

# Oak Lane News

April 2008

www.oaklanedaycare.org

## Did you know....

### that children ages 2-4 need 10 to 14 hours of sleep?

If children are not tired at night it is likely because they did not get enough exercise throughout the day or they are exposed to too much stimulation before bedtime. So, chase them around the backyard and then end the day with a book instead of a TV show.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics



## Day Care Make-Over

The day care's Board of Advisors is working on a renovation project, which has the potential to significantly improve the day care space. While the plans are not yet finalized, the board is diligently working with an architect and Westtown School to get the project underway. As you can imagine, how much work will get done depends on the money we have available and the money we will raise at the auction. We have a long wish list of improvements but recognize that not everything can be included in the project. So, read on about updates from the auction preparations and how you can contribute to making this event a success. More information about the renovation project will be available in the upcoming weeks.

## Auction update

The auction is exactly a month away! Time really flies when you're busy. Everything is moving along according to plan and we are getting closer to our goal of

100 donations. So far we have 78 donations on our list and need at least 22 more. Help us reach this goal, so that we can raise as much money as possible for the day care's renovation project. The next auction meeting is on April 16<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. The more parents attend the more prepared we will be on the day of the event.

## Good bye couch potatoes!

Spring is here and it's time for TV's to be turned off and doors to backyards to be opened. At Oak Lane we spend more time outdoors now that the weather is warming up and it is not always easy for children as well as teachers to have to come inside for lunch time. Children should be spending as much time outside as possible, away from TV's, computers and toys. Yes, toys! A few weeks ago, NPR featured a wonderful article about the value of old-fashioned play. It stated how nowadays when we think of play, we automatically think of toys and not of the activity of playing anymore. The most

important contributor to a fun play time should be their imagination and not a particular toy. I've included the article on page 3 of this newsletter.

## More News

The Jitterbugs music program will continue to visit Oak Lane on Thursday's for the month's of April and May!

The day care passed its annual inspection and is licensed for another year.

## Calendar

April 11 - Scholastic Book Order Due

April 16 - Auction Meeting

April 25 - Return signed contracts

May 4 - AUCTION  
11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

# Classroom News

## Infants and Young Toddlers

Everyone is on the move! Aleksander is pushing himself across the floor and loves to clap. William, on the other hand, is not very interested in crawling and seems to want to go straight to walking. He will stand up and hold on to something and then let's go in an attempt to walk only to fall down again and again. His perseverance is amazing! Chloe is well on her way to walking as she is moving around on her two feet while holding on to things. William and Chloe are also thoroughly enjoying their finger foods.

Maya, Annie, Juliet, Addison, Nora and Jack had lots of fun experimenting with paint and crayons in the past few weeks as they made some spring crafts. But the highlight of the week is the Jitterbugs music on Thursdays. They love to get in the circle with the big kid and dance and make music.

T. Sheila, T. Savannah and T. Noreen

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## Older Toddlers

March has flown by and we are happy that spring has finally arrived. We are able to spend more time outdoors. Using the Lower School playground while Westtown School was on spring break was a special treat.

One morning, Kim Glynn (Colin and Lilli's mom) volunteered her time in the classroom. She lead a potato print art activity and then baked delicious homemade french fries for us. They were really yummy. On St. Patrick's Day we enjoyed making and drinking green milk shakes. In preparation for Easter we dyed eggs and the next day we went on an Easter egg hunt.

The children continue to practice yoga in the mornings and look forward to the Jitterbugs music program every Thursday. One of our favorite activities everyday is reading books to ourselves or listening to a story read by a teacher.

T. Rachel and T. Kristen

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## Preschoolers

We are ready for spring! We spent the last few weeks creating many different spring crafts including chicks, bunnies, Easter eggs, flowers and butterflies. Come and see our beautiful spring bulletin board. The children had lots of fun dying their Easter eggs and were very particular about what colors they chose. The Easter egg hunt on the Lower School playground was exciting and the children had to search high and low to find all the eggs. For St. Patrick's Day we made shamrocks and learned about colors as we made bright rainbows.

One day, we made blue homemade play dough with T. Noreen. The children took turns and helped with pouring the ingredients in the bowl and then mixing everything up. Then we cooked the dough until it was smooth and T. Noreen kneaded the blue food coloring into it. Once it had cooled down, the children played with it for a long time.

We have also been really enjoying our jitterbug music time with songs, parachutes, bells and shaky eggs.

T. Margaret and T. Jean

## Volunteer Opportunities

**Auction:** We could use a couple more helping hands for set-up and clean-up.

**Thank you's:** Vukasovic family (Easter eggs), Way's (wooden toy entertainment block), Glynn's (toys), Bill Schmuck, Elson Blunt and Eric Mayer for building the storage shed, Spring Clean-up Day: Christine Miller, Marie Potter, Cheryle Blunt, Matt Bradley, Bill Schmuck, Todd Krasnai and his son Todd.

## Baby News

We welcome Olivia's new sister Charlotte. She will be starting in the Infant Classroom in June.

T. Margaret will be going on maternity leave on April 18<sup>th</sup> and will be returning to the day care at the end of June. During her absence, T. Jean will be running the preschool class with the help of our wonderful substitutes. Please join us in wishing T. Margaret all the best. We are looking forward to welcoming her baby boy to the Oak Lane community.

## Friendly Reminders

- ❖ Please make sure your child has a change of clothes appropriate for the warmer weather.
- ❖ The children are spending more time outdoors and are very busy all day long. Please make sure your child has an appropriate lunch to keep him/her going all day. We don't want to have to give your child a bigger afternoon snack to make up for a small lunch.

# Old-Fashioned Play Builds Serious Skills

On October 3, 1955, the Mickey Mouse Club debuted on television. As we all now know, the show quickly became a cultural icon, one of those phenomena that helped define an era. What is less remembered but equally, if not more, important, is that another transformative cultural event happened that day: The Mattel toy company began advertising a gun called the "Thunder Burp." I know — who's ever heard of the Thunder Burp? Well, no one.

The reason the advertisement is significant is because it marked the first time that any toy company had attempted to peddle merchandise on television outside of the Christmas season. Until 1955, ad budgets at toy companies were minuscule, so the only time they could afford to hawk their wares on TV was during Christmas. But then came Mattel and the Thunder Burp, which, according to Howard Chudacoff, a cultural historian at Brown University, was a kind of historical watershed. Almost overnight, children's play became focused, as never before, on things — the toys themselves.

"It's interesting to me that when we talk about play today, the first thing that comes to mind are toys," says Chudacoff. "Whereas when I would think of play in the 19th century, I would think of activity rather than an object." Chudacoff's recently published history of child's play argues that for most of human history what children did when they played was roam in packs large or small, more or less unsupervised, and engage in freewheeling imaginative play. They were pirates and princesses, aristocrats and action heroes. Basically, says Chudacoff, they spent most of their time doing what looked like nothing much at all. "They improvised play, whether it was in the outdoors... or whether it was on a street corner or somebody's back yard," Chudacoff says. "They improvised their own play; they regulated their play; they made up their own rules."

But during the second half of the 20th century, Chudacoff argues, play changed radically. Instead of spending their time in autonomous shifting make-believe, children were supplied with ever more specific toys for play and predetermined scripts. Essentially, instead of playing pirate with a tree branch they played Star Wars with a toy light saber. Chudacoff calls this the commercialization and co-optation of child's play — a trend which begins to shrink the size of children's imaginative space.

But commercialization isn't the only reason imagination comes under siege. In the second half of the 20th century, Chudacoff says, parents became increasingly concerned about safety, and were driven to create play environments that were secure and could not be penetrated by threats of the outside world. Karate classes, gymnastics, summer camps — these create safe environments for children, Chudacoff says. And they also do something more: for middle-class parents increasingly worried about achievement, they offer to enrich a child's mind.

## Change in Play, Change in Kids

Clearly the way that children spend their time has changed. Here's the issue: A growing number of psychologists believe that these changes in what children do has also changed kids' cognitive and emotional development. It turns out that all that time spent playing make-believe actually helped children develop a critical cognitive skill called executive function. Executive function has a number of different elements, but a central one is the ability to self-regulate. Kids with good self-regulation are able to control their emotions and behavior, resist impulses, and exert self-control and discipline.

We know that children's capacity for self-regulation has diminished. A recent study replicated a study of self-regulation first done in the late 1940s, in which psychological researchers asked kids ages 3, 5 and 7 to do a number of exercises. One of those exercises included standing perfectly still without moving. The 3-year-olds couldn't stand still at all, the 5-year-olds could do it for about three minutes, and the 7-year-olds could stand pretty much as long as the researchers asked. In 2001, researchers repeated this experiment. But, psychologist Elena Bodrova at Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning says, the results were very different.

"Today's 5-year-olds were acting at the level of 3-year-olds 60 years ago, and today's 7-year-olds were barely approaching the level of a 5-year-old 60 years ago," Bodrova explains. "So the results were very sad." Sad because self-regulation is incredibly important. Poor executive function is associated with high dropout rates, drug use and crime. In fact, good executive function is a better predictor of success in

school than a child's IQ. Children who are able to manage their feelings and pay attention are better able to learn. As executive function researcher Laura Berk explains, "Self-regulation predicts effective development in virtually every domain."

## **The Importance of Self-Regulation**

According to Berk, one reason make-believe is such a powerful tool for building self-discipline is because during make-believe, children engage in what's called private speech: They talk to themselves about what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. "In fact, if we compare preschoolers' activities and the amount of private speech that occurs across them, we find that this self-regulating language is highest during make-believe play," Berk says. "And this type of self-regulating language... has been shown in many studies to be predictive of executive functions."

And it's not just children who use private speech to control themselves. If we look at adult use of private speech, Berk says, "we're often using it to surmount obstacles, to master cognitive and social skills, and to manage our emotions." Unfortunately, the more structured the play, the more children's private speech declines. Essentially, because children's play is so focused on lessons and leagues, and because kids' toys increasingly inhibit imaginative play, kids aren't getting a chance to practice policing themselves. When they have that opportunity, says Berk, the results are clear: Self-regulation improves.

"One index that researchers, including myself, have used... is the extent to which a child, for example, cleans up independently after a free-choice period in preschool," Berk says. "We find that children who are most effective at complex make-believe play take on that responsibility with... greater willingness, and even will assist others in doing so without teacher prompting."

Despite the evidence of the benefits of imaginative play, however, even in the context of preschool young children's play is in decline. According to Yale psychological researcher Dorothy Singer, teachers and school administrators just don't see the value.

"Because of the testing, and the emphasis now that you have to really pass these tests, teachers are starting earlier and earlier to drill the kids in their basic fundamentals. Play is viewed as unnecessary, a waste of time," Singer says. "I have so many articles that have documented the shortening of free play for children, where the teachers in these schools are using the time for cognitive skills."

It seems that in the rush to give children every advantage — to protect them, to stimulate them, to enrich them — our culture has unwittingly compromised one of the activities that helped children most. All that wasted time was not such a waste after all.