

Oak Lane Child Care Center December 2011 Newsletter



Director's Corner

As part of my responsibilities as the director of a licensed, NAEYC accredited center I am required to attend monthly meetings with other center administrators that are held at the Scarsdale offices of the Child Care Council of Westchester.

It is interesting to me that for as many meetings as I have gone to over the years the issues seem to remain the same and yes the solutions to these problems still remain elusive. The essential dilemma is maintaining affordable child care for all working parents in the county. Concurrent to this is the task of making the importance of early childhood education understood and appreciated by all, not just the stake-holders.

In the October 19th edition of the New York Times Nicholas D. Kristoff wrote an op-ed piece entitled "Occupy the Classroom". It is a thought-provoking article written by a columnist that I have a love-hate relationship with. I am always interested in what he is writing about but remain eternally miffed at him for not looking up my son when they were both in Rwanda and writing about it. And yes I did email Mr. Kristoff and tell him all about Evan but to no avail. By the way, when I told Evan what I did, he wanted to shoot me. Oh well, his biggest fan was just trying to help!

The essence of his op-ed article is that Occupy Wall Street was shining a useful spotlight on one of our country's central challenges, the inequity that leaves the richest 1% of Americans with a greater net worth than the entire bottom 90%.

If you listen to all the “hopefuls” who are actively campaigning for the presidency in 2012 and the sitting politicians they all seem to cite taxing and spending and crooked bankers as the root of the problem. Although much of this is true, Mr. Kristoff cites another problem as just as pressing.... That many young people never get the chance to compete because they never receive the skills that they would need in order to do so.

“This is where inequality starts,” said Kathleen McCartney, the dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, as she showed Mr. Kristoff a chart demonstrating that even before kindergarten there are significant performance gaps between rich and poor students. Those gaps then widen further in school.

“The reason early education is important is that you build a foundation for school success,” she added. “And success breeds success.”

As all of my colleagues agree, a good education tends to be the most reliable escalator out of poverty. We also know that disadvantaged kids often don't get a chance to board that escalator.

At each Director's Meeting we have a presentation from Ms. Kathy Halas, Executive Director of the Child Care Council. When I began my tenure at Oak Lane Ms. Lottie Harris was the executive director. I got to know her quite well on two levels, one as the dynamic director of a powerful organization and, perhaps even more importantly to her, as the grandmother to a terrific young girl who attended Oak Lane for several years. After Ms. Harris retired Ms. Halas took over the reins of the organization with Ms. Harris' blessing.

Ms. Halas has worked tirelessly on behalf of the working families in the county. In October she attended a forum held by the Mid-Hudson Valley Regional Economic Development Council. She was there as a member of the Mid-Hudson Valley Child Care Resource and Referral Consortium. This group represents our region's early care and education industry of nearly 2,000 child care businesses employing close to 11,000 people. This business sector cares for and educates almost 68,000 children from infancy through age 12.

As Ms. Halas noted, “Access to reliable, quality child care makes it possible for parents across occupations and income levels to work.” Without a strong system of child care, employers will not have the reliable, productive workforce they need for business growth.

Research on the longer-term impacts of a quality child care system has over-reaching implications. Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman at the University of Chicago recently testified in front of the Senate Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, that "America has a substantial skills problem. The quality of our workforce is not what it should be and it is not improving. Budget deficits are created in large part by deficits in the skills of our workforce....." Dr. Heckman called for greater investment in early childhood programs, asserting that the "rate of return for investment in quality early childhood education is 7-10% per annum through better outcomes in education, health, sociability, economic productivity and reduced crime. These returns exceed the rate of return of stocks over the period of 1945-2008. Early childhood investments pay dividends for the life of the child. Each dollar invested returns 60-300 dollars over the lifetime."

Gov. Cuomo recently announced his application for \$100 million in the federal Early Learning Challenge Grant, part of the nation's Race to the Top to improve education. With nearly half of our 3rd grade students failing the state's reading exam, the Governor noted that "student achievement at all grade levels often rests on the quality of early learning and this challenge proposal demonstrates New York State's commitment to making sure our early childhood education programs are among the best in the nation."

It is my sincere hope that someday when I go to the monthly meeting I will see different agenda items because the concern for quality, affordable child care and outstanding early childhood educational opportunities will be the norm - rather than a wish and a dream.

We are now entering into the holiday season. This is a time for giving thanks and reflecting upon the year that is rapidly drawing to a close. I know that I have many, many things for which to be grateful. I have my families, both my own and my Oak Lane family - my staff. I am grateful for to all of our families who entrust their children to us each day. I am grateful for the unique setting that Oak Lane is and the possibilities that exist because of its' uniqueness. I am grateful that we have our health and that we live in one of the most beautiful areas of our great country - Westchester County with all of the bountiful riches that are present here.

It is my sincere hope for all that this holiday season and the coming New Year be filled with only joyous times and wonderful memories.

Best Wishes,
Ronnie



From The Board

Once again, we find ourselves in December – the season of Hanukwanzmas! As the end of 2011 approaches, please consider Oak Lane in your donation plans. As you well know, our small school provides a positive and long lasting impact for all of our children. Your tax deductible contribution will help us to maintain Oak Lane as a special, nurturing home away from home for your children. Thank you, and best wishes for the holidays and the new year.

Maggie Christ, President, Board of Directors



Calendar

December 25 through January 2, 2012 – Closed
January 12, 2012 – Trip – Upstairs classes
January 16, 2012 – Closed



REQUESTS AND REMINDERS

PLEASE:

- **Do not teach or encourage your child(ren) to unlock or open our childproof gates, either inside or outside.**
- Sign in and out EVERY DAY
- No cars running unattended in the parking lot.
- No children unattended in your car in the parking lot.
- No children are allowed to roam unattended at the Center. Please keep your student and his or her siblings with you at all times.
- Call the office to let us know if your child is going to be absent.



Miss Maura's Class

Music is one of the great joys of my life. There are many wonderful memories of listening to all kinds of music, from show tunes to rock n roll, with my older siblings. I shared that love and enthusiasm for music with my niece and nephews. They often thank me for introducing them to a wide variety of music and developing their music appreciation. More recently, Julia and I can often be found dancing around the kitchen listening to all kinds of music from the 70's to classical to the latest hits.

In the Acorn classroom one can always hear the sounds of music. It is an essential part of our program. There is the sound of the children and teachers singing in addition to a variety of music on the CD player. Music is soothing and joyful but as educators we know that music is also intellectually stimulating.

In an article by Maryann Harman, M.A. titled 'Music and Movement - Instrumental in Language Development', she states, "Each component of music affects a different part of the brain, e.g. a familiar song activates the left frontal lobe, timbre the right frontal lobe and pitch the left posterior. One side of the

brain processes the words while the other processes the music- activating the whole brain ensures better retention.”

This past week we used a familiar tune, Frere Jacque to create a song about making play dough. The play dough song helps the children develop their language and answer the questions about who- for our friends, what- adding ingredients and how-mixing it together.

Children love music. They love to hear and sing familiar songs that make them feel happy and safe especially in new surroundings. The children also use songs to learn and follow routines such as “clean up time” or “Brush your teeth che che che che.”

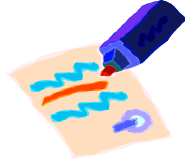
The children in the class are different ages and at different stages in language development. Music becomes common ground, literally giving each child a voice. It helps children learn to speak and understand their language. As we have seen these past few months in the Acorn room, music brings children of all ages and cultures together. It helps children to become familiar with language and the different sounds that make up the words we speak each day.

Music is enjoyable to the children whether it is a song about a star or a spider, a lullaby from around the world or a song we wrote ourselves. As teachers we see the educational value in music and understand that it is instrumental in child development.

We have a wonderful multicultural class this year. As the holidays approach we would like to invite our families to share a special holiday tradition with the class. You can read a favorite family story, share a traditional holiday treat or do an art project. If you have any ideas or questions please see one of the teachers. As always feel free to bring in music that you think the children will enjoy.

Have a wonderful holiday season and a very happy new year.

Misses Maura, Nancy, Corinne, and Lauren



Miss Leslie's Class

The children enjoyed making cookies for their snack. The entire group was involved with the cooking activity. The children assisted each other with different tasks when someone needed help with mixing or using the rolling pins.

Before we started cooking with the children we discussed each step in the cooking activity, ingredients and the equipment. We also drew pictures of the materials required for making the cookies and tasted some of the ingredients as they went in.

These experiences are helping the children to expand their vocabulary and language skills. When the children are engaged in cooking, they are learning about nutrition, demonstrating independence, learning measurement, sequential order and following directions.

The children especially enjoyed the hands-on experience when we floured the surface of the table for them to use the rolling pins to roll out the dough on. They really liked molding the dough into a variety of shapes. Some of the children rolled, cut and shaped the dough with their hands. Other children utilized the cookie cutting tools.

The children showed such pride in their ability to produce their own cookies. As the children began to prepare their cookies they made comments like: "I'm going to make a pumpkin", "we should put water on it", "what about a doggy?" and "an Oreo!" In addition, we had some unused dough that the children suggested we make juice, orange, cup cake and bread with. When the cookies were finishing baking we allowed the children to add "icing" on the top of each cookie that he or she shaped. They were so thrilled to do this and couldn't wait to taste it.

The children were actively involved in the cooking process. We let the children do the stirring, pouring, shaping and the measuring. We asked the children questions to help them think about the activity as they worked. We taught them good practices such as washing hands before they began the

food preparation and after eating, and how to use the equipment when we prepare foods. We plan to introduce a new cooking experience with the children regularly. When we cook with the children we will make play dough, taste interesting foods, and of course make foods the children may inquire about cooking.

Please take a look at the children's photo display of this activity located outside the classroom.

The sign-up sheet for Parent-Teaching conferences is posted inside the classroom. The Dates are December 5th-9th, 2011. I am looking forward to meeting with you soon.

We wish all our families a very Happy Holiday!

Miss Leslie and Miss Lady☺



Upstairs Preschool



Our first field trip to the Katonah Museum of Art was an extraordinary experience for all the children. For some it was the first time they rode on a school bus, while others were excited to be on the bus again. Once everybody was buckled up, their faces lit up in excitement, ready for the adventure that was awaiting them.

Since we have been studying maps, the children were aware of some street signs. We asked them to look out the bus windows and tell us what they were seeing. The following is a list in their own words: "Here we go again!", "Lots of water", "Water again", "Yellow sign means watch out", "I see a stop sign", "Cones on the ground", "Volcano dirt", "Yikes, Naked trees", "I go to the doctor there", "I found a left and a right sign", "A red flag on the pond", "This is where I was born", "My house is over there", "I've been to that store", "This is the way to Belizzi", "We saw 100 signs", "A sign for a light", "I saw 3 busses", "Bumpy road", "I see trees", "Look! Statues", "Who's driving the bus? I think it's a man. No, it's Miss Betty", "I saw some baby ducks", "I saw the train".

At the museum the children saw an exhibit entitled: New York, New York! The 20th Century. The five themes included: On the waterfront, streets and

avenues, parks and recreation, on the town, and tall buildings. The children saw paintings, photographs, sculptures, tree statues, and a variety of children's books that pulled the concepts together and geared it to our age group.

After we toured the museum the docent for the group took the children aside for a little chat. He told them that their behavior was 'terrific', that they were good listeners, that they asked great questions, and that they made good observations! We were beaming with pride for the children!

Maps are a difficult and abstract concept to grasp. According to Carol Seefeldt's book: Active Experiences for Active Children. "Not until children are around eleven or twelve years old can they comprehend the abstractions involved in reading maps. It is during the early years that children become aware of maps and how to use them. When given the opportunity to play and see maps being used, they will draw or paint their own maps." We used several library books that mapped out a dog's life, a map of our bodies, a map of a garden and others to illustrate the different ways we use maps. We have blueprints, nautical charts, maps of states, the globe, subway maps, and even maps of the sky as tools to encourage creativity and enhance learning.

When learning about maps the children are addressing Social Studies standards. Standard 1 states that maps use lines, color and other symbols to represent reality and are used to locate oneself in space. Standard 2 addresses the use of scale and Standard 3 addresses the use of perspective.

At circle time we had discussions about what we know about maps. We asked the children, "What is a map?" We created a web to generate ideas and wrote a detailed list of the children's responses. Emily said, "Maps are a plain piece of paper that tells you where to go." Brandon said, "Pirates use maps to find a treasure." Zach said, "People need a map in the car to go somewhere." Zoe said, "Some maps have pictures." These discussions led us to many projects and experiences in art, in literature and in block play.

We showed the children a map of the classroom. With very few details and some familiar shapes and colors, each area of the classroom was drawn on a big piece of paper including a map key.

We showed the children how to read a map and use the key. We continued by explaining that some maps have a key box which helps to identify where things are located. For example, in the classroom map, we used colors

to identify each area. One teacher read the map along with the children, while another teacher walked around the classroom. They were asked to draw a map of the classroom and another of their favorite place.

Another activity we did was taking the children outside by the front door entrance. They were encouraged to observe the sidewalks, the trees, the steps and the fence. We had an open dialogue while they did their observations, asking them to describe how they got from the fence to the front door. Each child was given a clip board and a Sharpie and drew a map of the entrance. As a follow-up, they drew a map of their travels from home to Oak Lane and dictated the directions to the teacher. These maps will be displayed in the classroom.

By having maps available in the block area, the children were able to construct roads, bridges, homes, parking garages---the possibilities are endless! We rotated props in the block area to extend the play and have clip boards and graph paper to extend their ideas.

In the sand table we added construction vehicles, rollers, rulers and maps. The play changed daily and it encouraged socialization as the children negotiated how they were going to play. We extended this play into the pebble area which is in the back playground near the steps, using larger vehicles and materials.

This study of maps and related topics will lead us in many different directions. It encompasses language arts, social studies, math, visual arts, and pro-social behavior.

The children may decide to study houses, neighborhoods, outer space. Again the possibilities are endless and we are excited to be on this journey!

You can extend the study of maps with your child as you drive to school. Look for signs together, notice different kinds of roads, check out traffic patterns (especially on Route 117 and downtown) and why traffic may be at a standstill.

In our last newsletter, we mentioned the body art project in which we traced their bodies and they decorated them by using different materials. The children used natural and recycled materials. The additional material we used was fabrics such as; buttons, cloth, yarn and ribbon. Each child used a different approach when decorating their body image. Some started with their face and others started with their feet. Belly buttons were very important to all.

It was interesting to see all the creative ways these materials were used to decorate their work. We are planning to redecorate our body images every few weeks. We will be using toys, wood materials, blocks and more. We'll keep you posted!

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us for conferences. It is so important to have the time to really talk about your child and any concerns you may have. If you couldn't make a conference, please let us know when you would like to meet. Our doors are always open!

The cold days are here now. Please send in mittens, a hat, a warm coat and when the time comes, snow pants and boots. Label everything please! Extra socks and even a spare pair of mittens would be great. Clothing gets wet as the children explore the playground. Please check the bins for winter outfits.

We all wish you the best for the upcoming holidays. Pace yourselves, it can be tiring for you and your children. If anyone wants to come in and share their holiday traditions with us, we would love it. Just let us know!

Misses Marty, Rosa, Stacey, Betty and Heather



Guidelines for bringing in food for celebrations

We have students enrolled who have life-threatening food allergies. Our Food Rules were developed to keep them safe:

1. No homemade foods are allowed.
2. Dunkin' Donuts products may now contain nuts and are not allowed.
3. The food must be in its original container with the ingredients list attached and legible.
4. The ingredients cannot include NUTS of any kind.
5. Even if nuts are not listed as an ingredient, items are not allowed if the label says they
 - a. May contain nuts
 - b. Were made in a factory that processes nut products
6. You must check the ingredients list each time you purchase an item.

7. Bakery items which do not have an ingredients list attached to the original packaging must be accompanied by a note on the bakery letterhead or receipt saying that the product is nut-free. This includes grocery stores, local bakeries, etc.
8. You may not allow your child to enter the building with food from home, and if your child has peanut butter or nut products for breakfast, please be sure to wash his/her hands before leaving the house.
9. If you would like to bring in special treats and would like an alternative to baked items, you might consider bringing in fresh fruit, sherbet, ice cream or ice pops after checking the labels to be sure that they are nut-free.