



# Parent/Provider Update

## “Watch how you hold that Crayon”

By Peg Tyre, New York Times New Service, Reprinted in the Indiana Gazette 3/1/10

Noah Lascano, 8, had a problem: His teachers couldn't read his handwriting. His homework became a frustrating exercise in writing once, and then, at the teacher's request, writing again, just for legibility.

His brother James, 5, was struggling in kindergarten - even drawing stick figures was a task. When his mother, Paula Lascano, tried to cajole him into completing a few workbook assignments, he reported that "his hand got too tired." Like many parents, Lascano decided it was time for help, so she hired a pediatric occupational therapist to work with her sons once a week. The boys manipulated stiff green putty, put pegs into boards, created chains of pennies and plastic connectors and wrote the alphabet - again and again.

These days, many little fingers are being drilled as therapists are being sought to help children without obvious disabilities to hold a pencil. Tim Nanof, legislative manager for the American Occupational Therapy Association, said it's hard to know exactly how many children are receiving these services. But parents, pediatricians, educators and early childhood experts agree that plenty of able-bodied children are receiving occupational therapy.

For some grade-school children, occupational therapists are filling the void left by schools, many of which no longer provide instruction on the mechanics of handwriting. About 30 percent of American Occupational Therapy Association members now work in schools, spending the bulk of their time helping children write legibly.

"As early as second grade I

could see he needed help shaping his letter and numbers," states Linda Tulloch of Greenwich, Conn. She waited in vain for teachers to provide her son, Jack, with handwriting instruction. But Jack's teachers told her that handwriting was old school and that students would wield a keyboard, not a pencil. "Kids can't use a keyboard to take a test or do math." Ultimately, Tulloch hired a tutor, who uses a handwriting program, *Handwriting Without Tears*, designed by an occupational therapist.

Anthony DiCarlo, long-time principal of the William E. Cottle Elementary School in Tuckahoe, N.Y. said that many children are experiencing delays in their fine and gross motor skills. In the last five years, I've seen a dramatic increase in the number of kids who don't have the strength in their hands to wield scissors or do arts and crafts projects, which in turn prepares them for writing." Many kindergartners in his community, he said, have taken music appreciation classes, adult-led sports instruction and have logged serious time in front of a TV or computer screen. But very few have had unlimited opportunities to run, jump and skip, or make mud pies and break twigs. **"I'm all for academic rigor," he said, "but these days I tell parents that letting their child mold clay, play in the sand or build with Play-Doh builds important school-readiness skills, too."**



*It is not an exaggeration to say that play is as basic to your child's total development as good food, cleanliness and rest.*

*-Joanne E. Oppenheim*

The age-old desire of parents with preschool children is, “I want my child to learn.” Unfortunately for many the proof of learning is in the number of work sheets that come home in the back pack. If we really want to help our children learn during the years leading up to kindergarten we will let our children play.

*“Play is children’s work!”*

The cognitive skills needed for school, everything from math to language to science, can be learned through play experiences. To make your facility a fun, engaging place for preschool children incorporate the following suggestions from ExchangeEveryDay, The Early Childhood Leaders’ Magazine e-newsletter.

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## WHY MUSIC

Jennifer Jones, author of the March article, “The Role of Music in Your Classroom”, cites the following reasons why play and music are an important aspect of a child’s development...



- Songs can be used to teach new concepts and to introduce new vocabulary.
- Songs give children the opportunity to explore adult roles. Children playing with dolls in a dramatic play area will sing lullabies to their dolls or hum while cleaning, emulating what they have seen their parents do.
- Movement to music develops children’s awareness of their bodies and what they can do. It can also help to develop feelings of self-confidence and fine motor skills.
- Listening to music can help teach children about the basic properties of music: loud, soft, fast/slow tempo, and pitch. It can also lead to further creative expression.

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## THE ROLE OF DRAMATIC PLAY

Dramatic/make-believe play is so much more than dressing up. If you have ever watched children in the dramatic play corner you understand that play does just not happen automatically. As children decide what they are going to do, there is much discussion about who and what to be and who others are going to be. Once roles have been assigned, the environment is then tackled. What props are needed, where are they to be placed, what will be used when it is time to change the scene or the scope of the play? Often setting up the scene involves more time than the actual play.

In addition to the set-up conversations and decision making comes the even bigger problem of how to get other children to listen to you and accept your ideas and vice versa. Dramatic play involves a lot of give and take and cooperation. Just imagine all the skills children are learning while playing.

As reported in ExchangeEveryDay on 10/28/2009: At 4 or 5, a child’s ability to play creatively with other children is a better indicator of her future academic success than any other indicator, including her vocabulary, her counting skills, or her knowledge of the alphabet.

*Dramatic play is the training ground where children learn to regulate themselves.*

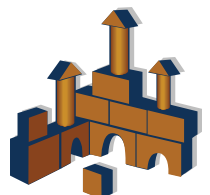
*-Lev Vigotsky*

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## BLOCK PLAY

It is noisy and active, it takes a teacher who is on her toes and who can anticipate the unexpected but it is oh so fun and rewarding to children. What is it? The block area! This space probably is the least liked and most scary to adults but holds so much opportunity for children to learn. Blocks come in all shapes and sizes, can be used to build houses, cars, bridges, ramps, towers and more. The learning that can be had ranges from math to physics to engineering. What better way to prepare children for elementary math and science classes?

Kay Stritzel, in her Exchange article, “Block Play is for ALL Children,” cites the value of inviting both boys and girls into block play... “Girls often relish the opportunity to become skilled block builders. They are using numbers and math concepts in a very real way. They are eager to expand their storytelling abilities to include what they are building with blocks. Boys enjoy dramatic play with blocks in a way that is different from their play in the housekeeping center. There can be a time for talking and sharing about what was built and comparisons to buildings that had been built previously.”



# PENN STATE EXTENSION TRAININGS FOR MAY

Penn State Extension will host a PD Day for Early Care Providers on Saturday, May 8, 2010. All providers have the opportunity to earn up to seven hours of training in one day! Three different sessions will be offered to providers, take just one or all three.

**“Infants & Toddlers - Tips for Providing Quality Care”** will begin at 8:30 AM and last until 10:30 AM. At this session providers will learn about the leading types of injuries, infection control strategies and the importance of nurturing care. Cost: \$5.

**“Soaring with Professionalism”** will begin at 10:30 AM and last until 12:30 PM. This training is designed to inspire individuals to pursue professionalism in their early childhood career. It

will feature the Five Keys framework from James R. Ball’s book, “Professionalism Is for Everyone.” Cost: \$20.

The afternoon session, **“Including All Children”**, will begin at 1:30 PM and will last until 4:30 PM.

This session is designed to inspire participants to create adaptations in their program to meet the needs of all children.

Cost: \$10.

All trainings will be held at the Penn State Extension Office located in the Court House Annex building on Water Street in Indiana. To register contact Darlene Sansone at 724-654-8370. Call soon!



Bumps and scrapes are a part of child care.

## NORTHWEST REGIONAL KEY TRAININGS

NW Regional Key will present **“Building Protective Factors”** in a two part series. This professional development series intends to provide early childhood staff and families with guidelines that promote family stability and prevent child abuse and neglect. The guidelines participants will learn about, support the *Strengthening Families* approach in the early childhood setting. Both parts must be taken. Part 1 will be held on May 10 from 6 PM until 9:30 PM. Part 2 will meet on June 21 from 6 PM until 9:30 PM. Both will meet at the Court House Annex building on Water Street. Cost is \$5 for each session.

Child care directors will have the opportunity to attend **“Budgeting for Early Childhood Facilities”** on June 12, 2010. This professional development will explore budgeting plans for the necessary and unexpected events and will assist participants in creating a functional cash flow statement. Directors will meet at Davis Hall on the IUP campus at 10 AM. This is a two hour training with a cost of \$5. Call 800-860-2281, ext. 128 to register.

*CCIS will be closed  
Monday,  
May 31, 2010, in  
observance of  
Memorial Day.*

## Support for Children Coping with the Death of a Loved One

Hopeful Hearts, Inc. is a child-focused family bereavement support group that meets at Grace Methodist Church in Indiana. This group which is non-denominational gathers every other Tuesday from 6 - 8 pm. They provide peer support at no cost for every member of the family when someone close to the family has died. Peer support for bereaved children helps them grow through their grief and may prevent the need for more individualized and/or costly intervention in the future.

Hopeful Hearts personnel have received training and ongoing in-service from the Highmark Caring Place, a state-of-the-art children’s grief support program.

Families meet every other week (during all or part of the school year) in a safe, caring and confidential environment. After a light meal and conversation or family fun, family members move into small age-appropriate groups where trained volunteers enable each family member to receive peer support that encourages sharing of experiences and feelings. For more information call 724-349-3888. Hopeful Hearts serves families in Indiana, southern Jefferson, and eastern Armstrong and Westmoreland counties.



**A child’s world suddenly becomes confusing and insecure.**

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## SUMMER'S COMING: What will your children be doing?

**Last summer (2009) presented these interesting numbers....**

*Average hours per day American youth spent:*

- .....*watching television: 3.9*
- .....*engaging in physical activity: 1.4*
- .....*reading: 0.7*

*Help your children beat the average this summer!*

## PROVIDER APPRECIATION DAY IS MAY 7TH

Here are some of the top reasons why day care providers love their jobs: they are first to know when the current flu epidemic hits, they have beautiful children in their life, their plumbing and handyman skills improve, they receive unlimited hugs, and knowing they are helping to get the next generation off to a great start.

Please let your provider know why you appreciate the care she provides to your child/ children on May 7th. Everyone deserves a little pat on the back.

