

the Parkside Press

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PARKSIDE SCHOOL ■ WINTER 2003



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From the Directors: Know Thy Media

“No Media is Good Media” and “No Shiny Boxes” have become a familiar refrains at parent assemblies, lectures and workshops at Parkside. Given the intense sensory overload induced by fast-moving images, light, color and sound—not to mention the inappropriate content of much media—it’s not hard to understand why this has been Parkside’s “official” policy.

However, like many official policies, it has been observed more in word than in deed. So now Parkside’s founders and directors are changing tactics. After attending a conference on children and the media sponsored by the NY State Association of Independent Schools, they have decided that “Know Thy Media” may be a more effective way of ensuring that the children in our care are not manipulated by the commercially motivated aggression and violence that are, alas, a fact of contemporary American life. Leslie Thorne and Albina Miller spoke with the Parkside Press on their new “media education” plans.

We know that kids are watching TV. It’s not just Parkside kids, this isn’t only a Parkside issue. So instead of making parents feel lousy about the TV their kids watch or the time they spend on the computer, we thought we would take a look at what’s actually happening. Number one: how much time are they spending? Then, what are they actually seeing? In January, we’re going to do a survey, and we really want it to be an honest assessment, not a guilt-ridden one, of the amount of time kids are spending on the media, and what exactly they are watching, what video and computer games they’re playing, what websites they are going to.

Then we want to have a school-wide study—done by the children. The goal is to take that information and use it to educate the kids by including it in the curriculum in
(continued on page 2)

Notes from the Parent Association

The Parkside Parent Association is off to a great start...at our first meeting in September, 28 parents attended! This year, we are scheduling meetings on different days of the week and some evenings in order to encourage greater participation. And at each meeting, Leslie and Albina will report on “happenings” at Parkside that we often don’t get to hear about. On January 15, we will feature an outside guest speaker for our evening meeting...more details to follow.

The date for Parkside’s spring Auction is Tuesday, April 27, 2004. Preparation is in full swing. We already have commitments for three fabulous items: A walk-on part on the soap opera **“As the World Turns”**; four club seats to the **METS**, which includes a visit to the locker room with Al Leiter and signed team balls; and a behind-the-scenes

cooking experience with the pastry chef at **Chanterelle** (after which you take off your apron and have a gourmet dinner).

We need many more items, large and small. We are especially eager to have one-of-a-kind opportunities most people could not buy: special dining experiences; theater, sports and concert tickets; spa specials, massages, and trainer sessions; vacations, airfare, hotels, etc. Please be creative...if it’s not on the list, don’t worry! These are just suggestions.

Lauren Beck, auction chairperson, is forming the auction committee now. If you want to volunteer, please contact Lauren via Jake Beck (group 4-2) or at 917-301-7221. There is something to fit everyone’s schedule. Get involved! IT’S FUN!!!! ■

— *Kathryn Wolfson, president, Parkside PA*

Know Thy Media *(continued)*

some way. We want children to review and look critically at what they are watching, what it's telling them, how the constant bombardment of changing color and noise is making them feel—how it's making their “engines run”—and what message is being sent. We have really serious concerns about racial stereotypes, and how women are portrayed—not to mention the fact that by the time kids are in fourth grade they have witnessed more than 100,000 acts of violence. I think that's going to be much more useful than increasing parental guilt.

One reason for taking this approach is that many parents say that their kids are at a disadvantage if they're not up to par on some of these things. They need to have some connection with the popu-

lar culture, because that's a way in for them socially. Albina and I understand this. Our very first student didn't watch any television. We actually recommended that he watch some programs in order to give him some common social ground with other children.

We're going to try to change tactics, and we hope that parents will respond honestly to our survey, so we know just what we're dealing with. Then we can take the information we get and use it to the children's advantage. We're very excited about the curriculum piece, and we think the kids will be excited, too. Instead of doing ten book reports a year, children will be asked to review TV shows, movies, and computer and video games, etc.

The first thing families can do is put the TV and computer in a common area so parents can monitor better. Sit with

your children, watch the programs they watch, and tell them what you like and don't like about them—that can be very powerful for kids.

We hope that parents will understand and support this new direction. Remember, an honest survey will allow us to accurately assess what is going on, and then intervene productively.

For starters, Leslie and Albina recommend that parents take a look at the website www.common sense media.org. A non-profit, non-partisan organization, Common Sense Media rates movies, TV programs, and video games based on levels of violence, language, sexual content, 'scariness,' emotional trauma, and sexual and racial stereotypes. It's not realistic to expect that children won't watch any form of media, but it is possible to make informed choices. ■

— Jamey Gambrell

Parkside Press

Please welcome the new **Parkside Press** staff for 2003-2004. Under the editorial guidance of **Jamey Gambrell** (mother of Callie, group 3-3), this issue reflects a whole new look and feel. Let us know what you think!

Other staffers include: **Lisa Redd** (Pilar, group 4-1), **Deidre Freeman** (Shiori in group 3-2), **Sanna Levine** (Noah, group 4-3) and **Inez Brown** (Avery, group 4-3). Thanks to all of you! Anyone else interested in writing something for the Spring issue, contact Jamey at jameygambrell@hotmail.com or 212-740-5167.

—Kathryn Wolfson



The Parkside Gallery



Parkside students consistently produce extraordinary art. Top left: Miranda Rogers (4-3); Center: Isabel Singer (4-4); Lower left: Sophia Stoch (3-4).

Parkside In Depth

Editor's Note: This year, each issue of the Parkside Press will offer an in-depth look at one aspect of the integral, Parkside approach to learning. This issue features OT. While the material may be familiar to long-time Parkside parents, we hope to show it to you in a different light, and perhaps offer some new ideas for its use at home. And we want all parents to be aware of how OT is being incorporated into the classroom. The next issue of PP will focus on reading and speech-and-language therapy at Parkside. Look for bios of new staff members, and more from the departments and classrooms.

Engine, Engine Number 9...

BY JAMEY GAMBRELL

Lately you may have heard talk of engines running 'high,' 'low,' and 'just right.' No, Parkside children have not been learning to tune cars or drive trains. It's part of a school-wide push to help our children regulate their bodies and feeling states, thereby making their hearts and minds more open to their classmates and to learning.

In November, Parkside OTs Donna Zapin, Dana Brett and Andrea Levinger held an evening workshop to familiarize parents with the concepts and props behind the OT program that is being incorporated into the classroom. As Leslie Thorne told the assembled parents, the idea is to use the "tools" in the OT "sensory tool box" in each class to help our children function at an optimal level of alertness throughout the school day as well as at home. "Children need to learn to recognize and communicate how their bodies and minds are feeling—and how to modulate those feeling states."

The 25 or so parents present got a crash course in "sensory integration." The presentation was well-organized, intellectually stimulating—and very fast paced. The concept of sensory integration was first articulated by Dr. Jean Ayres in the early 1970s. Ayres sought to

understand and ameliorate the perceptual and physical issues often associated with learning difficulties—poor small or gross motor control, visual tracking problems, auditory processing dysfunctions, speech delays, and tactile defensiveness, to give just a few examples.

Ayres studied how the brain processes and integrates the information it receives from all the senses. By understanding which neurological pathways and brain areas were involved, and where they had gone awry, it would be possible, she felt, to develop strategies and concrete activities to cope with and alter them. Sensory integration looks at ways in which, under the guidance of occupational therapists, the brain's neurological pathways may even be "retrained" to the child's physical, emotional and educational benefit.

In other words, sensory integration techniques and knowledge can be used to help children's engines run "just right." Kids need to know that there is something immediate that can be done about the sensory glitches and overload they experience. And it helps: "Our son is living proof that it works," said Burt and Susan Savitz, parents of Daniel (4-1), "the change has been amazing."



(above) Albert Perry (4-4) stretches across an exercise ball to reach a toy held by OT Dana Brett.



(left) Paloma Kalisch (3-1) uses her fingers and toes to get the OT swing going.



Left to right: Parkside parents Dianne Cohler-Esses (Ayelet, 3-1), and Isadore and Betsy Schmukler (Samantha, 4-1) enjoy the OT ‘tools.’

Parkside students are learning to recognize when their “engine” is running high or low, and to take note of what activities alter it. “But we are very careful,” said Donna Zapin, “to make sure that this language is not used punitively—like ‘go do such and such because your engine is running too high.’ That is very important. We let kids know that it’s just fine for your engine speed to be high when you’re at the park. But it’s not very helpful when it’s time for reading group.”

Fortunately for parents who aren’t feeling up to studying neuro-biology after work, sensory integration can be fun, as the OT department’s presentation proved. For the workshop, chairs were arranged in semi-circles around one of the “sensory tool boxes” now in all Parkside classrooms. While the OTs

explained the purpose of the contents, parents got to play with putty, pin-wheels, bumpy rubber pillows, squeeze balls and heavy jars of rice that sound like “rain sticks” when shaken. With the lights dimmed, we listened to Mozart and “Earth Drums,” both of which are often used in Parkside’s classrooms.

Given the hectic world we live in, we are all—with or without learning issues—in need of a little sensory integration. As Leslie Thorne noted in response to the anxiety evident in some parent questions: “There’s nothing ‘abnormal’ or weird about any of this. It’s just a matter of whether or not these things interfere with social life and learning. As adults we all do these things instinctively. We have strategies for regulating our body states—whether it’s working out at the gym, doing yoga, or having a cup of coffee to stay awake. We just have to help our children learn to do this, to become more intentional.”

Many parents may have left with

...Running down the Parkside Line...

their heads spinning from new ideas and terms. The way to integrate *that* particular sensation is to follow up on some of the reading recommended here. For parents who couldn’t attend, contact Donna Zapin at Parkside for a copy of the handout provided at the workshop. ■



Laura Beck (Melanie, 3-3) tries on a lap buddy at the OT workshop.

If my train falls off the track...

A Word or Two on the Seven Senses

Wait a second...Seven senses? We all know taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing. And Hollywood has popularized a “sixth sense.”

In fact, however, as the OT Department’s workshop explained, there are seven senses. The sixth and seventh are the proprioceptive and the vestibular. Not exactly household words, of course. But they don’t involve anything psychic or mystical at all. In fact, these are quite literally the senses that give human beings the feeling of being “down to earth.”

PROPRIOCEPTION

Think of proprioception as “proprietary perception” or “perception of self,” and you’ll be close. Muscles and joints contain “proprioceptors” that send messages to the brain about their activity and relative location—they tell the left hand what the right hand is doing, so to speak, and where it is. Most of these messages are processed unconsciously. People with inadequate proprioception have a hard time playing sports, tend to be more “clumsy,” and need to see what they are doing with their eyes.

“Heavy work,” or input to the mus-

cles and joints, whether deep massage, jumping jacks or a weighted vest, can literally help a child feel “grounded.” When it is fast paced (like calisthenics), it is alerting and wakes us up; when it is slow and sustained (like pushing or pulling heavy objects around a room), it tends to be calming.

THE VESTIBULAR SENSE

The vestibular receptors are located in the inner ear, and are responsible for our perception of gravity. There are two kinds: one is located in the labyrinth of the inner ear along with the auditory

receptors. The other is in the three pairs of semi-circular canals we have in each ear. The pressure of fluid shifting within these canals as our heads move tells us how we are moving in space, and helps us make sense of what our eyes see.

The effect of gravity on us is so integral to our experience that we are rarely aware of it—until the kids insist on us riding the roller coaster at Coney Island. When vestibular movement is fast, jerky or multi-directional (like spinning on a tire swing, or doing cartwheels) it is “alerting”—but can easily become over-

stimulating. When vestibular movement is slow, rhythmic and linear (like a swing or rocking chair), it is calming.

Once you know that the ear is home to neuro-receptors involved in movement, it is not so surprising that OTs have found that a good session at the playground can actually stimulate and improve speech in speech-delayed children.

Anyone who does yoga already knows that when you combine vestibular and proprioceptive input in a pose like a headstand—the result is that you feel wide awake, but very calm.

SENSORY DIET

This simply refers to the physical and sensory input that people need to keep their “engines” running “just right,” i.e., to function at their optimal level, and in a manner appropriate to the context.

As with nutrients, each child’s needs are different, and will vary depending on the circumstances. The sensory tool boxes designed by Parkside’s OT department are some of the “fixings” needed to provide your child with a nourishing sensory diet. ■

...Will I ever get it back?

The OT department has trained all Parkside teachers in the use of the “Sensory Tool Boxes” that are now part of each classroom. All of them are things you can use at home. These portable OT-Sessions-In-A-Box include items like:

Plastic jugs filled with rice, weighted vests, and a **lap buddy** (which looks and feels like two large socks filled with wet sand), all of which provide calming, deep muscle input, as does **Theraband**, a heavy-duty stretchy rubber material that recalls a very thick, popped balloon.

Squeezy balls and **Theraputty**—a kind of hard core, non-stick playdoh—provide similar input to the joints of the hands and arms and will help calm a case of tactile fidgets. Take some with you when you and your child go to the grocery store.

Yoga cards to remind children of yoga poses they can use to calm their body, focus their attention, and bring their “engine” speed up or down to “just right.”

Pinwheels to facilitate the calming effect of taking a deep breath.

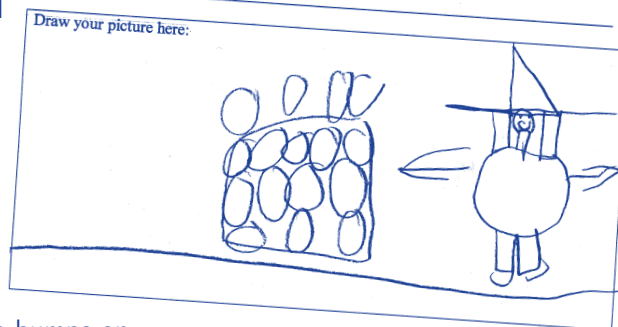
A **move-’n-sit pillow**. This is a heavy rubber air cushion with bumps on one side that provides sensory input that allows a wiggly child to move in his or her chair and keep the mind alert, while remaining in one place—and on the chair. A large **beanbag pillow** can provide a self-administered “hug” to help smooth difficult transitions.

Danielle Helfand, head teacher of group 3-3 says: “The tool boxes have been incredibly helpful. We use them for preparation and transitions, and as social behavior-modification tools. We use all sorts of different things for transition times in between activities. We find it helps center the kids, grounds them and gets their bodies and minds focused on the next activity. For example, before writer’s workshop, we give each child some putty to work with, to

4. Write two sentences about your favorite thing in OT and then draw a picture.

I LIKE GOING ON THE TRAPLES
IT'S FUN TWO GRA BANAND SWING

Draw your picture here:



Students of 3-3 did a ‘box job’ describing their OT favorites.

prepare their hands for writing.

When one child’s engine is high—he’s upset, say, or speaking in a loud or angry voice, we suggest different strategies and confer with the kids. We might suggest he walk back and forth in the hallway with the weighted buckets of rice, or take deep breaths.

We listen to a lot of music in the classroom that’s both alerting and calming. We also do a lot of stretching, jumping jacks, back presses, and “sandwich” squishes. We’re trying to build it in to the classroom – both the way we structure the room physically, and the schedule of the day.” ■

I write the thing
it was fun
I sit and I
spin around.

Draw your picture here:



The In-Depth Scoop: Parkside OTs On The Job

Our department name conjures up images of elementary school kids receiving career counseling. And there is some truth to that: our therapeutic role is to help kids flourish in their current jobs as student, playmate and friend.

Our room may look like a play-ground, but from the ball pit to the balance beam, each activity builds the foundation for learning. Children learn through the active engagement of their senses. Occupational therapists help children to explore and interpret information from the environment, and appropriately understand and adjust their responses.

We create individualized treatment plans after assessing gross motor, fine motor, visual motor, play, self-care and sensory processing abilities. For example, a child with handwriting difficulties may begin her therapy session by swinging and throwing balls to a target, as this will gear her "engine" and her muscles for learning. Then, she will be encouraged to explore the feel of the letter "B" in shaving cream, beans and rice, and the air.

These activities provide tactile and movement experiences to help the child to integrate the motor pattern of the letter. The therapist may urge the student to tune into her "body engine" (alertness) to ensure good attention and awareness.

By analyzing the child's strengths and weaknesses and breaking tasks into smaller parts, OTs tailor the environment to the child while building skills. If the child has weak arm muscles, the child may make a B on a chalkboard or paper taped to the wall to strengthen her upper body. The therapist may give the child small chalk or broken crayon pieces to facilitate a mature pencil grasp.

OTs partner with teachers, parents and specialists to integrate these skills in the classroom and the home. We also lead weekly classroom sensory-motor

groups and provide teachers and parents with equipment and strategies such as move-n' sit cushions or specialized writing utensils. As a transition between individual sessions and independence in the classroom, we often pair a child with a peer. In this context, the child learns to focus despite distraction, to negotiate and form relationships, and share ideas and knowledge.

We really enjoy working with your children! Please feel free to visit or call with any questions!

—Donna Zapin (supervisor),
Dana Brett, Andrea Levinger



Parkside OT's at the workshop. Left to right: Andrea Levinger, Donna Zapin, Dana Brett.

Links to Learning: Recommended Books and Web Sites

Sensory Integration and the Child

by A. Jean Ayres, Ph.D.

Called "the Bible" of sensory integration, this book had its 14th printing in 2000. Not light reading, but well worth the effort.

The Out-of-Sync Child

by Carol Stock Kranowitz and
Larry B. Silver.

Most parents will find this book far more accessible. It provides recognizable portraits of children and profiles of sensory "types."

The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun

by Carol Kranowitz.

A sequel to the first book, with lots of practical suggestions.

How Does Your Engine Run?

by Mary S. Williams, Sherry Shellenberger.

The OT department has adapted material in this book for use in Parkside's classrooms.

Smart Moves: Why Thinking Isn't All in Your Head

by Carla Hannaford.

More on what learning and movement have in common.

Learning Disabilities Online

www.ldonline.org

An invaluable resource for anyone interested in any subject related to learning differences. For a sensory integration approach to handwriting difficulties, as well as a novel take on learning math, go to LD Online's website and type "sensory integration" in the search box. Then read the first three articles listed.

Money Matters

FALL FEATURES

The Gift Wrap Drive and the Book Fair, the Parent Association's traditional fall fundraisers, were rousing successes, in both cases exceeding the previous year's achievements. The **Gift Wrap Drive** netted **\$6000**, or double last year's total. Over 50% of Parkside families participated. If you missed the sale or find that you need more wrapping paper, you can still participate by visiting the Innisbrook website (www.innisbrook.com) and ordering over the web. Enter **Parkside's number—116759**—and the school will receive 50% of your purchase.

The **Parkside Bookfair**, co-chaired by **Lauren Beck, Suzanne Engel** (Shira, 4-3) and **Daphne Hicks** (Henry, 4-4), was also a great success. Parents, families and friends all joined in making this our best book fair ever. The school raised **\$3,700**, and in addition, hundreds of books have been added to the library, classrooms and the specialists' collections. A lasting bonus to all the books acquired for home and school is the real feeling of community and purpose this event creates among Parkside families.

—Deidre Freeman

ANNUAL APPEAL

With this holiday season hovering over us, it seems the right time to talk turkey about Parkside's financial future.

Days before committing to New Year's resolutions, Parkside parents are making new pledges for the yearly appeal. Last year, all 80 families contributed and raised a substantial amount— **\$277,000** for the fiscal year ending in **June 2003**.

It appears we will need to duplicate this spirited response again to compensate for the less-than-anticipated increase in financial support from New York State.

As with any school, certain expenditures are a given. Among this year's are greater staff-related expenses: Cathy Constable, the author and innovator of

the reading program used at Parkside, now works two days a week at the school; and a raise in teachers' salaries this year will help to ensure staff stability by keeping salaries competitive with other private schools.

Thus, the goal for the **2003-2004** Annual Appeal will increase to **\$350,000**, reports Albina Miller, administrative director. Renowned for her pragmatism, Miller is confident about the appeal's successful outcome. "So far, 47% of all families have turned in pledges and we are expecting the same 100% participation."

May this be the resolution we all get to keep.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

There is welcome news from the campaign steering committee, which is hard at work. The project's architect, Arthur Chabon, has prepared a final schematic plan for the restoration and renovation of the two Georgian mansions that house our school; and the contractors are giving bids for the first phase

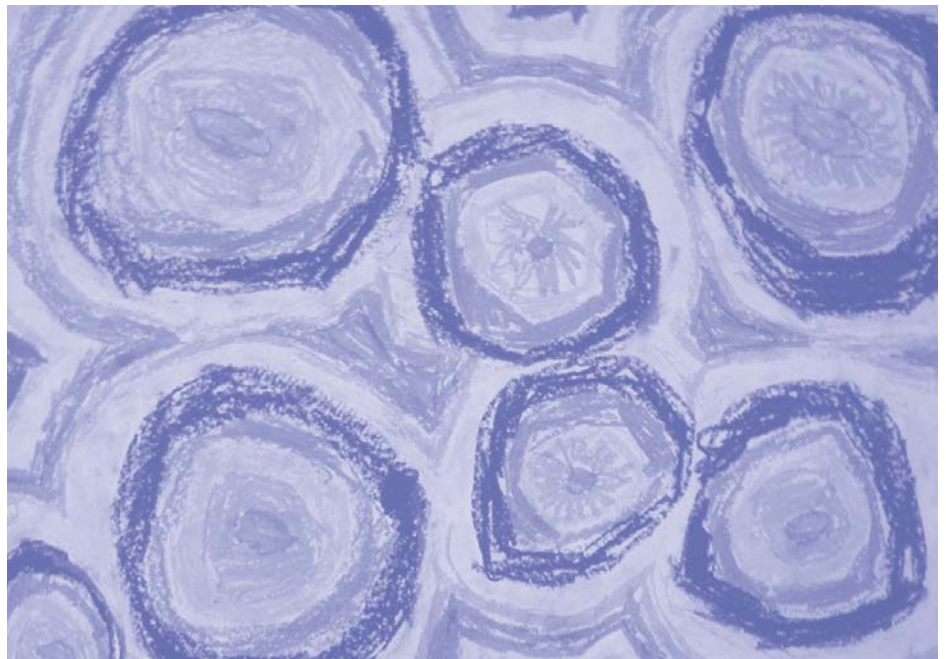
of the project—the demolition of the interior staircases on all five floors and in the basement.

If everything goes as planned, reports Albina Miller, work will begin this July. Parents will soon be receiving information detailing the three-year-campaign as well as how they can contribute. The campaign is to raise at least **\$2 million for the restoration and renovation** of the school, as well as a **\$1 million endowment**.

Even in its formative stages, this capital campaign rests on a far more solid foundation than when directors Leslie Thorne and Albina Miller as well as founding Board Member (and current Facility Manager) Tom Casey moved to the present location one steamy August month eleven years ago. "We were bare bones then," Albina recalls. "We had no money, no time, and we moved and settled in by ourselves. Now we have a steering committee to advise us and it's exciting."

Vive la différence. ■

— Lisa Redd



Artwork: Nicky Goutman (3-3).

A Special Day @ The Parkside School



The Music Man: Mr. Kennedy leads the lower school assembly in song for Grandparents' and Special Persons' Day.

What an exciting and stimulating literary experience having Miss Nelson, Bob the Builder, Curious George, Harry Potter, Swan Lake Barbie, Froggy, Clifford and a host of other kid-friendly characters camp out in the Parkside

milk-and-cookies-feeling kind of day! It gave grandparents and special friends of Parkside students an opportunity to visit the school, meet the dynamic staff, experience the stimulating classroom environments, view the beautiful art-

school library, waiting and hoping to be selected for the students' book wish lists.

In addition to these characters, some extra extra special guests visited the Parkside school on Friday, November 14th—grandparents and special persons.

“Grandparents' and Special Persons' Day” was a warm

work the students created, delight in the singing of Parkside's magnificent and talented students (upper and lower schools), preview the cabaret video that narrates future Parkside renovations, partake in delectable snacks, mix and mingle, and, last but not least, seek out those literary characters in an effort to fulfill the students' book wish lists. Phew...what a mission, but one that was accomplished, and definitely enjoyed, by all!

The numerous parent volunteers who greeted and assisted the Parkside guests helped to make this Grandparents and Special Persons day a great success. Family and friends delighted in experiencing the Parkside school atmosphere—some of them for the first time—and the children relished the opportunity to show off their classrooms on this extra special day.

—Inez D. Brown