solutions to solve Social Security’s financing problems so that individuals will continue to work through the golden years. Dr. Alan Garber is working on finding realistic, fair ways to move forward with health-care reform. Much of this work is being done with the Stanford Center on Longevity. Going forward, lessons from the history of how long life was achieved in the last century can be used to develop technology and policy in response to the demographic changes underway in the United States, innovation that will benefit all of us and our children.

Laura L. Carstensen is a professor of psychology at Stanford University, Fairleigh S. Dickinson Jr. Professor in Public Policy, and founding director of the Stanford Center on Longevity. Carstensen is best known for socioemotional selectivity theory, a lifespan theory of motivation. She received her B.S. from the University of Rochester and her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from West Virginia University. She is also the grandmother of Bing graduate Evan Pagano and current student Jane Pagano.

Stanford Center on Longevity

Founded three years ago, the Stanford Center on Longevity is a multidisciplinary center whose mission is to focus on human aging. But it’s not just another academic think tank. The center is charged with wedding research with entrepreneurial action to fast-track policy and products that deliver answers to the challenges of long life—such as a vaccine that improves muscle repair and solutions for the Medicare crisis. On the way there, the more than 120 faculty affiliates—from bio-mechanical engineering, psychology, and medicine to political science and economics—hope to rise to the challenge of using science, technology and policy to improve quality of life at all ages. As founding director Laura Carstensen, Ph.D., says, “We’re really thinking about the whole life course and how we create the best world possible to support very long lives.” To learn more about the center, you can visit their Web site at http://longevity.stanford.edu. You can read the story of the center and the promise of long life in Carstensen’s book, A Long Bright Future: An Action Plan for a Lifetime of Happiness, Health, and Financial Security, published in August, available through Amazon and Barnes and Noble.
A Search for the Meaning of Play: A Workshop with Vivian Paley
By Todd Erickson, Teacher

“Our fantasy characters became our confidants. We would talk and listen to them and tell their stories at will. They did not mask reality; they helped us interpret and explain our feelings about reality.”
—Vivian Gussin Paley, A Child’s Work: The Importance of Fantasy Play

Story plays are processes in which children bring to life, in a dramatic fashion, the words and ideas from a story. Sometimes a story play emanates from the original ideas of a child, while other times it is based on an adult-authored book. Regardless of the source, the potential for creativity, social connection and emergent literacy is limitless. The importance of children’s storytelling and its intimate connection to their play was a central theme during an in-service training workshop the Bing teachers had with Vivian Paley on February 17, 2009. Before retiring, Paley was an early childhood educator for 37 years, mostly at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. She is the recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship, the John Dewey Society’s Outstanding Achievement Award and more recently the John Dewey Award. She is also the author of 11 books and an advocate for the importance of children’s storytelling as a vital communal activity [see curriculum articles on storytelling on pages 15 and 20].

Paley’s visit, Bing’s classrooms have been alive with dinosaurs, pigs, monsters and an endless parade of characters surfacing with urgency and creativity from the fertile minds of Bing children, creating friendships and community.

In the weeks following Paley’s visit, Bing’s classrooms have been alive with dinosaurs, pigs, monsters and an endless parade of characters surfacing with urgency and creativity from the fertile minds of Bing children, creating friendships and community.

Once upon a time, there was a big tree and there was a lion! He came out and sat on my head and I scared him. He ran away.
—Kabir R., 2 years 8 months
Are bilingual children more sensitive to non-verbal gestures in communication than monolingual children? Are they better able to interpret speakers’ intent? These are the questions Wei Quin Yow aims to answer through a series of studies conducted at Bing over the past three years.

A 5th-year graduate student in psychology, Yow studies under the guidance of professor Ellen Markman, Ph.D., Yow has a dual role at Bing, both as a parent and a researcher. She has two daughters, Angie, 6, a Bing alumna, and Zoe, 3, currently at Bing.

Yow is from Singapore and speaks three languages (Cantonese, mandarin Chinese and English) from early childhood. After graduating from university with honors, Yow obtained a master’s degree in statistics at Stanford.

Petite, energetic and a fast speaker, Yow is also an accomplished Chinese martial artist. She started learning Tai Chi in college and won several national and international titles in Wushu, a Chinese martial art, including a silver medal in the South East Asian Games in 2003.

Yow’s main research focus is the social cognitive impact of bilingualism. Specifically, whether bilingual children are better able to notice cues such as non-verbal referential gestures (pointing and eye gaze) as well as tone of voice compared with monolingual children. Her studies are designed to provide a social context, i.e., interaction between a child and a researcher, and investigate children’s understanding of the speaker’s intent in different circumstances.

For her study, Yow defines bilingual as being exposed to two languages—hearing or speaking the less-predominant of the two at least 30 percent of the time. Yow’s findings supported her hypothesis. The implication is “if the results hold true, growing up bilingual will actually facilitate the development of social cognitive competence,” said Yow. The results suggest that bilingual children are able to integrate multiple cues to have successful communication and that they might attain these skills much earlier than monolingual children.

Yow has conducted a series of four studies at Bing in the past three years.

The first study looked at 3- to 5-year-olds’ use of non-verbal referential cues—looking or pointing—to find a hidden toy. Children were presented with two boxes, one of which contained a novel object (for example, a garlic press, or a massage tool shaped like six-pointed star, resembling a giant piece from a game of jacks.) To indicate the right box, the researcher either pointed at it or looked at it with focused attention. In one condition, the researcher sat equidistant between the two boxes. In another condition, the researcher sat behind the empty box while providing the cue to the correct box.

Yow hypothesized that bilingual children would be better at using these cues to locate the hidden object. The study showed this to be the case in some but not all situations. Both monolingual and bilingual 3- and 4-year-olds are able to use gaze and point as cues to retrieve the hidden toy except in the most challenging condition—when researchers sat directly behind the empty box and used eye gaze as the cue. This condition is especially confusing because of the researcher’s proximity to the empty box and the less direct cue of eye gaze. In this case, bilingual children were better able to use the eye gaze as a cue to retrieve the hidden object than monolingual children. By 5 years of age, there was no difference between bilingual and monolingual children in using the eye gaze as a cue in the more challenging position.

The second study examined children’s more complex understanding of a speaker’s referential intent. For example, were bilingual children simply following the researcher’s point or eye gaze indiscriminately? Or were they showing a more sophisticated understanding of the context?

To find out, a researcher sitting across a table from children, showed 3-year-olds a box with two compartments, each with a window [see photo]. In the study, a screen the width of one compartment covered sometimes one window and sometimes the other. The researcher showed children two novel objects without referring to them by name and then turned around to look elsewhere while a second researcher placed each of the objects in separate compartments and covered one with the screen. The box was oriented so that when the first researcher turned back to face the children, the screen blocked her view of one compartment while children had a full view of the objects in both compartments. The first researcher then turned back and fixed her eye gaze at the object in the open window and said either “There’s the gorp. (“Gorp” was one of the made-up words used in the study for the novel objects.) Can I have the gorp?” in which case the speaker was looking for the visible object, or “Where’s the gorp? Can I have the gorp?” in which case the speaker was looking for the object blocked by the screen.

While all 3-year-olds understood gaze equally well when the researcher used it to refer to the mutually visible object in
the open window and said, “There’s the _____.” bilingual children were better at understanding the speaker’s use of gaze to refer to the hidden object when the researcher asked “Where.” The result showed that 3-year-old bilingual children are better able to integrate linguistic demand [there vs. where] with eye gaze than their monolingual counterparts.

Yow then found that the combination of a questioning gesture (palms faced up, raised to shoulders) and explicit searching (looking at the open compartment, looking to the blocked window, looking back at the open compartment and then asking “Where’s the _____?”) helped monolingual children discern the speaker’s intent.

In the third series of studies, children listened to audio recordings of sentences of happy or sad content with matching and incongruent tones. For example, “My mother gave me a treat,” was spoken in high-pitched tone with fast tempo or low-pitched tone with falling intonation. Past research showed that adults tend to rely on the speakers’ intonation (paralinguage) in incongruent situations to judge their emotion. However, children depend largely on the content. Yow hypothesized that bilingual children would be better at factoring in speakers’ paralinguistic cues to determine if they are feeling happy or sad.

The results showed that bilingual children were significantly more likely than monolingual children to use paralinguistic cues to judge emotion when content conflicted with the manner in which it was spoken.

What if the linguistic content is filtered out in such a way that it’s no longer intelligible but the intonation and tempo remain intact? Using the same recordings but passed through a filter, Yow found that monolingual and bilingual children are equally capable of identifying if the speaker was feeling happy or sad when the content was unintelligible.

In the fourth study, Yow designed a protocol that uses both non-verbal gestures and intonation, combining elements in the second and third studies.

Researchers again used the box with two compartments. The difference in this study was that they tried different intonations, serious vs. playful, when they asked children to locate an object. The serious tone implied that the speaker was looking for something not in view whereas the playful intonation implied that the speaker was searching for what was visible. As predicted, the results found that bilingual children were better than monolingual children at identifying the object in both conditions.

What is the importance of these studies?

It is important to understand whether growing up bilingual has any social cognitive impact on children, and if there is, then what that might be, said Yow. If the results hold true (Yow recognized that there are a number of variables to consider), Yow would advocate for the introduction of a second language to children, starting at a young age, to facilitate the development of these social cognitive skills.

Does bilingualism have long-term benefits in the social cognitive domain?

These findings pertain mainly to 3- to 5-year olds. Researchers must develop other designs to see if the bilingual advantages shown in Yow’s studies similarly extend to young adulthood, or even old age.

Yow cited research indicating that bilingualism slows down cognitive decline. It is supported by studies on inhibitory control comparing monolingual and bilingual seniors.

What can parents do if they speak one language?

Yow acknowledged that the decision to expose children to more than one language is a personal choice that depends greatly on individual family situations and values. However, parents who speak one language need not despair, Yow said. They can engage in activities with their children to develop cognitive skills. For example, Simon Says is a game through which children can practice inhibitory control, i.e., recognizing the cues and performing the appropriate actions.

TOWER HOUSE RENOVATION

The Tower House Restored—After a Two-Year Renovation, Peter Coutts’ Library is Once Again a Place of Study

By Simon Firth, Writer and Bing Alumni Parent

R

emember the old brick building that used to sit, boarded up and apparently abandoned to decay, between the beautiful Escondido Elementary and Bing Nursery School campuses?

Well, on a perfect June day just after the close of the 2009 Spring term, a small crowd of Bing teachers, staff, friends and benefactors gathered outside the building’s newly restored front door, across which was tied a big red ribbon.

The rest of the structure, too, looked as spruce as it must have in 1876, when it was built by Peter Coutts, a wealthy gentleman farmer of somewhat mysterious origins, to house his fine library of rare books.

The occasion was to celebrate the restoration of the Tower House, as the building has long been known, and to inaugurate it as a professional workspace for Bing staff, the Stanford professors and students who study at the school and the many international visitors who come...
to Bing to learn about its much admired approach to early childhood education.

Before the ribbon was cut, Bing’s director Jennifer Winters welcomed everyone and thanked the many people who’d helped make a long-held dream a reality, especially Don Intersimone and Shannon Silva of Stanford’s Facilities and Capital Planning office in the School of Humanities and Sciences, and Bing alumni parent and designer Michelle Coutts, who jointly oversaw all the details of the careful restoration. But in particular, she said, “I’d like to thank Helen and Peter Bing and the Arrillaga family, who have generously made this restoration possible.”

Winters’ thanks were echoed by Richard Saller, the dean of Stanford’s School of Humanities and Sciences, who holds the Vernon R. and Lysbeth Warren Anderson endowed deanship. Noting the Bing family’s many gifts to the university, the first of which was to create Bing Nursery School, Saller said, “It’s been a great privilege to get to know Helen and Peter, and I thank you for another contribution to the university.”

The Arrillagas, he added, “are another family who have made Stanford what it is today: and I think that’s arguably simply the leading university in the world, with the leading child development school in the world.”

The new building has three stories, the first two dominated by a single large, open room. The main room on the ground floor is a conference space, complete with its original fireplace. This floor also holds a small library, service kitchen, restrooms and an informal meeting space in the converted porch.

Upstairs the large room is a work space, outfitted with tables for project preparation and computer-equipped research stations. Next to it is a small supply room and lockers—available to Bing’s teachers for the first time.

Each room is furnished with fine wooden tables, chairs and cabinets. Just as she has with the main Bing campus, Helen Bing picked out drawings, paintings, quilts and prints to hang on the building’s walls. Many are by renowned children’s illustrators, like Eric Carle, or exquisite examples of folk art, such as the colorful quilt made by the Gee’s Bend Collective in Alabama that hangs in the tower stairwell.

The building’s most dramatic feature is its staircase tower. The original spiraling wooden staircase joins the two main floors and then sweeps up again to a small, light-filled room on a third floor, creating the tower that gives the building its name.

Legend has it that Peter Coutts used the tower (which was originally capped by a spire) to view the cattle on his ranch. Coutts bought the 1,100-acre property, which skirted the existing town of Mayfield and extended from what is now Barron Park in Palo Alto to Leland Stanford’s horse ranch to the north, for just over $90,000 in 1875. On it he established one of the great California dairy farms of its day, as well as a home that he called Escondite, now the administrative offices for Escondido village.

Coutts was widely liked and admired, but he remained something of a mystery to his neighbors. Indeed, Coutts was an assumed name. His real name was Jean Baptiste Paulin Caperon, and while in France he’d been a successful banker and was politically active. It was political troubles that caused him to liquidate his French assets and move to America in 1873.

Problems with European railroad investments and an attempt by a San Francisco journalist to extort money from Coutts in return for keeping his identity secret led Coutts to return to Europe in 1881 to try to restore his affairs. But while living in Europe, Coutts became ill and in 1882 he sold his American ranch to his neighbor, Leland Stanford.

Stanford used the ranch to expand his famed horse farm and turned the Tower House into a night school for his employees. In 1887 it was used as a drafting room, and with the opening of the university Escondite became the home of President David Starr Jordan and the Tower House his office.

In later years the Tower House was used as a school for faculty children, an eating club, a hospital and a home. It survived the 1906 earthquake, but was closed after the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989.

Now, Peter Coutts’ library is returning to its scholarly roots.

It will house Bing faculty as they prepare for their classes, document their teaching, and prepare the presentations they give at child development conferences around the world. In addition, it offers space for staff development activities. Stanford faculty now have a purpose-built lecture space in which to present their ideas to Stanford undergraduates, as well as study space in which to work while conducting observational research at the school.

“It’s our vision that the Tower House will enable Bing to bring the knowledge, wisdom and experience that’s here to a much greater segment of the early childhood education community, locally, nationally, and internationally,” Winters said at the opening.

“Just as Peter Coutts believed in doing things the right way,” said Dean Saller in concluding remarks, “the Arrillagas and the Binges have clearly taken the same approach in restoring the Tower House and making it yet another powerful asset to serve the Stanford University community.” He then invited two young Bing students, Jack and Finn Arrillaga, John and Gioia Arrillaga’s grandchildren, to cut the ribbon and declare the Tower House officially open once again.
Undergraduate Teaching and Training at Bing

By Emma O’Hanlon, Teacher

Most descriptions of Bing Nursery School would likely begin with a scene of 2- to 5-year-olds deeply engaged in play. However, these young children are not Bing’s only students. As a laboratory school for Stanford University, Bing serves more than 100 undergraduate and graduate students as well, offering three psychology courses, one human biology practicum course, observation labs for linguistics courses and opportunities for independent study and internships.

“The undergraduate courses offered by Bing are a critical component of the overall mission of the school,” said Jennifer Winters, director of Bing and instructor of several of the courses. Bing was established not only to provide a sound educational environment for young children and a laboratory setting for research, but also to teach undergraduate and graduate students about children through observation and firsthand experience.

“Our courses strive to link theory and practice and to provide a dynamic learning experience for Stanford students,” said Winters.

“We really get to know our students and we keep in contact with some of them over the years as they move into the professional world and parenthood,” she added. “We are fortunate to have several current Bing parents who were once enrolled in our undergraduate courses.”

The undergraduate courses offered at Bing all focus on child development and education and offer ample one-to-one mentoring. One of these—Development in Early Childhood (Psychology 147)—is offered every quarter at Bing. Winters, head teacher Parul Chandra and teacher Emma O’Hanlon hold weekly seminars with students to discuss child development, educational philosophies, teaching practices and learning theories in the field of early childhood education.

Currently, out of 18,951 courses offered at Stanford University, Psych 147 is one of the highest student-ranked courses offered, according to courserank.stanford.edu. The course places undergraduates in Bing’s classrooms to serve as student-teachers. They receive mentoring from Bing staff as they work with the children, fostering their development, planning curricula and participating in team teaching.

Another Bing course is the lab section for Introduction to Developmental Psychology (Psychology 60), taught by Susan Johnson, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology. Led by head teachers Beverley Hartman, Adrienne Lomangino and Karen Robinette, the lab (Psychology 60A) offers undergraduates opportunities for guided observation of children’s physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth. “Psychology 60A provides a complement to course readings on developmental theories and the dynamic growth observed in childhood,” said Lomangino. “It’s a means to enrich students’ understanding and bring book-learning to life.”

A third course, Observation of Children (Psychology 146), expands upon the learning and theories introduced in Psychology 60A. In this course, students explore topics related to children’s physical, cognitive, social and emotional development in depth, spending several hours a week observing children’s growth and behavior in the classroom and attending weekly seminars led by Hartman, Lomangino and Robinette. Hartman explains: “Students learn to look at child development closely and objectively; they learn to record behavior and interpret it. They become good observers, a skill that they will carry with them and will be of great use in many future professions.”

In addition to these psychology courses, Bing also offers Human Biology Practicum 3Y, taught by Winters; independent study on child-related topics (Psychology 194), also taught by Winters; observation opportunities for First Language Acquisition (Linguistics 140/240), with professor Eve Clark, Ph.D.; Language Acquisition: Exploring the Minds of Children (Psychology 7Q), with professor Anne Fernald, Ph.D.; and Research Methods and Experimental Design (Psychology 110). Each of these opportunities expands students’ knowledge of development by linking academic theory to practice and by providing experiences with growing children.

A close look at the adults in Bing’s classrooms will reveal the presence of university students working and studying in a variety of roles such as student-teacher, careful observer of child development, and feverish note-taker of language acquisition. Winters comments: “It is our hope that upon completion of the training and teaching experiences offered by Bing, undergraduate students will enter their future professions as advocates for young children. Many of our university students will go on to become teachers, physicians, lawyers and business people. They will find themselves in schools, governments, hospitals, non-profits and law firms and we hope that when presented with opportunities, that they will advocate for the importance of quality teachers, generous space, ample time and supportive environments for all children.”
In spring 2008, parents gathered at Bing Nursery School to participate in the parent seminar, “The Importance of Play.” Part of the seminar was devoted to hands-on play using classroom materials, and many parents expressed desire for more time to play. So on October 1, 2008, at the beginning of the school year, the Bing community was invited to participate in the “Play” seminar for a second time, allowing parents to experience first-hand what their children will encounter during their time at Bing.

The evening commenced with refreshments as parents and teachers filed into West room. Soon director Jennifer Winters gathered the mingling adults with the jovial sound of a ringing triangle. Head teachers Adrienne Lomangino and Kitti Pecka presented a concise overview of the importance of play in young children’s lives: theoretical foundations for Bing’s play-based philosophy, definitions of play itself and the impact of play on children’s development. The presentation was summed up by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s famed declaration that “…play is the highest level of preschool development.” Head teacher Peckie Peters affirmed this, saying “play is a really important instrument for children that needs to be supported and encouraged, and we’re seeing less and less of this over the years.”

Following the informational portion of the seminar, the teachers invited the parents into the other two nursery school classrooms, where they had set up various materials in the indoor and outdoor environments. The parents encountered easels set up for painting, found materials, blocks, clay, water tables and musical instruments. One parent described the classroom environment as “inspiring…open and unlimited.” Parents then participated in the kind of play that their children experience each day at school. While some spent all of their time playing music with head teachers Pecka and Beth Wise, others utilized as many materials as they could.

One father tested the limits of how high he could build a tower of unit blocks; others waited patiently in line for a turn at the easels.

Amidst the fun, adults discussed the analogous nature of their own play to that of their children’s. Observing how separate block structures transformed into a collaborative “city,” parents were able to interpret their own children’s development from solitary to cooperative play—and to remember all of the advantages and challenges that accompany such growth.

The evening ended gradually, as parents reentered the classroom drying their hands from the water table, accompanied by applause from the music stations. Spouses and friends reunited to share their experiences. One father described his time at the clay table as “therapeutic.” A mother, when asked what she made out of clay, responded: “I just didn’t make anything,” reflecting upon the value of the process of her work rather than final product. These anecdotes remind us of children’s wonderful, vital experience with play. “It really is their work,” reports Peters, “it’s a lot of decision making.”

As parents lingered to ask final questions or to hastily finish their projects, all seemed to reflect upon the importance of play in their children’s lives. Parents reported that they enjoyed learning what goes on in the classroom and how it is important for development. They appreciated the acquisition of strategies on how to play with their children. And one noted that “even by observing play you’re engaged in it, and learn.” Some parents desired more time for indoor play, while others seemed to pine for the outdoor environment: the hills, the swings, the sand! But as they left, all had smiles on their faces, and one mother concluded: “I’m so happy that my child is coming here.”

Playdates and Playmates: How to Facilitate Children’s Social Play
By Christina Davis, Teacher

Parents know that a successful playdate isn’t always “as easy as child’s play.” And while playdates provide valuable opportunities for building friendships and developing social skills, they can turn stressful for children and adults alike.

At the parent seminar in May, Bing parents gained insights on facilitating positive playdate experiences from the East PM teaching team: Christina Davis, Colin Johnson, Matt Linden, Adrienne Lomangino, Amanda Otte and Kim Taylor. Highlights of the discussion follow:

What’s a playdate?
Playdates are one-on-one or small-group gatherings that allow children to create and foster friendships.

How do children benefit from playdates?
Playdates can help children practice sharing their own space, or become more comfortable entering into new environments. Social play provides opportunities for children to develop physically, emotionally, cognitively and linguistically. Through playdates, children can develop their sense of self-concept, self-control, empathy and altruistic behavior. These pro-social characteristics are integral to building strong relationships throughout their lives.

Who makes a good playdate-mate?
Children with whom a child is interested in playing will make the most successful playmates. These are often the children they play with at school, or talk about at home. Teachers may also have suggestions for other children who have a similar temperament, or who may have shared interests.

How many children should take part?
The playgroup should be kept small and increased only when the skill of all the players permits. If the group size increases before the group is ready, the result could be exclusionary play as the children try to limit the group size on their own. The planner should factor in the presence of siblings. Siblings increase the group size and add a sibling dynamic that can cause some children to behave in ways they may not otherwise.

How does play change as children develop?
As children gain skill as players, they go through several stages of play. Young children engage in solitary play. As they grow, they move into parallel play—playing side by side with little interaction. This evolves into cooperative play, where children share their ideas with one another.

What can adults do to help friendships grow?
Once cooperative play has been established, adults can support the transition from play into friendship. Adults can play a crucial role in turning a momentary transient interaction into a trusting, valuable relationship. It helps if the adult follows the child’s lead in social situations, recognizing that there are a wide variety of personalities, and these require a wide variety of support for social development. Some children will need help to make a social overtire, while others will need help to respect another’s personal space. It is essential to recognize their individual needs, and also to realize that one personality type does not make a child a better friend than another.

What goes into planning a successful playdate?
Simply making a plan is a great start—but the plan should be flexible. Decide ahead of time a few activities to suggest, or items the child may want to share. These activities are designed to get the play rolling, not to limit the play. If either the child or the adult becomes too attached to the plan, then departure from it could hinder the success of the playdate. It is also important to take the limitations of the child into consideration. If a particular item is difficult for the child to share, it is appropriate to put that item away and save it for a time when the child is playing alone.

A snack can provide an excellent transition activity or a shift of focus. A snack can also combat fatigue and hunger, which can bring even the most successful play to a halt. The playdate is a success when it ends with all involved wishing it had been longer. This is an excellent set up for the next playdate.

An hour is a good amount of time for the first playdate. It can be increased to an hour and half when all are ready. Play is hard work for children and like anyone they are most successful when they are not overworked.

What role do adults play?
During a playdate, the adult role is to be available to support play. Make children aware that adults are available to help. It is best for an adult to be within eyeshot and earshot of the play and step in when support is needed, rather than waiting for play to fall apart. As the group has more experiences playing together, the support needed will change. Initially, the group may need help to feel comfortable and initiate play. Once engaged, the group is likely to test out their roles and may need support resolving conflicts. After this, the group may test the boundaries of their environment. At this time, adults are needed to provide structure and enforce house rules. Once the group establishes itself, the adult role changes to include more observation. It is important to give the group some space, but to be available in case conflict comes up or support is needed.

Children may benefit from assistance in verbally resolving conflicts and finding meaningful solutions. Adults can guide children in listening to each other. Help them to express their feelings using speech. It may be necessary to interpret the problem for the children. Use words that children understand and clearly define the problem for them. Once the problem is established, it may be helpful to brainstorm solutions. It is important to allow the children to come up with the solutions. It may seem like a short cut for the adult to choose a solution, but it is likely to result in less of an investment from the players. Once a solution is chosen, allow the play to continue. If the solution is unsuccessful, the process may need to be repeated.

Play is challenging work for children, but with proper adult support they can become skilled at working with others to develop and maintain quality friendships.
Bats in East AM

By Karen Robinette, Head Teacher

Just beyond the door leading to the outside play yard in the East classroom, stand redwood trees. The rumor among the children is that bats live in these trees, although no one has ever actually seen them. Before long, the children started pretending to be bats themselves and their play provided the momentum to embark on an exploration of bats, their habits and their habitats.

Children were intrigued but at the same time also a bit worried about bats. This was likely due to the scary portrayals of bats in stores around Halloween. Although we don’t celebrate Halloween at Bing, most children were aware of the holiday and were curious about some of the images associated with it, bats being one of them. They had many questions and theories about bats, although the majority had never actually seen any live ones. One child offered the theory that “bats hang upside down so they can see the moon better.”

To support the children’s interest this past year, teachers brought in books with bat photos and information. Teachers also read some bat-related picture books such as Bats at the Beach, Bats at the Library and Stella Luna at large group story time. These picture books and the informational books allowed the children to become more familiar with the subject. Their play began to reflect their growing knowledge of bats.

On the patio, children were often engaged in small groups building bat caves with the large, hollow blocks. These hollow blocks are available to children every day in all of the classrooms and can be used for any purpose that the children intend. After collaborating on the building of the bat caves, children would often stock the caves with items, such as pretend food, and huddle inside together as they had seen from the photos of bats in books.

Children were also eager to make and decorate bat wings out of large paper. It was a sight to see them “fly” across the classroom yard in groups with their “wings” fastened to their backs. When they grew tired, they returned to the comfort of their bat cave for a much-needed rest until it was deemed time for the next “flight.”

Meanwhile, across the yard, children brought the interest in bats to the sand area. There, water and sand together took the form of “Bat Island.” Children in the sand area enjoyed combining natural materials with small bats cut out of paper to “inhabit” Bat Island and its surrounding communities. Bats (suspended from sticks) flew around while other bats rested directly on the island. “Trees” crafted from leaves sprang up and sand caves emerged to complete the habitat.

Out in the garden box, a “bat” scarecrow stood watch over the newly planted bulbs and plants. Children determined that a bat would be an effective deterrent for most garden pests, since bats eat insects. (Too bad this didn’t work for the squirrels.) Other children were inspired to make paper bats and hang several from sticks found in the garden area, making bat mobiles. (Not the kind that Batman drives.)

Other activities that children enjoyed were drawing bats, making bat paintings at the easels, writing stories about bats, crafting bats from clay and engaging in music and movement activities focusing on bats. It was amazing to see that the children found ways to include bats in every area of the curriculum. The teachers also realized that children explored the topic through the use of all of the basic materials that make up a core part of the classroom’s everyday activities, including sand, water, paint, clay and blocks.

Teachers agreed that the one missing link to all of the enthusiasm over the topic of bats was that most of the children still had never experienced bats in real life. Fortuitously, this was about to change. The Junior Museum and Zoo for children in Palo Alto had recently opened an exhibit focusing on bats! The teachers were eager to partner with them to arrange an opportunity for the children to see bats. As it turned out, a generous donor provided funds so that two of the bats could visit the classroom, along with a docent who answered questions and shared information about these interesting animals.

The “guest bats” were named Sonar and Radar. They were a variety known as African Fruit Bats. In addition to the live bats, the docent also brought along a bat skeleton, a bat skull and a bat wing model. The children were ready with a list of questions. The docent, Becky, answered all these questions and provided a wealth of information that went well beyond the inquiries. Many children made observational drawings of Sonar and Radar.

The teachers found that the topic study of bats united the classroom’s children through a common theme. Bats were interesting to all of the children and this interest continued to bubble up in various ways throughout the remainder of the school year. The children seemed to gain most of their understanding through play acting bats together using paper wings and building bat houses with hollow blocks.

Over the year, the teachers have observed that many other explorations have emerged from the study of bats. Children not only regularly crafted paper bat wings but they also crafted wings to use in pretending to be fairies, angels, birds, butterflies, ladybugs and super heroes. This type of dynamic play, using these same materials, held center stage in the creation and acting out of rich and captivating scenarios that all stemmed from the initial interest in the bats who (allegedly) live in the East Room redwood trees!

Places to view bats in the Bay Area:
• Palo Alto Junior Museum and Zoo
• California Academy of Sciences
  Golden Gate Park, San Francisco
• Oakland Zoo

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Ingredients for Fun
By Parul Chandra, Head Teacher

On any given day this past year, a look into Center Room would likely reveal children pretending to pour tea or bake bread. The children clearly enjoy this type of “cooking,” and it benefits them—by building social connections and developing new friendships.

So when the children returned from winter break, eager to continue cooking in the classroom, the teachers encouraged their interest. We set up a table with cooking utensils, tools and recipe books from around the world, and soon noticed children cooking everywhere in the classroom and experimenting with cooking terms as they manipulated the various kitchen tools and symbolic foods such as felt for noodles, wooden cake and plastic sushi. We also asked parents to bring in a kitchen tool or a family recipe to share with the children, and invited families to cook with us in the classroom.

As we explored cooking, the children became interested in tools, recipes and other culinary materials. Some of the cooking techniques we learned were baking, steaming, sautéing, frying, blending and juicing. We prepared many recipes, such as oatmeal cookies, muffins, apple crisp, peach cobbler, pasta, tostadas, guacamole, sushi, stone soup, pizza, Greek crisp, peach cobbler, pasta, tostadas, guacamole, sushi, stone soup, pizza, Greek and juicing. We prepared many recipes, such as oatmeal cookies, muffins, apple crisp, peach cobbler, pasta, tostadas, guacamole, sushi, stone soup, pizza, Greek potatoes, German noodles, French toast, waffles, orange juice and smoothies.

The children became increasingly skilled in the cooking process, using dozens of different tools. They worked with complicated appliances like electric mixers, juicers and blenders; simpler equipment like ladles, whisks and rolling pins; and special-purpose gadgets like potato mashers, egg slicers and zesters. Experiences with utensils from varied food cultures, such as chopsticks, bamboo mats and tortilla presses, exposed them to the similarities and differences in the appearance and purpose of tools from around the world.

The physical changes that took place as we added, mixed and cooked ingredients intrigued the children. They were like scientists in a chemistry laboratory, speculating, theorizing and predicting as they manipulated the materials. After observing the common elements in recipes, children began creating their own recipes as they played with the open-ended materials to represent their ideas. Sometimes the children used sand, water, clay and art materials creatively to represent foods and the cooking process.

This type of “cooking” is a form of symbolic play, which for children is one of the most important mediums for self-expression. Engaging in this kind of play promotes the development of the whole child, which includes the child’s cognitive, emotional, social and physical realms. It’s a necessary precursor to the mental processes that later enable reading, writing and mathematical thought. The experience of creating imaginary scenarios fosters oral language and the ability to talk about their play further contributes to early literacy.

To further develop our topic, we read books about cooking and related themes, sang songs about foods from different cultures and shared recipes for these new foods. Eating foods cooked by the parents and the children in the classroom at snack time was a rewarding experience for the classroom community. Discussions about the foods, their preparation, and the experiences children had with the process created a special communal feeling amongst the children. Some recipes used ingredients that children had planted in our classroom herb garden. Excited groups of children would carry out small baskets and scissors to the garden to identify and collect the herbs needed for the recipe. There was much joy and satisfaction in gathering cooking ingredients from our own environment.

As the project unfolded, teachers collected children’s drawings of different kinds of food and kitchen tools, wrote up their recipes and compiled them in a book so the children could revisit their responses to the project and gain a better understanding of their own thinking.

A few recipes shared by the children, from simple to elaborate:

ELI: “Ice cream. You put milk in it and color in it. Then put it in the freezer.”
CAITLYN: “Hamburgers. We need to cook them. Put lettuce, mustard and also mayonnaise and that is all. Then we need to eat.”
OLIVIA R.: “Oatmeal raisin cookies. Three eggs without the yellow stuff, just the white stuff. Flour. You scoop it, scoop it and scoop it. Mix it up with the mixer. You don’t have to use your hands, just the really fast mixer. That is how my mom and I do it. Bake it. Take it out of the oven, and put it on the tray and: cookies!”

Collaborating together on a project with intention, motivation and energy had profoundly beneficial effects on the children’s development. For example, the children expressed their likes and dislikes for various foods and textures and were able to appreciate differences in personal tastes. They also adjusted their theories to accommodate new experiences resulting from their involvement in the project.

The many hands-on, positive cooking experiences contributed to a sense of belonging to the group and shaped the children’s identities as active learners.
The East PM teaching team was truly inspired by Vivian Paley’s visit to Bing in February. The early childhood education community has been profoundly influenced by her work with children, in particular children’s play, and we were excited to participate in her workshop [see page 6 for more information].

The day after Paley’s visit, we put in place a plan to apply her storytelling structure in our classroom, gauge the children’s interest and be open to the impact it had on the classroom community. Within this storytelling structure, children dictated stories while teachers wrote them down. The children then acted their stories out.

The East PM children already loved acting in story plays based on children’s books, so we were optimistic about our storytelling project. However, we wanted the children to get the message that these would be different: The East PM children’s personal stories and ideas would be the focus, and we were not performing the plays at story time, in front of visitors—these plays were for the children.

The classroom became our theater, the children the actors and the audience and teachers the stage managers. We chose to implement the following “stage rules” suggested by Paley:

- One page limit for each story (unless it’s the child’s birthday)
- The children don’t choose roles, they are assigned. Equal access to the stories is what creates friendship.
- No clapping because this isn’t a performance. (As Paley asked, “When you pass a group of children playing, do you clap?”)

To bring attention to our new project, we removed the language tables from the classroom, and in their place, we marked off a large rectangle on the floor with masking tape. We set up chairs around the perimeter. This was our stage. In the middle of the stage, we placed a small placard that said, simply, “Storytelling.”

We got the “wow effect” we were hoping for as soon as the children entered the classroom. “Why are the tables gone? Why is there a rectangle on the floor? What are we doing today?”

We informed the children that we were telling stories and acting them out, and invited them to sit with us and dictate a story. We decided that, instead of writing the story and then immediately acting it out, we’d collect a number of stories and then act them out. Children sat patiently in the chairs, waiting for their turn to tell a story, listening to the stories being told. When it was time to act them out, we went on a classroom-wide search for all the authors and returned to our stage to perform.

After casting the plays, we would begin reading, pausing at appropriate times to allow the characters to act. Often they would know what to do. “Once upon a time there was a little caterpillar…. .”

A cat, a dog who was really, really angry. And then he just said, “Lucas, please will you carry me?” Tommy wrote, “There was a fish. And a shark. The shark ate the fish up. There was a Quinn. It grew to be big. And there was a boy. And the boy ate the shark up.”

At the end of winter quarter, the team reflected on the storytelling project. We found that it had encouraged the children’s interactions, in effect creating a new classroom social dynamic. This came about when children engaged in active listening and brainstorming together, problem-solved and drew on creativity to enhance and deepen each other’s stories. As teacher Colin Johnson stated, “At storytelling, every child gets noticed by other children.”

Our stories brought us together. We created a community full of bats, lions, dinosaurs, monsters, foxes, dolphins, sharks, cats, dogs, the letter W, the letter Z, princesses, Peter Pan, trees, flowers, rocket ships, Annakin Skywalker and even Hans MacGregor—a character invented by Daniel’s father for bedtime stories. The greatest imprint storytelling left on East PM is echoed in Dante’s words, “Jordan, I want to play with you. What are you doing?” It can be seen when Quinn and Rex leave a storytelling session together, a newly formed friendship in full bloom. They jump with delight at the prospect of painting together, then run outside to play some more.
I don’t recall a horse in any Star Wars episode, but I would be happy to see children include one while playing Star Wars in the nursery school classroom. Creative developments like this show children using play, even war play, to gain mastery and control over their learning experiences.

At the beginning of the year in the West PM classroom, children independently initiated Star Wars play—wanting to be the good guys, who were pretending to attack and kill the bad guys. Their play involved what appeared to the teachers to be aimless running and aggressive pretend-fighting moves. We struggled as a staff to see the value in such play, especially as it was largely imitative: attempts to copy scenes from the movie without elaboration or variation. However, this class seemed strongly interested in Star Wars play, so in an attempt to follow their interests, we were determined to support, yet somehow develop and extend this play.

From a developmental perspective there is a compelling argument that war play can 1) help young children gain and master their impulses; 2) provide the forum for young children to explore the boundaries between fantasy and reality; and 3) offer children the opportunity to see how their actions affect others. In their book, The War Play Dilemma: What Every Parent and Teacher Needs to Know, researchers Diane Levin and Nancy Carlsson-Paige propose that when children not only play but extend powerful fantasy roles—such as Luke Skywalker or Darth Vader—within a safe environment, their play becomes a creative tool that serves their developmental needs. They state: “In war play, children assume the roles of powerful fantasy characters, express aggression in pretend situations, and engage in “pretend fighting,” all of which can help them to learn about impulse control as they struggle to stay within acceptable boundaries and receive feedback about their actions from people and objects in their environment” (p.26).

Helping these children develop their impulse control, while staying within acceptable boundaries and getting appropriate feedback from their peers, became the central social curriculum for the whole year.

Managing Star Wars Play in the Nursery School Curriculum

• Setting the Basic Safety Rules

Our first strategy was to set acceptable boundaries: The goal was to keep everyone safe. We found that when children engaged in this type of play they needed more adult support to gain control over their aggressive impulses. Discussion about the safety of individual players helped the staff and children formulate a set of safety rules, which focused on keeping bodies safe and respecting the feelings of others. The three basic rules were:

1) No touching or hurting each other’s bodies.

2) Pretend shooting is allowed only if all players are in agreement.

3) If someone calls for a time out for any reason, the game has to stop until everyone feels safe and comfortable to proceed.

This meant teachers working in close proximity to the group and reinforcing the rules. We focused our safety questions on helping the children make clear distinctions between what is pretend and what is real. In addition, much of our support was aimed at helping individuals realize the effects their actions were having on others.

• Developing Goals for Star Wars Play

Once the rules had been established, we decided as a staff to become active positive agents in this type of play. To gain some insight into how children were using this play we asked a plethora of questions. At first, the barrage of questions seemed to cause an annoying disruption to the flow and intense pace of the war play. The teachers seemed to be getting in the way of the group’s mission to “kill” as many bad guys as they could. However, our role at this point was to help the children restructure and extend their imitative play, and figure out what to do next. As Kostelnik, Whiren and Stein suggest in their article, “Living With He-Man” in Young Children, “Any dramatic play episode can deteriorate if the children define roles and characters and then are at a loss for what to do next. This dilemma can lead to nonproductive activity.”

To keep these activities productive, the teachers offered different scenarios for the characters to try out. For example, we suggested that the good guys might need to see a doctor or visit a Star Wars hospital to take care of any injuries. We suggested...
that other powers, such as flying or running faster than the speed of light, could be added to any Star Wars characters skill set. At times, these suggestions would frustrate the “Star Wars experts,” who would want to keep referring back to the original script and plot. But the ideas piqued the imagination of others.

- Practicing Pretend Battle
As more children in the class expressed a desire to participate in the Star Wars play, we helped them feel safe and in control within the extended activities. After all, children learn best when they control their play, we helped them feel safe and in control within the extended activities. Star Wars a desire to participate in the

- Using Open-Ended Materials
Open-ended materials, such as the unit blocks, were useful for some children who needed highly structured play. The blocks could be manipulated in a variety of ways and could even be changed as the play progressed. Complex block structures started to appear in the block-building area, followed by detailed scripts and story plots. It seemed that having the control over these resources allowed our “Star Wars experts” to produce more creative play and develop their own play scripts.

May the Force Be with Us
With or without a light saber, war play is something that can become a part of our nursery school curriculum. It appears we can’t just bury our heads in the sand area and hope it goes away. It is important to limit exposure to disturbing images and provide age-appropriate activities and materials for children. Through play, they work out, express and master their experiences and we need to acknowledge the challenge and value of this play. We are determined to help young children become self-regulating, compassionate and confident individuals. May the force be with us, horse and all!

Families Around the World: a Meaningful Multi-Cultural Curriculum
By Nancy Howe, Head Teacher

Families Around the World, Center P.M.’s winter and spring quarter project, created a very personal and meaningful context in which to experience the rich cultural diversity in our classroom. This five-month long journey around the world to figuratively visit the 21 countries represented by our families became a catalyst for creating our classroom community.

The project had a dramatic start with a surprise visit from the Bhutanese royal family arranged by the parents of Center P.M. student Garab Wangdi, Tashi and Dechen, who are Bhutanese, and Garab’s grandfather Mark Mancall, a Stanford history professor.

Bing teachers have long understood the importance of promoting diversity to give young children a foundation for understanding, accepting and celebrating different customs, languages and cultures. We select curriculum materials that fit this philosophy. The books in the Bing children’s library and the songs we sing reflect a variety of cultures and languages. Children also have opportunities to play an array of musical instruments, including guiros, maracas and drums. Our dramatic play area includes dolls of different ethnicities and dress-up clothes from all over the world. However, the most meaningful multicultural experiences have come not from materials, but from our extraordinarily diverse group of children, parents and teachers. We are fortunate to be a part of Stanford University, an internationally recognized institution, whose academic excellence has been a magnet for attracting students and faculty from all over the world.

Our Families Around the World project was truly a collaborative effort. Based on what we knew about our families, teachers identified 21 countries to visit. Our families included first, second and third generation parents, many of whom were part of bicultural families. We began our trip in North America, among the Inuit of Alaska and worked our way south through the plains states to Mexico, Guatemala, Chile, Columbia and Brazil. We crossed the Atlantic Ocean to Africa, visiting Nigeria and South Africa, then headed north to Europe. We traveled to England, Ireland, France, Germany and Russia and arrived in Iran on the first day of spring, just in time for Nowruz, the Iranian New Year festival! Our trip led us east to India then north to the tiny country of Bhutan, with an unexpected side trip to Spain to welcome Alice, a new girl to our classroom. We spent two weeks in China, and then went on to visit Vietnam, Korea and Japan. We crossed the Pacific Ocean and arrived back in North America, traveling through Canada and across America to finally reach California, just in time for our end-of-the-year potluck picnic!

We mapped out our itinerary and the date of arrival in each country, established a different story time teacher each week as a contact person and invited parents to join us. Organization was key so that parents could schedule time to participate.

Photo not available online.

Photo not available online.

From left: J.T. waters a hyacinth bulb that he plants for Nowruz, the Iranian New Year Festival. Johannes writes Chinese characters with ink and a special calligraphy brush.
Activities were coordinated to take place in all areas of the indoor and outdoor classroom with a teacher acting in a supportive role. Every parent embraced the project with generosity of spirit, welcoming us to share in their traditions as if we had been honored guests invited into their home. They were our greatest resource and it was an honor to work together to support them and make their visits successful and memorable.

This project energized teachers as well. The teachers met weekly to develop an innovative and developmentally appropriate curriculum that engaged children’s senses as well as their minds. We researched each country for images of flags, textiles, stamps, clothing, handicrafts, music and dance, currency, cuisine and literature. We also selected a story, folktale or fable to read all week at story time, often embedded with moral lessons about friendship.

As the project progressed, the children began to infuse their play with references to countries and cultures they had recently visited. “We’re going to China!” Hannah exclaimed as she and several friends began to pack their bags. Yaya and Jadyn dressed up for a party in pink ao dais (traditional Vietnamese dresses) donated by a family after the Vietnamese fashion show.

The project also inspired the children to think and ask questions as they recalled the activities.

“I know how to count in Dzongkha because I was born in Bhutan!” Sophie declared after a recent visit by the Prince of Bhutan. “Beh choo means cabbage in Korean,” said Peyton. “Beh choo sounds like a sneeze, doesn’t it? I wonder how you say tamales in Korean?”

“I’m thinking of an animal that makes the sound of how you say radish in Korean (moo)” said Kiran to his classmates during a game at snack time.

We had many visitors in addition to the Bhutanese royalty. Wilhelm Grotheer, Bing’s resident woodworker, shared stories about wearing wooden shoes as a boy growing up in rural Germany in the 1930s, and then invited children to his workshop where he cuts wood for our projects. Many grandmothers came to visit. James’ grandmother shared indigenous textiles and tapestries from Guatemala as well as musical instruments including a marimba. Kiran and his mother sang a Tamil lullaby that his grandmother had taught him. Allegra’s and Yaya’s grandmothers made scones. Sebastian’s grandmother made pirogis and blinis and served tea in a lovely lacquered Russian samovar and Yaya’s other grandmother carried 36 little lanterns on a plane all the way from China to give to each child.

Our end-of-the-year potluck picnic culminated our project. Everyone brought food and picnicked together, friends both old and new brought closer by a project that made the world just a little bit smaller. On the patio, festooned with flags from many countries, children, parents and teachers danced to our project play list that included the Mexican Hat Dance, Brazilian Carnaval music, African high life, the Beatles, Bollywood and the Beach Boys and wished the trip would never end!

It was only after we returned home to California that we had time to reflect on the scope of the incredible cultural immersion we had all shared. It will be interesting to see what each child takes away from this experience. What memories will quietly emerge or be unveiled later: a word, a phrase, a song that once sounded strange, a willingness to try new foods, a desire to “revisit” a favorite place through travel. We truly believe that the children’s eyes have been forever opened and that this project will be a springboard for a lifelong interest in other cultures.

Foods children made during the project:
- Native American corn bread
- Mexican pan dulce, tacos and tamales
- Guatemalan empanadas
- Chilean sweet rolls
- Nigerian jollof
- South African mieliebrood
- French crepes and madelines
- English scones
- German brzels and sausages
- Russian pirogis, blinis and Napoleones
- Persian lavash
- Indian parathas and mango lassis
- Bhutanese buttered basmati rice
- Spanish pan de horno
- Chinese glutinous rice balls and scallion pancakes
- Chinese and Vietnamese rice balls
- Korean and Japanese sushi
- Canadian butter tarts and crepes with maple syrup.
Singing, Dancing and Playing: Two-Year-Olds Make the Leap
By Kitti Pecka, Head Teacher

Two-year-olds enter the classroom uniquely poised for development. The growth that unfolds in this year is tremendous and multifaceted. They are eager to be with peers and eager to play, but interacting cooperatively is a challenge. Many children in preschool are just learning to share, especially the youngest. How does a teacher prepare for this and direct the children’s energy to interact in a way that encourages cooperation and accesses individual talents and abilities? A mix of singing, dancing and playing with an adult guide provides the model.

Children come to the Two’s room with many capacities. They are talking, walking and absorbing the sensory stimulation. They are often skilled in using art materials, puzzles, play dough and manipulatives of all sorts. But often they play in a parallel fashion, side by side, engaging with the material but not with the people. Even during interactions with a teacher, the focus is often on their own work.

It is the role of the teacher to encourage the children to be aware of others. And though these first explorations seldom involve cooperative work, a vast segment of the curriculum is cooperative. It is the time spent in singing all together, dancing as a group and play-acting that carries the spirit of cohesion and is so important in helping the classroom community to form and flourish.

Two-year-olds are social. The company of their peers motivates them. They are not yet a member of a group outside of their family, but they are interested. How are they introduced into a group of like-minded peers? The routine of the preschool classroom includes many group activities.

Singing together used to happen spontaneously in many venues, but now it is seldom a part of family or community life. However, singing together in the classroom is a central part of our curriculum. It is a pleasure to most children, and it is a treasure trove of multi-sensory input. Auditory intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, language and tactile intelligence are all boosted by this educational tool. Cognitively, children are encouraged to reflect on the content of the words. “Up the mountain under the tree sleeps the dragon baby,” sang teacher Betsy Koning at music time. Tatum and Sophie later repeated this refrain as they prepared the baby dolls for bed in their cribs. They shared the tune, the concept and the warmth of the lullaby.

Dancing together happens in an organized fashion at least once a day in the classroom. A group energy and feeling results when children and teachers move together to varied music (classical to rock and roll recordings, live performances, or sung and played ourselves). Music can actually entrain the group to have the same heart rate and breathing pattern. The emotional effect is easy to see: Joy is shared and a bond formed. Savoring the movement, the sounds and the sight of others enjoying the experience, is multisensory learning at its best! A sense of community and the benefits of empathy are compounded by these group movement experiences. Relationships are deepened and friendships are sparked by a group in sync.

Emma Jane and Perry like to dance in the dress-up clothes. They coordinate a schedule for the sharing and exchange of clothes for different activities and especially for dancing. Their dancing has anchored the group and the “dance of play” has been fostered by the relationship.

This leads to the subject of play-acting. Two’s-turning-three begin to dramatize the stories they have heard. Story plays are enacted at the end of the day once the children know the story well. The stories are varied, from the elegant simplicity of The Very Hungry Caterpillar to the extravagant Giant John. When teacher Betsy read Giant John, the children became the fairies and played the music to which John danced. As monkeys in the story Caps for Sale, the children not only take and wear the caps from the peddler, they also have “lines” and “actions” that go with the content of the story.

The value of play-acting is multifold. Children not only become a character in a story, they also become “playmates” with their peers, practicing those skills of pretending, which are essential for interactive learning. In addition they collaborate in the creation of a community event.
Stories: Not a Project, a Process

By Peckie Peters, Head Teacher

In West room, there were always piggies. Not live animals, like the classroom’s chickens and bunnies, but toy piggies that belonged to children. Ginger brought her stuffed piggy in her backpack on the first day of school when she was only three. “Piggy” was her connection between home and school, and just knowing he was there helped her feel safe at school. So it wasn’t surprising when Ginger at age 4 told a story about pigs. “So there was a little pig and big mommy pig and she had a baby named Ginger and there was two sisters and they were named Jordan and Bridget. And there was a Daddy pig also. And his name was David Thomas Quigley.”

Stories are always a part of a nursery school classroom, but this year West AM teachers decided to begin a stories project—and our first step was to commit to collecting children’s stories in all areas of the curriculum. So when Baxter asked to paint a pinecone he found on the way to school, a teacher asked him if he also had a story to tell about it. He did. “There was a boy named Baxter. He found a pinecone at Bing School front garden. He wanted to paint it. He painted it purple.” When Belle returned from a trip to New Mexico, we asked if she had a story to tell. She did. “I went to Ten Thousand Waves. I went in this huge bathtub. A round one. There was snow there. It was a bath, not a tub.” Lucas made a structure using Magna-Tiles, clear plastic shapes with magnets inside, which allow children to build a variety of formations. “Tell me about it,” a teacher asked. “It’s a space garage. It carries rockets. ’Cuz inside there are two rockets inside. I’m making a mini-rocket.”

For over a month, teachers collected children’s stories each day and often shared them at story time, which exposed the group to many types of stories. We were excited to see the variety of stories that were being generated—the children were clearly motivated to be storytellers and express what was on their minds.

As teachers, our hope was to elicit, document and share those stories to see if we could better understand what this process revealed about our group of children.

Several weeks later, teachers were also anticipating a visit by Vivian Paley [see page 6], an extraordinary teacher and writer who built her curriculum on a foundation of play and storytelling. As we read and discussed several of Paley’s works prior to her visit, we looked deeper into what stories could tell us about children. Was there a way we could better incorporate storytelling into our curriculum? When Paley arrived at Bing, she answered by modeling techniques she had used in her own classroom. She also urged us not to turn stories into performances, which takes them out of the context of play, but rather to view them as an enactment of children’s lives. Armed with a new vision, suggested techniques and a renewed confidence in our own practice, we were excited to greet the children the next day.

Our revised mission was to create a structure in which storytelling and story acting could become an integral part of the classroom. Our hope was that in adding this to our curriculum we could weave together a community of children who developed a deeper understanding of each other and a broader comfort with sharing their own stories with the group. After some experimentation, the teachers became aware that sufficient time and space assist the process of story sharing. We then created a “stage” on the carpet area, a large rectangle delineated by masking tape. The teacher who lead story time solicited stories from children throughout the period before snack time and recorded them in a binder. After enough stories had been collected, all members of the class were invited to act them out. This gave the broader group of children an opportunity to be part of the storytelling community and gave the authors a chance to view their stories from the perspective of the community. Teachers chose actors by offering a particular child in the group a particular role. If the child didn’t want it, the teacher would ask the next child until the role was filled. Friendship did not dictate who was given a particular role so children quickly learned everyone has equal value in the world of story plays.

Within this new system, we experienced an increase in children’s eagerness to tell stories. Some stories included cues for actors to follow. Aria: “It’s the story, a boy and a girl. And then they play on the grass and then they came home. And then they had dinner. And then they had milk because they were a little girl. And then they went to sleep. No, first dinner, then they went to sleep.” Others, like the brief one by Katherine, called for children to interpret the meaning a little further: “Tornado.” Children were excited to listen to others tell their stories. Often one child’s plot would feed the next child’s content, like the day when many stories included a hotdog with human characteristics.

Sometimes children expressed an interest in duplicating a friend’s story. “I want to tell a story like Grace’s with the kitties.” Other times we’d see a similarity in location (e.g., under the sea), or characters (e.g., princesses, bad guys, Star Wars). The children had ongoing exposure to the storytelling process and a model for how that works. As the teachers acted as scribes and narrators, they helped the children understand the pace and process of how language is spoken, then written, then acted out. Acting out stories gave children a new venue for using their imaginations.

Still, the teachers were not satisfied. We wanted our process to somehow

Photo not available online.

Grace shares a story about the magical kingdom that she painted at the easel.
incorporate the entire class. We hoped that storytelling could lead to the strong sense of community that Vivian Paley had experienced with her class of 15 kindergartners for our group of 36 3- and 4-year olds. Making this a whole-group experience proved challenging. Waiting as the teacher went around the big circle asking for volunteers to act out specific parts helped develop patience and turn-taking skills, and gave everyone a chance to experience each other’s ideas, but at times it felt chaotic. Was this how the shared storytelling was supposed to happen?

Our answer came as it often does by careful observation. Stepping back from the project, it became clear that “stories” wasn’t a project at all, but rather a way of being together. Belle and Nathaniel helped to clarify this idea when they were acting as kitties in a play. They smiled and giggled as they carefully played their roles of kittens going to kitty school. It was clear that they had a shared understanding, expressed without words through the process of play, of how kitties were supposed to be. After the play was over the two decided to go outside together.

Zachary and Dashiell made a connection through monsters, a theme they shared in their storytelling. Both preferred to be the loud monsters wreaking havoc and both learned to perform their roles without being too loud for the audience. Many long-term social connections, such as these, rose out of the storytelling process, which demonstrated community building.

“Stories” is no longer a project, but a process which has become an integral part of our class. Providing the environment where children can continue to tell their stories has allowed us to understand each member of our community. William F., whose preference was to be a member of the audience expressed his enjoyment of the stories and connection to his peers with his rapt attention and broad smile. Brock, who eagerly assumed most roles but preferred not to move on stage, was another part of that kinship. Andrew, Braden, Jacob and Lucas took turns telling us stories about the Star Wars saga, providing new material for light-saber carrying characters who frequent the patio area. And Ginger provided the stability and the knowledge that some things will always be there.

“It’s about the same old piggy in my stories before, Ginger Lisa Quigley. There’s a daddy piggy named David Thomas Quigley. There was a mama piggy named Jeannie Karen Waltoch. There’s a sister piggy named Jordan Claire Quigley. There’s another sister piggy named Bridget Kendall Quigley. The End.”

Parents are always welcome to schedule time to visit Bing, but in the spring quarter of 2009 the teachers in West, Center and East afternoon classrooms offered a specific invitation to parents and extended family. The goal was to remind families of their importance in the Bing community, and to offer a classroom activity in which they could participate. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

The week of May 4th was Dads, Grandfathers & Uncles Week, and the week of May 26th was Moms, Grandmothers & Aunts Week. Families were encouraged to share their interests or to come in and simply spend time with the children. The activities were numerous and diverse: Some parents spent an afternoon coaching organized sports like soccer, golf, basketball and even broom hockey; another parent led yoga and breathing exercises during music and movement time; musical family members performed with the children playing along on instruments; several fathers designed a scavenger hunt, engaging the children for hours; other family members led paper airplane folding and flying, cake baking, microscope viewing and tent building. One father even led a Mother’s Day card-making activity.

One child’s grandfather brought in his toolbox. He removed the wheels from the wooden carts and enlisted the children’s help in oiling and reattaching them. Later that week the child said to a teacher, “My grandfather said those carts are really well made. It was really hard to get the wheels off, but we did it.” Clearly this experience made a lasting impression on this child.

Not all family members were able to take the whole afternoon off from work. Some came for 30 minutes during snack time and read books aloud. Others lingered longer than usual when bringing their children to school or when picking them up. No matter how much time they spent or how much planning was involved, these were special times for families. The children’s wide grins illustrated their excitement in sharing their grown-ups with their classmates, and the adults wore smiles that were just as wide, if not even wider.

Calling All Families!
By Lars Gustafson, Teacher

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Stanford Philharmonia Orchestra director and Bing alumni parent Jindong Cai collaborated with Bing School to create another fantastic free musical event for children at Dinkelspiel Auditorium this April. The Philharmonia Orchestra’s performance of Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* was the third such event Cai organized since beginning the child-oriented chamber orchestra programs in 2007. Previous events include Stravinsky’s *Firebird*, performed in 2008 by the 90-piece Stanford Symphony orchestra and accompanied by 8-foot-high silk puppets; and in 2007 a performance of dance and music by a visiting Thai ensemble.

This year’s *Peter and the Wolf* event offered not only music but an accompanying puppet show by The Fratello Marionettes, made possible by a generous contribution from the Stanford Institute for Creativity and the Arts. Bing parent and humorist Firoozeh Dumas narrated, tying the performance together with her engaging storytelling ability.

**Former music specialist Beth Wise introduces the story and music of Peter and the Wolf to children.**

Children at Bing prepared for the performance by reading the book, listening to the music, acting out and dancing the various parts of the story. As the former music specialist, I created a poster that outlined all the instruments in the story and the characters they represented. Children were invited into the multipurpose room to experience and discuss the many elements of the story. Some groups of children drew pictures with pencils and paper as they listened to the music while others simply looked at the poster and the book. Listening to the recording reinforced the musical concepts. Cai noted that on the day of the symphony, when he asked the children which instrument represented each character, they were able to respond in unison with the name of the instrument playing each one.

Familiarizing the children with the story also brought up some questions, which were answered in an age-appropriate manner. Many were concerned about the duck being swallowed and wanted to talk about the fact that it was swallowed “whole,” thus making it possible for it to be retrieved again at the end of the story. Similarly, a very perceptive 4-year-old looked closely at the picture of the wolf and wanted to know why his tongue was hanging out. Upon reflection, children agreed that he could be “hungry,” “thirsty,” “tired” or “hot.” They compared that to how a dog might feel if placed in the same situation. As the story became more understandable, children thought about alternative outcomes for the wolf. Most agreed that he should go to the zoo.


Back at Bing a few days following the symphony performance, one child said, “What I saw was a bird, a cat, a wolf, and cellos, bass, horns and other instruments. The conductor was there. The conductor waves a stick and it tells the instruments to play high or low and they always listen to him.” The smaller music rooms adjoining nursery classrooms in the school were set up for children to enter and listen to the music, read the book and sketch their ideas. Later at Bing, I provided a set of marionettes for children to create their own plays and puppet shows. A 5-year-old child was especially drawn into the world of puppetry and created his own paper puppets to use in addition to the set of wooden ones. He summarized the experience with an astute recollection of his musical experiences at Bing: “Did you do a show in 2001? The *Firebird* was good but I am kind of forgetting the puppets. Were they bigger than a tree? Bigger than a statue? Bigger than 10 persons standing on each other? *Peter and the Wolf* used marionettes. Marionettes sounds like clarinets. Were they the same height as the house? Was the *Firebird* your first concert? *Firebird* first, *Peter and the Wolf* second and what will your next concert be? I would like to see a concert called *John and the Monsters*. We could have big, huge puppets. Puppets as big as a tree. We could use clarinets, bassoons, guitars, oboes and drums. *Peter and the Wolf* used violin, kettledrums, bassoons, oboes and flutes.”

Thanks to all the parents who have taken the time to bring their instruments to school, perform with their bands or trios in the classrooms (Michael Flexer, Caitlyn’s father, and the St. Michaels Trio) and at the Bing Fair (Saul Sierra, Sara’s father, with El Tren and friends), and even bring an entire improvisational music class to the atrium (Mark Applebaum, Charlotte’s father, and the Stanford Improvisation Collective). Parents also helped with music and story time at school and participated in the making of the Bing music CD.

**Left: Jindong Cai, Bing alumni parent and conductor of the Stanford Symphony Orchestra; right: Firoozeh Dumas, Bing parent and humorist, narrates the story of *Peter and the Wolf*.**

**Bing Nursery School and Stanford Institute for Creativity and Arts host the free family performance of *Peter and the Wolf* at the Dinkelspiel Auditorium on the Stanford campus.**
Rediscovering Creativity by Building It
By Svetlana Stanislavskaya, Enrollment Administrator

Creativity is present in every school—both in the innovations and enthusiasm of the children and in the adventures encouraged and shared by teachers and parents.

Can this creative spirit be harnessed? Can one learn and teach confidence in one’s own creativity? Can this energy be directed towards focused problem-solving? “Absolutely!” say the staff of the Hasso Plattner Stanford Institute of Design (also known as the Stanford d.school).

On April 27, the Bing teachers enjoyed a staff development day of complete immersion in the institute’s inspirational “design thinking” philosophy. This day came about when Joon Yun, a Bing parent who is friendly with members of the d.school faculty, described design thinking to the staff with infectious enthusiasm and offered to organize an event to showcase it. Yun invited designers and educators to share and interpret their work and guide the staff through hands-on exercises. The presenters/facilitators included Bing parents George Kembel, executive director of the d.school; Chris Cowart, guest lecturer at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and a director at IDEO; and Diego Rodriguez, associate consulting professor of the d.school and a partner at IDEO. Kim Saxe, lecturer at the d.school and director of the Innovation Lab at The Nueva School, a school for pre-K to eighth grade in Hillsborough, Calif., rounded out the panel.

The event was held at the d.school, an adventure space in the heart of the Stanford campus. The staff found themselves in an environment very much like a Bing classroom for adults, where hands-on learning is led by discovery and ideas are developed and prototyped. They were asked to attach sticky post-its to themselves that described how they felt that morning. The labels ranged from “nervous” to “inspired” to “feeling connected” to “ready to play.”

The first activity of the day was to find a partner and design a most ordinary object, a wallet, for a colleague. The participants interviewed each other, examined wallets, observed their partners and discussed their understanding of how the wallet was used. They asked questions and reflected on what they saw. The understanding and observation phases of design thinking are meant to develop a sense of empathy.

In the next phase, the staff was asked to focus on becoming aware of their partner’s needs, develop insights and suggest changes that will improve the other person’s experience. A critical component of design thinking is ideation, and it was at this time that all sorts of possibilities came into view, for example, a wallet that was embedded in a hat, a wallet belonging to a mother covered with bubble wrap (to distract a young child from getting into it) and a zip-on wallet for a person who never carried a wallet. Following the ideation stage, the staff created prototypes. The d.school faculty explained that prototyping, feedback and iteration, done early and often, are central to design thinking. Colleagues are more willing to give feedback on a rough prototype than after the project is more developed.

After a delicious lunch, the next challenge was presented to the participants—they were to generate solutions to the problem of teen obesity after viewing a video made at a local educational farm.

The Bing staff was divided into groups, equipped with colored markers at stand-up portable whiteboards. The process for devising the project was similar to the process for designing an object. The five-step approach involved empathy and observation, anything-is-possible brainstorming, visualizing solutions by creating actual prototypes, testing prototypes and iterating, and repeating the process as necessary. Teams brainstormed, had lively discussions and laughed a lot. They created costumes out of found materials and each group settled on one scenario to present their solution.

In the debriefing session afterward, teacher Matt Linden had a revelation—the steps in design thinking are similar to those teachers follow in conflict resolution: empathize (create a safe environment and acknowledge each child’s feelings), observe (watch body language, listen without interrupting, gain insight), interpret (consider different vantage points and articulate the problem), ideate (let children come up with the solution, and resume discussion if the solution is not working), prototype (support children in choosing and implementing their plan) and test (let the play resume, reflect on attempts to find an acceptable alternative and reiterate, “Next time you can say/do/make...”). The steps aren’t necessarily linear. They can occur simultaneously or they can be repeated. And just like social problem solving, the design thinking approach requires practice.

The day concluded with a graduation ceremony and presentation to each member of the Bing staff with a d.school pin celebrating the innovation that results from interdisciplinary collaborations. The staff chose from among five designs, all based on the d.school’s logo.

Yun gave the staff a follow-up gift of a heart-warming slideshow documenting their day of play and discovery the next day. The staff is grateful to Yun and all the d.school team for the experience of a design approach, not purely an intellectual exercise, but as a way to think about problem solving.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff gather to view each other's designs of a wallet for a colleague.
At the first staff development day of the new school year, the Bing staff enjoyed a busy program full of presentations and discussions, sharing new information and reflecting on the school year thus far.

The event, on Oct. 13, 2008, opened with four researchers from the Stanford psychology and linguistics departments who gave an overview of the studies they have completed or are currently researching at Bing Nursery School. Psychology graduate student Lucas Butler spoke about two studies—last year’s, on adult input and children’s reasoning, and his current study (which is a modification of the aforementioned study), investigating how children might learn information when it is framed as intentional and accidental. Linguistics graduate student Nola Stephens discussed her study on the effects of conversation on child and adult verb use and linguistics postdoctoral scholar Patricia Amaral, Ph.D., summarized her study on the acquisition of adverbs of approximation. Psychology graduate student Wei Quin Yow spoke about two of her recently completed studies regarding monolingual and bilingual children and how they use cues to interpret a speaker’s intent [see page 7 for more information].

The next segment of the day was a talk by Bing parent Thomas Freeland, Ph.D., a lecturer for Stanford’s Center for Teaching and Learning. Freeland’s talk focused on effective presenting—a particularly useful topic for Bing teachers, who present at events varying from story time in the classroom to national conferences. Freeland emphasized the importance of preparation and then gave detailed advice on a variety of related topics, such as how to organize material, how to deliver a presentation and how to use visual aids. His talk led to a group discussion about story time at Bing and how teachers can employ Freeland’s suggestions in the classrooms. Bing teachers shared tips and ideas with each other regarding the use of props and other strategies for leading fun and innovative story times.

After Freeland’s talk, the staff shared a lovely lunch and then reconvened to hear about the many diverse conferences that Bing teachers attended over the past several months. Head Teacher Kitt Pecka spoke about an autism conference that centered on how to welcome children with autism into the classroom and how to recognize (or emphasize) their capabilities.

Teacher Jenna Aserai had attended a workshop on a process called “descriptive review,” and she led us in a group activity to help us understand what descriptive review is and how we can use it in our interactions regarding children’s work. It is important, she said, that we notice and describe a child’s work (such as paintings, drawings and block buildings) “as it is,” in simple terms. Teachers should ask thoughtful questions and be diligent about collecting work that helps them to discover and support the strengths of a given child.

Teachers Mary Munday, Andrea Hart and Nancy Verduzarella traveled to the Boulder Journey School in Denver, Colo., to see the Wonder of Learning exhibit—a new installment of the 100 Languages of Children exhibit from Reggio Emilia in Italy. It incorporated a lot of digital media and contained huge amounts of information. According to the Bing teachers, one of the highlights of the exhibit was the chance to read actual notes taken by other teachers in their classrooms. These notes contained children’s dialogue, teachers’ and children’s questions and ideas on how to expand and support the ideas of the children.

Enrollment administrator Svetlana Stanislavskaya and head teachers Karen Robinette, Chia-wa Yeh, and Parul Chandra attended a conference on the education of young children in Pistoia, Italy, at the Eric Carle Museum in Amherst, Mass. They shared that the teaching philosophy and methods in Pistoia are similar to those of the renowned Reggio Emilia schools. The Bing teachers reported feeling impressed by the amount of support that is given to the Italian teachers by the city and community, and inspired by the active role that those teachers take in advocating for the educational rights of their students.

The culminating activity of the day was a song swap in the beautiful atrium. Each teacher brought a favorite song or two to share with the rest of the group and had fun teaching those songs to each other, often including hand motions or body movements that corresponded to the songs.

The staff development day was one full of sharing and learning, and it provided much-appreciated opportunities to discuss ideas with one another in a full-group setting.

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### 2008-2009 Annual Fund Report

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. 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, Lisa and Glenn Solomon and Kim Bazar and Joon Yun and their committee members for their efforts and support. In 2008-2009, the participation of our current Bing families reached 62 percent. In 2009-2010, we are striving for 100 percent participation! Starting this academic year, you have the option of making your gift online (at http://bingschool.stanford.edu/giving).

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.
NAEYC Conference 2008
By Lisa Wesley, Teacher

“T

There’s enormous power in reading aloud to kids,” said University of Delaware professor and author, John Pilalkulski, Ph.D., while lecturing on promoting preschool language and literacy at this year’s conference for the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Thousands of early childhood professionals, including Bing teachers Charlene Larson, Colin Johnson, Lars Gustafson and myself, gathered in Dallas, Texas, this past November for the world’s largest early-childhood conference.

During the four-day conference, attendees were able to attend workshops given by a diverse group of early-childhood leaders on topics ranging from curriculum to leadership to public policy.

Pilalkulski, who was lecturing with Sue Bredekamp, Ph.D., early childhood consultant, and Lesley Morrow, Ph.D., Rutgers University professor of literacy, emphasized that promoting language and literacy must be intentional. He stated that building vocabulary is important and that the texts read to children should be appropriately challenging. Some books, he claimed, should be read several times to help build vocabulary and comprehension. Also, Pilalkulski recommended that non-fiction texts offering explanations and information should also be used, adding that they often appeal to children, especially boys.

Bredekamp, one of the editors of the NAEYC publication, Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, spoke about the volume of learning that is accomplished in the early years of childhood, emphasizing vocabulary and social-emotional accomplishments. She stated, “Children who have larger emotional vocabularies are better at regulating their emotions.” She encouraged participants to help children develop sustained shared thinking—talking about what’s going on in your mind—by using questions or statements such as “Tell me how you came up with that.” She also counseled participants to avoid conversation closers, such as using pat phrases like, “That’s very interesting,” and to instead use more conversation stretchers that focus on details, share experiences and give plenty of time for responses, e.g., “What do you think will happen when the eggs hatch?”

Morrow stated that a quality preschool can serve to enhance a child’s vocabulary. He felt that it is crucial to have excellent teachers who are able to blend child-guided and adult-guided learning experiences.

Another workshop, given by Terri Emberling, MA, LPC, focused on superhero play in preschools. Emberling is the director of Relationship Roots, a program that started out as a therapeutic preschool and now offers training and workshops to early-childhood education professionals. She began with a discussion of how people address superhero play in their...

AERA Conference
By Beverley Hartman, Head Teacher

A mong the many perspectives offered at this year’s major conference for education researchers were some of special interest to early childhood educators. The American Educational Research Association’s 2009 annual conference, held in San Diego in April, attracted over 14,000 professionals with its rich offering of engaging, thought-provoking sessions.

The organization, with more than 25,000 members, strives to advance educational research and its practical application.

The association’s early childhood special interest group offered workshops with topics including studies about play, the arts, self-efficacy, assessment and evaluation, literacy and the achievement gap in education. These meetings introduced research that revealed new information and confirmed longer-term understandings.

One session featured Joseph Tobin, Ph.D., professor of early childhood education at Arizona State University and author of two books that compare preschools. Published in 1989, Preschool in Three Cultures: Japan, China and the United States details teacher responses to videos showing a typical day in a classroom in these locations. The reactions highlight the cultural boundaries that guide practices with young children.

Tobin’s new book, Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited: China, Japan and the United States, is a multi-cultural ethnography. To be published this year, the book brings attention to both the changes as well as the consistencies in programs 20 years later. Tobin says that continuity takes as much effort and creativity as change. He points out that prevailing ideas about values and systems shift over time like a swinging pendulum. Noticing how some things change and some remain the same promotes understanding of cultural context and how culture endures.

Professional development is essential in continuing to learn and develop as a teacher. Experiences such as the AERA conference provide information, increase awareness and broaden perspective. Opportunities such as attending the AERA conference place Bing Nursery School teachers in strong positions to bring together research and practice.
programs. This type of play, in which children pretend to be characters such as Spiderman, Batman or ninjas, has become a hot topic among educators because it often involves boisterous play and other activities that can frighten or physically overwhelm some children. Emberling continued by talking about common adult concerns about this type of play, including the possibility that children may hurt themselves or others, that it may lead to aggression later in life, or that it may cause them to ignore other learning opportunities in the classroom. Some programs try to resolve their concerns by banning the play, but she points out that when teachers ban superhero play, children do it secretly.

The advantages of superhero play, Emberling states, are that children are able to work through issues of power, fairness, fear and anxiety, life and death, and work on problem solving. She stated that because children are exposed to scary information and images, they may need opportunities to process this information. “Children need to play to understand the difference between fantasy and reality.” She also states that research has found that healthy rough-and-tumble play leads to greater skill and experience in handling adversity without aggression as teens and adults. She understands that there are also risks to this play and encourages programs to create a policy that works for them. Emberling offered some guidelines to help with this task. She suggested using transitional play, something more straightforward such as pretending to be firefighters, to set up rules that can then be transferred to superhero play. She also suggested negotiating and setting clear, respectful limits that keep in mind physical and emotional safety as well as location and materials. Last, she emphasized understanding the superhero story line and adapting it so children can identify with the characters, having one or more characters be good, and having a problem to overcome. Through this play, she says, children learn how to get along in the real world.

Among the other events at the conference, there were performances by various children’s performers, including one given by Ella Jenkins, an 84-year-old children’s musician. She engaged the crowd in several songs, and sang many of her familiar classics.

Nancy Hertzog, Ph.D., Lilian Katz, Ph.D., professor emeritus, and Marcia Burns, all of University Primary School at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, gave the workshop, “Enhancing Social Competencies in Early Childhood Classrooms.” Their school uses the project approach, which they describe as an in-depth investigation of worthwhile topics. In other words, teachers choose a topic that the children have been interested in, such as insects, and help children to learn more about the topic by allowing them to investigate it and by incorporating this investigation into all areas of the curriculum. At their program they divide children into small sub-groups, which take on a small topic and report to others. They point out that their process necessitates social interactions by requiring children to question, discuss, collaborate and report to one another while investigating their topics.

Rebecca Wilson of Black Hawk College gave a workshop on supporting second language learners in the classroom. She stated that research demonstrates that the longer children’s primary language is supported, the better they do. Support may range from allowing children to use their home language to teachers learning a few words in a child’s home language. She discussed typical language development of second language learners, information she adapted from the book, One Child, Two Languages by P. Tabors. Wilson also suggested teaching strategies like repeating language, narrating children’s play, expanding on their words and using visual cues. She believes it is important to include relevant items from a child’s culture in the classroom, such as play food, dolls and books.

The importance of thoughtful planning when working with young children was a recurring theme at the conference. This is evidently what people had in mind when traveling from all parts of the country to share knowledge and hear new ideas about early childhood. This conference offered an excellent opportunity for educators to share new information and connect with colleagues and resources, with the goal of better serving young children and their families.

2009 CAEYC Annual Conference & Expo: Children’s Need and Right to Play

By Nancy Verdtzabella, Teacher

California’s major annual conference for early childhood educators offered a comprehensive look at play this year. The California Association for the Education of Young Children annual meeting, held in Sacramento March 26-28, featured presentations on the importance of play, its foundations in research and theory, its manifestations in a variety of early childhood settings and its implications for children with a wide range of developmental and learning needs.

The keynote speaker was Becky A. Bailey, Ph.D., an award-winning author, renowned teacher and internationally recognized expert in education and developmental psychology. Drawing on the research-based practice she refers to as conscious discipline, Bailey links enhanced brain development to play. Her presentation, “The Hidden Powers of Play,” cited a significant link between physical development of the brain and play that is facilitated through teaching practices characterized by caring, contribution and creativity. She placed emphasis on the role of play in establishing and enhancing a culture that supports children’s ability to control impulses and empathize with others.

Responding to recent perspectives that consider play a luxury for young children, Bing Nursery School representatives, director Jennifer Winters and head teacher Sarah Wright, presented “Sociodramatic Play: Not a Luxury, a Necessity.” In their
Learning & the Brain Conference
By Minjae Bae, Teacher

Discoveries about how brain development affects learning have much to offer teachers. This February, head teacher Kitti Pecka and I were among the many educators, researchers and clinicians attending a conference on this subject in San Francisco. Public Information Resources Inc. organized this Learning & the Brain conference, which focused on applying brain research to the classroom. The conference offered a plethora of sessions, many featuring respected speakers from the field of brain research.

John Medina, Ph.D., the director of the Brain Center for Applied Learning Research at Seattle Pacific University and an affiliate professor of Bioengineering at the University of Washington School of Medicine, spoke about how exercise, memory, sleep and stress influence learning. He said that although some stress is good for learning, the more out of control a person feels, the more likely stress will impede learning. Chronic stress will eventually damage the hippocampus (the area of the brain essential for learning and memory), crippling the ability to learn and recall information.

Medina also described the negative impact artificial sweeteners can have on brain function. These cannot be processed by most young children and can cause severe hyperactivity in others.

On the other hand, one positive factor for brain function is movement. Medina has conducted research that indicates that just 30 minutes of aerobic exercise two or three times a week increases executive function (a set of cognitive abilities that manage and regulate such tasks as priority-setting, organization, decision-making and time management) anywhere from 50 percent to 120 percent within four months.

Another presenter was Christine Carter, Ph.D., a sociologist and the executive director of the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, who spoke about how parents can raise socially and emotionally intelligent children. Emotional literacy is the ability to be able to read, understand and respond appropriately to personal emotions as well as to the emotions of others. Her research showed that children who are better at regulating their emotions are better at soothing themselves when upset, thereby shortening their experience of negative emotions such as anger and fear. They have fewer infectious illnesses and can better focus their attention on tasks. Emotional literacy fosters resiliency, and these children are better able to relate to people and form stronger friendships. She says, “It is one of the best predictors of school performance and career success, better even than IQ.”

We learned valuable information at the conference. We returned to the classroom grateful to have had the opportunity to expand our knowledge in ways to help families and young children ways that can help families and young children.
On the evening of January 22, 2009, Bing Nursery School’s parents and staff gathered in West Room for Kindergarten Information Night. At about 7 p.m., the event’s panelists took their seats in the front of an audience of more than 70. There, Bing head teachers Peckie Peters, Karen Robinette, teacher Nandini Bhattacharjya, assistant director Beth Wise and director Jennifer Winters were joined by event veterans Rick Lloyd, MD, a Palo Alto pediatrician, and Susan Charles, recently retired principal of Ohlone Elementary School. The panel also included two kindergarten teachers from Nixon Elementary School: Stephanie Han and Jody Turner Harrier. All in the room were gathered for the purpose of discussing Bing students’ transition to the next stage in their education: kindergarten.

Lloyd began the evening with a definition of “the typical 5-year-old.” Understanding the unease that a generalization like this might incite in parents, Lloyd calmed the audience by acknowledging that age distinction as it relates to development is indeed a crude science. Lloyd was joined by all the panelists of the evening in his sentiment that “kindergarten ready” is a term that can describe a wide variety of children, from different developmental levels and backgrounds.

The common transformation of the 4-year-old to the 5-year-old child, as described by Lloyd, is one of self-realization and discovery. The 5-year-old, he explained, demonstrates an “increased enthusiasm for learning” fueled by a heightened sense of self and self worth. Lloyd said that the 5-year-old will portray an attitude of wanting to please, “to be good” and might be more amenable to rules and structure. However, that desire to please, he noted, might lead a child to be less than truthful at times. Limits are important at this age, when children often seek independence and strive to have some control over their surroundings. These concerns aside, Lloyd emphasized how the child’s increased self-awareness and focus will allow him or her to transform into a more curious student and active learner.

Lloyd went on to discuss some typical concerns that arise among parents of 5-year-olds. He noted that outlets for anxiety like nail-biting and thumb-sucking should not worry parents. He advised that while children should no longer need diapers at night when they are ready for kindergarten, accidents may still happen. He also explained that it is normal for children to begin having more vivid nightmares as their imagination develops. He clarified that as children gain a greater understanding of the world around them, their imagination is enriched with an enhanced capacity for creating detailed worlds of their own.

Lloyd ended his speech with a depiction of the 5-year-old as being privileged to a magical sense of the world, and urged parents and teachers to capitalize on that sense of wonder and enjoy their creativity and imagination.

When Lloyd took his seat again, the audience was invited to question the nine-person panel.

How can I best prepare my child for the first day at a new school?
Kindergarten teacher Harrier answered with a description of how students are introduced to the classroom at Nixon Elementary School. She explained that the first day of school is not the first time that the children can see and explore the classroom. She invites her students to come together three times for teas or popsicle socials before that first day in September, which gives them the opportunity to get acquainted with the new environment, which will feel very much like nursery school. Separation might be a bigger problem for parents than children, she added.

How do kindergarten teachers assess readiness?

Harrier recommended considering readiness on a child-by-child basis. The eight other panelists all nodded in agreement on this point. Harrier said that the first step in determining a child’s readiness is for parents to talk to their nursery school teachers. She observed that the Bing teachers see children function within a school environment on a daily basis and are great resources for anecdotes and advice. Harrier was joined by her colleague at Nixon, Han, who vouched for the importance of maintaining open communication between parents and teachers throughout the year to track the child’s development. Both teachers agreed that even in kindergarten the range of readiness is wide and kindergarten teachers are prepared to provide differentiated instruction.

The panel also addressed particular concerns about what to do about active boys who are close to the cut-off date for kindergarten when a parent reported having noticed a trend to hold them back. Harrier agreed that boys tend to be developmentally younger than girls of the same age and that this could be a challenge for them in the beginning. Susan Charles, Ohlone Elementary School’s principal, noted that good teachers recognize the need for all children to be active and know how to engage boys in school. For example, some allow “run breaks” or as Harrier and Han both suggested, “dancing time” at the beginning of each day.

How can I tell if my child is enjoying school?
Charles urged parents to think about how they frame the questions they ask their children about school and to be careful not to lead children in their answers. If there is real doubt, she advised seeking information from adults, such as their teacher. She described the Palo Alto School District as having an open-door policy where parents’ questions are invited and encouraged.

Nandini Bhattacharjya, a teacher in West AM and a Bing alumni parent herself, shared a technique that she used with her daughter when she wanted to get a better sense of what her kindergarten
class was like. She would engage her daughter in dramatic play activities; she would say, “You be the teacher, I’ll be the student,” and her daughter would recreate her experiences for Bhattacharjya to see.

What sort of after-school programs or activities do you recommend for kindergarteners?

Han asserted that parents should not try to over-schedule their children with activities outside of school. She recommended helping them focus their interests to one or two activities. Harrier and Lloyd joined her in encouraging parents to allow children to focus on school, especially at the beginning. Lloyd noted that over-scheduling children so young can induce stress.

Recognizing that some families require after-school childcare, Peters, head teacher in West AM, advised these families to choose play-based programs to allow children to have choices in their activities. Charles urged parents to relieve the pressure on their children to achieve so young in their student careers. She said, “They grow up fast enough, don’t push.” Robinette, head teacher in East AM, built on this thought by explaining that children live in the moment, and parents and teachers need to let them be 4 and 5. She insisted that what they do now at Bing is an important developmental time in and of itself and should not be confused with “preparation for kindergarten.”

How can I alleviate my child’s stress due to comparisons with other children?

Harrier advised parents to do what she does as a teacher: point to the positives. Notice that each child excels at different things in different ways and at varying stages of the year based on their development. Point these things out and celebrate them, she urged. Charles explained that comparison stress is taught or projected by adults and rarely comes from the children on their own.

What are the particular challenges in kindergarten for children coming from a play-based program?

Robinette explained that kindergarten classrooms are generally more structured, and while this transition takes time for children to make, it is a logical step in their education. She described how Bing exposes children to the appropriate tools and materials so that they are prepared to use them as they enter a new classroom. Even more important, she emphasized, Bing instills the foundational social skills needed to excel in kindergarten. Assistant director Beth Wise, who was Friday Two’s head teacher and former music specialist, shared her prior experiences as a kindergarten teacher and described how Bing children often displayed the ability to engage in social problem solving that benefitted all of the other children in her classroom.

The evening came to a close with Harrier describing the role of early-childhood education as teaching children to love school. If children take away one major lesson from these early years, she insisted, this is the most important.

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### Controlling Childhood Ailments

By Nila Bala, Assistant Teacher

This spring, the Bing staff learned about early detection and control of some common childhood health issues. Alumni parent, Joann Blessing-Moore, MD, and current parent, Tandy Aye, MD, visited Bing on classroom set-up day and discussed obesity, germs and allergies. While these conditions affect children of all ages, Blessing-Moore stressed that preschool teachers and parents are exceptionally positioned to catch them early and control them.

“We’ve begun to call it an ‘allergic marathon’ to describe how allergies develop. At 6 months we might see folds [of skin] with dryness, which transforms into a stuffy nose at 3 years and wheezing by 6 years,” explained Blessing-Moore. She also discussed how allergies can cause long-term health issues if not treated.

“Allergies and asthma can disrupt the REM cycle (rapid eye movement, found to be essential for normal sleep), affect the child’s bite (alignment of teeth), and cause permanent scarring of airways because of inflammation,” continued Blessing-Moore.

Blessing-Moore recommended controlling asthma and allergies so they don’t become chronic. She also reviewed emergency administration of antihistamines and EpiPen with the staff.

The staff also learned more about community-associated MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus), a type of staph infection. Aye explained that MRSA is spread by the “five Cs”: Crowding, Contact, Compromised skin, Contaminated personal items and Uncleanliness—essentially skin-to-skin contact.

Although MRSA can be serious, Aye explained that it can be controlled. “MRSA presents a low risk of serious infection in healthy kids. Also, it’s not a ‘strong’ bacterium, which means compared to other bacteria it’s easy to clean off. Just wash your hands with regular soap and water. Keep open wounds clean and covered,” she said.

Aye also discussed another concern for early childhood educators and families: obesity.

“A child’s weight at age 5 is a predictor for the weight at age 9 and for life. A single measure of weight at 5 years can point towards obstructive sleep apnea, asthma, joint problems, and type 2 diabetes in the future,” reported Aye. So what can we do to help? Aye mentioned a few different causes for obesity in young children, including an excess intake of juice and all sugar-sweetened beverages and “the big reason” being not enough physical activity for young children.

“Cultural values may be favoring educational achievement,” said Aye. “You know that free, creative play is being lost and that alternative activities are increasingly sedentary. You are wise at Bing!” She expressed her hope that teachers would continue to encourage young children and their families to be active and make healthy choices.
Visitors from Abroad

Clockwise, from below: Ten administrators and teachers of the Poppins Preschool in Japan visited Bing Nursery School last November. A delegation of 15 administrators and teachers from various preschools in Taiwan visited Bing on a study tour in March. A professor of the Northwest Normal University in China, administrators and art teachers of the Victoria Educational Organization in Hong Kong and China visited Bing last November.

Bing Children’s Fair and Alumni Breakfast

Our Spring Community Event

A Starry Safari was the theme for the 20th annual Harvest Moon Auction to benefit the Bing Nursery School Scholarship Fund. The auction, held Oct. 18, 2008, raised over $250,000 that will provide financial aid for 20 percent of our students. The scholarship program is as integral to the mission of Bing today as it was when our school was founded over 43 years ago. Helen and Peter Bing continue to lead support for the scholarship program with a very generous gift of $50,000.

The event took place on Stanford’s campus at the Arrillaga Alumni Center’s McCaw Hall. It was transformed into a virtual African Safari where guests were on the lookout for big game animals as well as great items to bid on in the auction. The food was fantastic and the supplier, Jimmy V’s Sports Café, made sure there was an ample supply! The rare and tasty African liqueur Amarula helped to get the crowd in a festive mood. As the night went on, Stanford’s own Kumba dance group and the Talisman a cappella group entertained guests with their amazing singing and dancing.

As in past years, this very successful event was made possible only through the dedication and countless hours devoted by our parent volunteers. Our Bing parents were responsible for every aspect of the event from the planning, execution and final clean up. They solicited donations, picked them up, entered them into the database and organized the auction inventory; they also put up bulletin boards, coordinated the entertainment, put together gift baskets, set up display items, decorated the venue, checked guests in and out, and took care of the very important job of clean-up.

Exciting items that were bid on during the live auction, which raised $30,000, included a private tour of the exhibition “Timbuktu to Cape Town,” at the Cantor Center art museum, a safari led by teachers Emma O’Hanlon and Jen Aguilar to the San Francisco Zoo, a horizontal magnum of L’Angevin wine, premium tickets to a 49ers game, a Las Vegas luxury weekend, an off-road adventure in a Land Rover, a precious handmade playhouse by Bing carpenter Wilhelm Grotheer and teacher Betsy Koning, and the ever-popular “Fund a Scholarship”—in other words, straight cash donations.

The wide array of exciting events and parties that were available for bids proved to be another extremely popular attraction. These special events were all planned, arranged and donated by Bing families. Some of the events included a hike in Woodside followed by a delicious lunch in a private home, an afternoon tea, an Iranian dinner, a pizza and puppet party, a movie night, an Academy Awards party, a family hike and picnic, bunco night, a princess tea, a wine tasting dinner, a wine tasting party, the annual Texas hold’em poker championship, a family fun BBQ, a California French cooking class, a Spanish paella dinner, a football throw with Steve Young, a speech and language development talk, a children’s cooking class with former pro golfer Cindy Axe, a ladies game night, a Halloween jump house party and a gourmet chocolate tasting party. These wonderful events not only raised money for our scholarship program, they also brought together members of our Bing community.

There were over 500 silent auction items, including adventures and getaways to destinations both near and far, from Lake Tahoe all the way to South Africa. For car buffs, there were test drives of a Maserati and a Tesla roadster. Children’s activities and parties included an evening with teacher Jenna Ascarie, a puppet show with teacher Stephanie Holdermann, ballet lessons, soccer sessions, frozen yogurt with teacher Katie Smartt, a ride on the historic Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad, music classes with teacher Kitti Pecka, cooking class with teacher Jen Aguilar and lessons in Russian speaking and singing.

The culinary delights included dinners at Quattro, Armadillo Willy’s, Palo Alto Creamery, Chez Panisse, The Fish Market, Stanford Faculty Club, Sundance Steakhouse, 231 Ellsworth, In-N-Out Burger, Amici’s, and Frankie Johnnie & Luigi Too pizza. In addition, there were opportunities to win lots of homemade dinners and desserts from toffee, pies, cakes and cookies, and even intimate dinners delivered right to your home.

We would like to thank all of the Bing parents whose dedication and countless hours of involvement made this such a successful event, and, specifically express our appreciation to the auction chairs, Nicole Nokes and Claire Libraro, and to incredibly talented auctioneers, Jeff Jonkers and Laurie Quinn! We also thank all who donated, volunteered and participated in this annual extravaganza, and we look forward to seeing everyone again at this year’s auction, “A Night of Good Fortune” on November 14th. We truly appreciate all your involvement and support. It is what makes the Bing community so special.
21st Annual Harvest Moon Auction
Bing Nursery School, Stanford University

Saturday, November 14, 2009 at 6:00 p.m.
at the Frances C. Arrillaga Alumni Center
326 Galvez Street
Stanford University campus

Celebrate the evening with food, wine
and exciting auction items.

All proceeds benefit the Bing Nursery School
Scholarship Fund.

If you would like to help or donate
to this year’s auction, please contact us at:
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THANKS!

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