Open Connections

2019-2020

“It all starts with the belief that people are natural learners.”

– Peter Bergson
Co-Founder, Open Connections

Freedom to Learn and Create
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“There is no difference between living and learning.”
– John Holt
What Is Open Connections?

We are a forward-thinking educational organization offering programs for youth ages 2 through 18. Youth attend OC programs 2-3 days a week and OC co-directors work with families to help them design what their non-OC days will look like (if the family wishes for this support). We refer to this approach as Partnership Education, as OC and the family work together to create and implement a vibrant, diverse and comprehensive educational (and life!) experience. Guided by our values and principles, we serve as a community base for young people and their families seeking an innovative, collaborative and Process Conscious educational environment.

At Open Connections, we have a VISION of a world where all young people develop the foundation for a self-directed life of purpose and fulfillment.

Our MISSION is to help young people and adults develop the tools needed to create the life they want, full of purpose and fulfillment. We do this in two ways:

- by providing an Open Education environment (the Open Connections Village) which fosters the guiding principles of Respect, Freedom, Responsibility and Natural Learning; and
- by working with others who share our principles and values in order to tip the balance from the traditional model of compulsory instruction over to a more organic, learner-directed approach based on self-motivation and the creative process.

We believe in the PRINCIPLES of

- Respect—for oneself, others and the environment;
- Freedom—to learn and create;
- Responsibility—supporting the foundation of a nurturing and positive social, physical and intellectual environment; and
- Natural Learning—the belief that all people have an innate desire to learn, grow, communicate, nurture and create.

And we VALUE

- Process Consciousness—paying attention to the way we do or say something so that the effects serve our highest goals and intentions;
- Creative Process—the way we move from the present to a desired future state, using various tools to build on current reality in order to achieve a chosen goal;
- Conceptual Development—the process of understanding, achieved by figuring things out, rather than by rote memorization of answers and techniques;
- Collaboration—working with others synergistically, with the belief that none of us is as smart as all of us;
- Real Work—work that is done for its own sake, rather than “busy work”;
- Community—building meaningful connections within both OC and the community at large;
- Connection—with ourselves, with others, and with the natural world;
- Personalization—helping families create personalized educational and life journeys;
- Exploration and Innovation—creating opportunities to engage in hands-on experiences that foster innovation and exploration;
- Life-Long Learning—where our natural curiosity guides us to continuously seek new experiences and learning opportunities; and
- Facilitating (vs. teaching)—OC staff serve as mentors and guides.

Our vision and mission combined with these principles and values guide the Open Connections Process.
Open Connections was born of the marriage of two growing bodies of knowledge, each shared by Co-Founders Susan Shilcock and Peter Bergson. One reflected the world of “alternative” or “progressive” education, as it was known in the 1960s, where experiential learning and individual development were advanced over rote memorization, and where self-motivation was based on individual passion rather than a fear of failure. The other body of knowledge was that of the creative group process known as Synectics®, where adults in the corporate world were learning how to recover the skills of Flexible Thinking and collaboration, which had been lost initially during years adapting to a “teach ‘em/test ‘em” school environment.

Ashley Montagu said that “the trick in life is to die young - as late as possible.” We then asked, “How could Open Connections foster the retention of our most positive childlike qualities into adulthood?” and mixed in John Holt’s notion that “The true test of intelligence is not how much we know how to do but how we behave when we don’t know what to do.”

In 1983, Open Connections began its transformation to its current format, which provides weekly programs for families seeking a more open and natural form of education. In June of 2000, Open Connections underwent a major expansion. Working with the Willistown Conservation Trust, neighbors and township officials, OC moved to its current location: a 28-acre historic farm/estate in Edgmont Township, Delaware County. We call our new home the Open Connections Village. Due to the enactment of conservation easements, the OC property, along with four adjoining residential parcels totaling an additional 50 acres, will remain largely open space.

Our History

In 1983, Open Connections began its transformation to its current format, which provides weekly programs for families seeking a more open and natural form of education. In June of 2000, Open Connections underwent a major expansion. Working with the Willistown Conservation Trust, neighbors and township officials, OC moved to its current location: a 28-acre historic farm/estate in Edgmont Township, Delaware County. We call our new home the Open Connections Village. Due to the enactment of conservation easements, the OC property, along with four adjoining residential parcels totaling an additional 50 acres, will remain largely open space.

In 1978, after three years of conducting workshops and consultations, Open Connections opened a preschool/kindergarten program in Bryn Mawr for three- to five-year-olds. In 1980, Peter and Susan began to codify key aspects of the OC philosophy by publishing their book, titled Open Connections: The OTHER Basics. In 1983, Peter continued his role as Director until 2008. During this time, Peter worked closely with the next generation of leadership to ensure a smooth transition. In 2008, Julia Bergson-Shilcock (offspring of Peter and Susan), Mike Hilbert and Rick Sleutaris moved into the roles of Co-Directors. Today, along with 25 other dedicated staff members and supported by a vibrant Board of Directors (including Peter), this team continues the legacy of Peter and Susan, while also working continuously to enhance and improve OC’s offerings.

We are looking forward to another creative and engaging program year. Thanks for joining us on this Partnership Education journey.

About Registration, Program Fees, Discounts and Financial Support

We invite you to look over the following program descriptions to see what might be of interest to your family. Interested families who are not currently enrolled at OC are asked to call (610) 459-3366 or e-mail us at info@openconnections.org to schedule an appointment. During our time together, both your family and OC will have an opportunity to see how/IF OC programs would enhance your youth’s educational experience. If you are a current OC family, thanks for your on-going involvement in our community. We strive to provide our services to all interested families regardless of their financial position. At the same time, we seek to achieve financial sustainability. Program fee reduction through program/administrative support or through financial aid (from our Friendship Fund) is available to those families who demonstrate financial need.

For those who can pay the full program fee, the rates are as follows:

- Pre-Open Program, a half-day program, is $1,650; additional Pre-Open Program siblings are $500;
- Open Program is $4,080 per program day of the week;
- Group Tutorials I and II, and all Choice Programs are $4,215 per program day of the week;
- Group Tutorials III and IV are two-day programs meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and are $8,430;
- Shaping Your Life, a two-day program meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays and running until 4pm, is $9,750.

All program fees include materials and supplies. Ten percent of the program fee is due at the time of registration. This first payment is fully applied to the program fee and is non-refundable.

To all parents, we thank you for your interest and appreciate your part in building this community of self-directed learners.
All programs at Open Connections have vertical age-groupings. The ages listed for each program aid in guiding Facilitators, parents and youth in selecting the program(s) that will best fit each youth—socially, developmentally and academically. The ages listed serve as a starting point for a broader conversation, which will take into account each youth’s current needs. At times, it may make sense for an eight-year-old to continue in the Open Program for another year before moving on to a Group Tutorial or Choice. Similarly, an eleven-year-old may continue to be in Group Tutorial II (vs. III) to have the opportunity to further develop certain skill sets in an environment where he or she can grow into a leadership role.

Please reach out to the appropriate Program Coordinator to discuss which program(s) will help foster your youth’s continued growth.

We repeatedly hear from alumni and current families that the biggest values they see in Open Connections are the following:

- Our philosophy, in particular what we refer to as Process Consciousness. The positive impact a family experiences when their youth joins the OC community is not just felt by the youth, but also by the family at large.
- Our exceptionally dedicated staff members. Our staff truly care about each young person, and work diligently to ensure that a positive OC experience is had by all. Conscious effort is put into creating meaningful and lasting connections with each youth.
- Our very low youth/Facilitator ratios that enable ample one-to-one interactions.
- The pro-social environment that is cultivated and nurtured among all community members. OC is a place where both ideas and people are respected, valued and heard.

Program Coordinators:

- **Approximate ages 2-3 (Pre-Open Program):** Allie Neilson (allie.neilson@openconnections.org)
- **Approximate ages 4-8 (Open Program):** Michelle Brockway (michelle.brockway@openconnections.org)
- **Approximate ages 7-12 (Group Tutorial I, II, III, and Choice):** Kelly Dillon (kelly.dillon@openconnections.org)
- **Approximate ages 13-18 (Group Tutorial IV and Shaping Your Life):** Mike Hilbert (mike.hilbert@openconnections.org)

The staff at Open Connections are comprised of a vibrant, committed and highly educated group of individuals, many of whom hold advanced degrees. They represent a diverse set of professions (from engineers to former public and private school teachers; lawyers to Master Naturalists). All staff members have been trained in OC’s distinctive body of knowledge, having participated in the OC Process training workshops. Additionally they have all spent significant time observing OC programs in action before becoming official staff members. Furthermore, they participate in 1-on-1 training with OC Co-Director Julia Bergson-Shilcock both initially and in an ongoing capacity. Lastly, the staff also engage in ongoing professional development workshops and trainings, both on-campus and off-site.

A number of staff members have spent time living, teaching or working internationally (from Japan to Macedonia), bringing a global perspective to their work (play!) at OC. What distinguishes the OC staff is their unparalleled commitment to providing meaningful learning opportunities in a collaborative and nurturing environment, as well as their desire and ability to develop lasting connections with the OC youth. In short, the OC staff are life-long learners, naturally curious about the world around them. OC is a home-away-from-home for our staff and many of them have been with us for well over a decade.

Of course, Open Connections does not discriminate, either in enrollment or employment, on the basis of race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin or ability to pay.

“When you figure things out for yourself, you learn you can figure things out, and that far outweighs any bit of information you might absorb about the content itself.”

– Peter Bergson, Co-Founder, Open Connections
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Fee*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Open Program</td>
<td>2- through 3-year-olds</td>
<td>10:00am to 12:00pm</td>
<td>$1,650 ($500 for additional sibling)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Program</td>
<td>4- through 8-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,080</td>
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**Mondays**

**Tuesdays**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Fee*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Program</td>
<td>4- through 8-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Tutorial I</td>
<td>7- through 8-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Tutorial II</td>
<td>9- through 10-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Tutorial III</td>
<td>11- through 12-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$8,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Tutorial IV</td>
<td>13- through 14-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$8,430</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shaping Your Life</td>
<td>15- through 18-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 4:00pm</td>
<td>$9,750</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended Day</td>
<td>7- through 14-year-olds</td>
<td>2:15pm to 4:00pm</td>
<td>$590</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

All programs run from September 16, 2019 through June 1, 2020.

All program fees include materials.

*A reduced program fee through financial aid from our Friendship Fund or through barter may be available for families who qualify for assistance.
### Wednesdays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Fee*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Program</td>
<td>4- through 8-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice I</td>
<td>8- through 10-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice II</td>
<td>10- through 12-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice III</td>
<td>13- through 16-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,215</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended Day</td>
<td>7- through 14-year-olds</td>
<td>2:15pm to 4:00pm</td>
<td>$590</td>
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</tbody>
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*All programs run from September 16, 2019 through June 1, 2020.
*All program fees include materials.
*A reduced program fee through financial aid from our Friendship Fund or through barter may be available for families who qualify for assistance.

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### Thursdays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Fee*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Program</td>
<td>4- through 8-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Tutorial I</td>
<td>7- through 8-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Tutorial II</td>
<td>9- through 10-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>$4,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Tutorial III</td>
<td>11- through 12-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>see page 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Tutorial IV</td>
<td>13- through 14-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 2:15pm</td>
<td>see page 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping Your Life</td>
<td>15- through 18-year-olds</td>
<td>9:15am to 4:00pm</td>
<td>see page 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Day</td>
<td>7- through 14-year-olds</td>
<td>2:15pm to 4:00pm</td>
<td>$590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theater I</td>
<td>7- through 10-year-olds</td>
<td>2:15pm to 4:00pm</td>
<td>$810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theater II</td>
<td>11- through 14-year-olds</td>
<td>2:15pm to 4:00pm</td>
<td>$810</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“We don’t receive wisdom; we discover it for ourselves by a voyage that no one can take for us, a voyage that no one can spare us.”

– Marcel Proust
This program is designed for youth 2-3 years and their parent(s) (or caregiver). Much like the Open Program (see page 15), this course offers time for youth to let their natural curiosity flourish. The program space will be stocked with developmentally appropriate materials that nurture Natural Learning and Flexible Thinking. This hands-on program will explore the numerous intersections of parenting and education and how, as parents, we can encourage and foster Natural Learning in our young people.

The first part of each day will include new activities for the youth and their parent to explore, along with additional rotating manipulatives and books. Parents are encouraged to follow their youth’s lead, which means that sometimes they may choose to engage in all of the offerings, while other times they may become engrossed in one particular activity and stick with that for much of the time. In addition to these activities, each week we will offer time for snack, reading and outside exploration on our 28-acre campus.

While the focus, of course, will first and foremost be on the young people during program time, it is also an opportunity for parents to meet like-minded individuals and expand their own peer networks. While the program is officially a two hour program, parents and youth are invited to stay late to socialize with other group members and eat lunch. This time serves as an opportunity for further connection-making as well as a chance to explore the OC property. Over the course of the program year, discussion topics will include the following:

- What is Partnership Education and how will it benefit our family?
- What can I do now to reinforce Natural Learning?

Additionally, participants will learn about and explore:
- Setting boundaries that work;
- Nurturing Flexible Thinking;
- Understanding and promoting true development vs. rote memorization;
- Role-playing (“What do I do/say when my youth _____?”).

The Pre-OP is a likely fit for families who are strongly considering the path of Partnership Education and are looking to expand their network of like-minded individuals so when their young people are ready for the Open Program at age 4, they already have roots and connections in the OC community.

“I am always ready to learn, but I do not always like to be taught.”

– Winston Churchill
All of the Open Programs reflect the essence of the Open Connections philosophy: a belief in Natural Learning, curiosity and the primacy of self-motivation, collaboration and the creative process. Within certain wide parameters, including respect for the rights of others, young people decide how, and with whom, they spend their day in an Open Program. One of our main goals is to keep alive the flame of curiosity that is present in this age group.

Although no two days look exactly alike in the Open Program, there are certain threads that, when woven together, comprise what most closely resembles a “typical day.” A key component of this program is the belief that young people are naturally curious about the world around them, and that this natural curiosity will flourish in a self-directed atmosphere. Therefore, young people may choose to work with real tools in the workshop; design a marble rollway; sew a pillow; explore fractions with math manipulatives; write a story or poem; take apart an old telephone; experiment with batteries, bulbs and motors; or explore the world in a hundred other ways. These opportunities help youth become confident decision-makers and initiators.

While we place value on self-direction, we also recognize the “I don’t know what I don’t know” perspective/phenomenon and therefore include some Facilitator-initiated activities each day. Youth are invited to participate in activities designed to support their Conceptual Development, initiating the type of higher-level thinking that allows academics to be truly understood rather than merely memorized. These activities serve as building blocks for youth who are looking to explore academics in a hands-on and developmentally appropriate atmosphere. Examples of such CD challenges are working with Montessori beads to develop the concept of place value; or working with scales, beakers and liquids to explore the concepts of weight, measurement and volume. Such activities serve as tools to help create a strong foundation in preparation for their time in Group Tutorial programs (starting at age seven or eight) and, more importantly, for life skills.

There is also emphasis on building collaborative social skills — learning how to create win-win relationships. Facilitators and young people actively participate in developing ways to include others, offer friendly language, find constructive and mutually satisfying solutions to disagreements and engage in other positive social behaviors.

Facilitators spend significant planning time working to create an engaging and enriching environment that helps to foster each youth’s personal and intellectual growth. As believers in a holistic educational (and life) experience, Facilitators offer activities and materials that nurture the youth’s Multiple Intelligences (as defined by Howard Gardner).

Participants also take advantage of OC’s 28-acre property. From exploring the creeks and ponds to hiking in the woods, from free play in the sand pit to playing games on the blacktop, the Open Program offers ample time for youth to experience life’s natural beauty.

In sum, the Open Program experience affords youth both the time and the space to be tinkerers, explorers, creators and problem solvers, while simultaneously offering outlets to further develop their intellectual curiosity and social interactions in a warm, safe and pro-social environment.

The Open Program is likely a fit for youth who: show signs of independence; express a desire to interact with peers; are independent in bathroom use; have the ability to control physical and verbal impulses; are respectful of themselves, others and the materials; and understand boundaries and checking in before leaving an area.

“What we want to see is the child in pursuit of knowledge, not knowledge in pursuit of the child.”

– George Bernard Shaw
Group Tutorials expose youth to academics in a non-threatening and experiential mode. Emphasis is placed on process over product, on reasoning versus grasping for quick answers, on respecting the developmental level of each young person and on promoting a positive and collaborative social atmosphere. Each multi-age group is an excellent format for fostering varied levels of intellectual development, because every youth is both a peer and a mentor. The programs vary in content and are designed to be taken together to create a holistic educational experience that exposes youth to all of the Multiple Intelligences as defined by Howard Gardner. Group Tutorial Facilitators collaborate with one another to ensure that each program is serving as a building block for the next. On the following pages are some examples of the types of activities and concepts to which youth will be exposed at each age level. Given that the groups meet only 5 to 10 hours a week, it is unrealistic to expect that youth will master (truly conceptually understand) all concepts. Our goal is to introduce youth to a wide range of content areas, with the understanding that parents will then be able to build on these same themes when working with their youth on their non-OC days. This is Partnership Education in practice! OC Facilitators are always happy to speak with parents individually to talk about their observations of a specific youth and which areas a family may want to delve into deeper at home. Remember, Facilitators can be an invaluable resource, so please do not hesitate to reach out.

Group Tutorial I
Ages 7 through 8
Tuesday Group Tutorial I includes exposure to the whole spectrum of Multiple Intelligences, with an emphasis on the Intelligences that are more deeply rooted in logic, mathematics and the sciences. Youth often work in small clusters, with ample time for Facilitators to work closely with them. Some of the specific concepts the youth will be exposed to include: basic scientific concepts; basic math (addition, subtraction); estimation; measurement; reading comprehension; group discussion/public speaking; logic puzzles; further understanding of OC core values and philosophy; basic graphing; creative problem-solving; and effective communication. Further types of activities will include: cooking; robotics; and collaborative group games.

Thursday Group Tutorial I offers a forum for youth to engage in activities and projects with particular focus on the Humanities, Service Learning, Cultures, the Arts, and Environmental Exploration. Focus areas include: Service Learning—acts of service to others both at OC and within the community at large; Cultures, explored through language, history, geography, music, stories, food, crafts and celebrations; the Arts/Creativity, explored through woodworking, music/dance, sculpture/clay and painting/murals.

Group Tutorial I youth will present a Mini Peer Facilitation on either Tuesday or Thursday.

Group Tutorial I is likely a fit for youth who: are seeking Facilitator-initiated activities (that still, of course, incorporate some ideas and wishes from the youth); show a desire to participate in collaborative/group activities; recognize and can write the letters of the alphabet and “sight words” (phonetically or accurately); are either beginner or fluent readers; and have a developing number sense including one-to-one correspondence, as well as a conceptual understanding of basic addition and subtraction.
Tuesday Group Tutorial II is designed for youth who are ready for collaborative group learning experiences. Activities will be planned to integrate a variety of academic areas including exposure to the whole spectrum of Multiple Intelligences. Emphasis will be placed on the Intelligences that are more deeply rooted in the humanities, with a focus on hands-on, project-based work. Some projects and topics will be one-time events while others will continue for multiple weeks.

Youth often work in small clusters, with ample time for Facilitators to work closely with them as they explore such content areas as writing, language arts, and civics/government, as well as youth-initiated community service projects. Some of the specific concepts the youth will be exposed to include: creative writing; art; cultures; current event discussions; and Flexible Thinking challenges.

Youth will also have the opportunity to conduct a Peer Facilitation including a written component. These self-directed projects provide the framework for each youth to choose, research, develop and present his or her own findings and creations in a group setting. Emphasis is also placed on building a pro-social and collaborative work and play environment.

Thursday Group Tutorial II will focus on science and math. Some of the math and science will be through the lens of a Naturalist. Youth are introduced to basic naturalist principles such as ecology, zoology and botany, utilizing observation skills in a hands-on and collaborative setting. Youth will become keenly aware of the many ways mathematics weaves its way into the natural world. Emphasis will be placed on developing and honing the youth’s naturalist skills through Real Work endeavors such as designing and clearing nature trails, cooking over an outdoor fire, preserving food using methods such as smoking or canning, and utilizing OC’s 28-acre campus. Additionally, there will be opportunities for service learning through local volunteering.

Citizen Science is a Real Work opportunity to act locally and contribute globally. These projects develop critical thinking and analytical skills through the examination of data collected. We will also take time to dip into the well of literature inspired by the natural world. Furthermore, self-expression through word and picture are encouraged through journal entries, introducing youth to the practice of taking field notes. Youth will share with their peers individual experiment-based Science Projects, which will serve as an outlet for youth to explore a science-related curiosity.

Additional math and science-related content that falls outside of the Naturalist scope will also be incorporated.

“Curiosity is one of the most permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous intellect.”

– Samuel Johnson
Group Tutorial III is a two-day program, meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays, providing time for the pre-teens to delve deeply into activities and projects. This program is designed for youth who are looking to engage in collaborative activities and experiences. Activities will integrate the whole spectrum of Multiple Intelligences.

On Tuesdays, emphasis will be placed on the Intelligences that are more deeply rooted in the humanities. Youth will engage in collaborative group problem solving and team-building activities and further develop their communication skills (written and oral). A deeper exploration of language arts could include an examination of, and practical work in, poetry, short stories, novels, essays and journalism. Youth will complete a Comprehensive Project, which is a more formalized and advanced version of a Peer Facilitation. It incorporates a written component and offers youth the opportunity to hone both their research and writing skills.

Activities will integrate academic areas with hands-on, project-based work. Some projects and topics will be one-time events while others will continue for a number of weeks, offering time for deeper exploration. Using the broader community as a living framework, young people will be given the opportunity to take action to make a positive impact in the world and understand its complexities. Youth-driven interests will inspire the group to explore multiple areas of study to broaden and deepen their understanding of the world around them.

Thursdays will focus on science and math. Some of the math and science will be through the lens of a Naturalist. Youth are introduced to basic naturalist principles such as ecology, zoology and botany, utilizing observation skills in a hands-on and collaborative setting. Youth will become keenly aware of the many ways mathematics weaves its way into the natural world. Emphasis will be placed on developing and honing the youth’s naturalist skills through Real Work endeavors such as designing and clearing nature trails, cooking over an outdoor fire, preserving food using methods such as smoking or canning, and utilizing OC’s 28-acre campus. Additionally, there will be opportunities for service learning through local volunteering.

“Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire.”
– William Butler Yeats
Group Tutorial IV is a two-day program, meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays, providing time for the teens to delve deeply into activities and projects. Strong emphasis is placed on development of effective communication skills—in oral, written and computational form. Special attention is given to this age with a focus on providing teens with the tools necessary to continue making healthy and educated decisions as they develop into autonomous young adults. Interest surveys guide much of the content planning, as this program fosters the expectation that youth at this age are becoming increasingly responsible for creating their own positive Partnership Education experiences.

Over the course of the two days, youth will be exposed to the whole spectrum of Multiple Intelligences. On Tuesdays the focus is on the humanities, current events, collaborative group activities and problem-solving skills. Youth will complete a Comprehensive Project that incorporates a written component in addition to a TED Talk style presentation. Emphasis is placed on writing as a process, and youth will craft multiple drafts. Program time directed toward the Comprehensive Projects is reserved for topic and thesis creation, the development of research and writing skills, and the scripting of the TED Talk. Therefore, it is important to note that the majority of research and written work related to the Comprehensive Projects will occur outside of program time.

On Thursdays the focus will be on math and science. Mathematical development includes essential skills, problem solving and logical thinking. Youth will also develop core science competencies in our fully-equipped lab and inquiry skills through their exploration of the natural world. Teens will be exposed to a variety of disciplines such as the life, physical and chemical sciences. They will also engage in creating and conducting independent research that they will present at a Science Expo at Open Connections. Youth will be exposed to working in Google Sheets and will continue to develop their understanding of statistical operations, graphing, and data tables. The inquiry-based format of this program fosters the development of hypothesis-testing, critical thinking, and understanding experimental design. Unlike younger Tutorial programs, the bulk of the Group Tutorial Expo work will be completed during program time.

Group Tutorial IV is likely a fit for youth who: are seeking Facilitator-initiated activities (that still, of course, incorporate some ideas and wishes from the youth); show a desire to participate in collaborative/group activities; are proficient in basic mathematical operations, including long division and multiple-digit multiplication; demonstrate ability to follow and contribute to oral discussions and debates; show ability to write proficiently for communication; handle peer challenges directly; and seek Facilitator support or guidance whenever deemed necessary. Youth in this program have the opportunity to demonstrate increasing maturity and self-management as they prepare for the significant degree of independent and self-directed learning that takes place in the Shaping Your Life program.
Choice Programs
Ages 8 through 16

Choice I (8 through 10 year olds)
Choice II (10 through 12 year olds)
Choice III (13 through 16 year olds)

Choice I, II and III offer young people the chance to explore eight different content areas of their choice each year over the course of four 8-week segments. For example, a youth might spend the first 8 weeks of the year engaged in Makerspace projects or Cooking and Chemistry each Wednesday morning, have lunch and community-building social time, then move on to Lego Mindstorms or Woodworking for the afternoon. New Choices are offered every eight weeks. For each of the four 8-week segments, there are two or three morning and two or three afternoon options from which to choose. Our goal is to provide new input, appropriate amounts of invited instruction, and space for self-motivation to emerge. The 8-week segment format of these programs allows for youth to truly immerse themselves in subject/content-specific areas for an extended period of time.

The middle hour of the Choice day is a chance for young people who have been in different pursuits to come together and reconnect, followed by outside games. In true Choice fashion, some weeks the youth choose the game, while other weeks the Facilitators select the group activity. The staff choose games that will build stronger ties within the group and allow young people to be challenged by activities or roles that are new to them. For instance, a young person who is generally reserved might be given a leadership role in a game, while a more extroverted youth may be given a role that encourages him or her to develop observation skills. Some weeks these collaborative games are played within the young person’s individual Choice program and others are played as a whole community. This gives everyone an opportunity to connect and build skills in working with people of various ages. As always, the goal is to provide an atmosphere that fosters deep connection-making and respectful interactions among both peers and Facilitators. This middle hour of the day has proven to be a valuable time for young people to tap into their Interpersonal and Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligences in a safe and nurturing environment.

The Choice programs are scaled to meet the developmental, social and academic needs of the youth, with Choice I serving as a building block for Choice II, and Choice II preparing pre-teens for the content they will be exposed to in Choice III.

Choice programs are likely a fit for youth who: are seeking Facilitator-initiated activities (that still, of course, incorporate some ideas and wishes from the youth); and show a desire to participate in collaborative/group activities.

Choice I is likely a fit for youth who: are reading and writing independently (for content and discussion), and demonstrate proficiency in adding and subtracting.

Learning is not the product of teaching. Learning is the product of the activity of the learner.”
— John Holt

Choice II is likely a fit for youth who: have mastered the skills outlined above and also demonstrate proficiency in multiplying and dividing, reading aloud in a group setting, and engaging in group discussions and debates.

Choice III is likely a fit for youth who: have demonstrated proficiency in the skills outlined above, and who are also proficient in basic mathematical operations, including long division and multiple-digit multiplication; demonstrate ability to follow and contribute to oral discussions and debates; show ability to write proficiently for communication; handle peer challenges directly; and seek Facilitator support or guidance whenever deemed necessary.
Creating a fulfilling, enriching and dynamic educational experience for the “high school” years can be an exciting, yet daunting task. OC can play an integral role in actualizing a family’s goals (both the teen’s and the parents’). The goal of the Shaping Your Life program is to expose teens to a wide array of content areas and skill sets that we believe are critical in their becoming thoughtful, dynamic and engaged participants in society.

SYL is a two-day program, meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays until 4pm, providing time for the teens to delve deeply into both independent and group activities and projects.

On Tuesdays participants will mostly focus on math and the sciences, in an “OC way” (the importance of truly understanding a concept, rather than rote memorization), and take advantage of OC’s picturesque 28-acre campus (including ponds, a creek, and woods), as well as our Science Lab and Makerspace Room. The process of how concepts are introduced is instrumental to our approach. With that in mind, the most important aspect of our program is placing math and science in a meaningful context to young people. Teens are excited by the prospect of doing work that has meaning and relevance to them. We are fortunate that we are not tied down to a set curriculum, thus allowing for a collaborative experience between Facilitators and teens to emerge when deciding on specific topics to explore. Young people fill out self-assessments and topic suggestion surveys four times over the course of our program year to help guide us in our planning. The beauty and excellence of this structure is that our group can be responsive to the curiosity and developmental progress of the young people within the group.

The extended day (2pm-4pm) is used to explore individual or collaborative projects that pertain to the teens’ own interests surrounding math and science. Young people utilize this time to conduct experiments, build machines, and create computer programs or engage in myriad other activities that further their own development and allow them to pursue their passions. The teens then present their findings and completed creations to the group. These presentations serve as an ideal forum for teens to continue to gain confidence in their presentation and public speaking skills, laying the framework for their larger, more in-depth Symposium event (see details below).

On Thursdays, the SYL program focuses primarily on the humanities, and offers time for youth-directed projects, small group academic study, the development of practical skills, and occasional trips to other sites in the community. The day is generally divided into three segments. The first part of the day is focused on Facilitator-designed activities that represent Language Arts, Civics, and Life Skills. While some mornings might be exclusively focused on discrete subject areas, the group often enjoys the interconnectedness of the humanities. For example, a current event topic like a Presidential Election allows us the opportunity to do research on candidates’ positions on different issues. A natural progression into a public speaking exercise often follows, where young people take on the persona of various candidates, speaking on their behalf in a large group debate. Life Skills is one area that has been added to the morning content because the teens have specifically asked for it. They are on the cusp of adulthood and want practical knowledge on a variety of real-life experiences: applying to college, renting an apartment, filing taxes, etc. Guest speakers and workshops on relevant topics are periodically offered, exposing the youth to different career options and discussing issues of safety, mental and physical health, and personal development.

During the second segment, youth carry on projects, have Symposium feedback meetings, and engage in independent projects and group activities. This is also the time when young people select

“Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him and let him know that you trust him.”

– Booker T. Washington
different committees on which to serve for their large-scale collaborative project. This project has always taken the form of an overnight trip. Some places the group has traveled to in the past include Baltimore, New York City, Washington, D.C., and Boston. The young people are in charge of planning every aspect of the trip, such as executing fundraisers, researching the location, choosing activities and booking hotel rooms and museum tickets.

A third segment offers the opportunity to choose subjects to study in depth with a small group of peers, led by veteran Facilitators and special Guest Facilitators. The goal is to offer more advanced and direct academic content in a meaningful context. Topics often revolve around a particular theme in order to build connections between disciplines. Facilitators and young people work together to create the topic choices. Recent examples of afternoon offerings include Computer Modeling, Shakespeare, Folklore, Filmmaking and Cooking.

The SYL group hosts a Symposium, during which teens present the findings of an individual investigation or study to a community-wide audience. Mike and Lucy (Facilitators) provide support for the projects, although the majority of the research and preparation is self-initiated and takes place outside of program time. The Symposium offers a forum for the teens to tackle a long-term project of their choosing in a self-directed environment.

Both days allow for the natural curiosity of the teens to unfold organically. It empowers young people as learners when we honor and pursue their questions. SYL teens utilize the countless resources available on OC’s 28-acre campus. In addition to their dedicated program spaces, the teens spend time: creating and exploring using out laser cutter etcher, 3-D printers, vinyl printer, etc. in the Makerspace; building in the Woodshop; designing and making clothing in the Sewing Room; discussing music theory or engaging in an impromptu jam session in the Music Room; exciting their taste buds as they cook with locally-grown food in the Kitchen; or utilizing the bounty of open space to play large group games outside.

In sum, SYL exposes teens to content areas and topics they may not typically gravitate towards, gently pushing them outside of their comfort zones and expanding their horizons. Particular emphasis is placed on fostering a collaborative, nurturing and pro-social learning and play environment. OC’s Process Conscious approach lays the framework for teens to feel comfortable expressing their beliefs, pursuing their ideas, and uncovering their hidden talents. The collaborative nature of the program invites connection-making and strengthens the teens’ sense of belonging, and their ability to make meaningful contributions to group experiences. Shaping Your Life is likely a fit for youth who are able to: self-advocate to meet their academic, social and emotional needs; demonstrate an ability to work independently and stay on task without constant/direct supervision; demonstrate proficiency in conversion between decimals, fractions and percentages; have familiarity with how to conduct research, create a bibliography, avoid plagiarism, and cite sources; and take initiative and actively engage in an ongoing process to expand both their educational and real world skill development.

“Education is a social process. Education is growth. Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.”

– John Dewey
Extended Day and Theater Programs
Ages 7 through 14

Extended Day (7- through 14-year olds)
Tuesday Program
Wednesday Program
Thursday Program

Think “after care,” but done in the OC way. This program is designed to offer families a way for youth to extend their OC day until 4:00pm. A supply of board games and card games, simple building materials (such as Kapla blocks, Legos and K’nex) and basic art and sewing supplies will be available. Youth will also have access to the outside for kinesthetic play in all kinds of weather. This program is a wonderful opportunity for multiple ages to spend time playing and working together. Targeted towards youth who have demonstrated their ability to be self-directed, this program will be overseen by an adult Facilitator and participants are expected to be self-managing and work collaboratively with other group members to create a peaceful and pro-social environment for all involved.

Theater Programs

These programs are designed for youth interested in being in a play. This is a great opportunity to develop performance skills while also taking part in the collaborative effort of creating a theatrical production. Emphasis will initially be placed on acting exercises in voice, movement and character development. The focus will then shift to rehearsing for the group’s springtime theatrical production. We anticipate that additional rehearsals will need to be scheduled as the performance date approaches. The dress rehearsals will be on Monday, May 11th during the day. The Theater I & II performances will occur back-to-back on Thursday, May 14th at 3pm and Saturday, May 16th at 7pm.

For the Theater II program, the approach and content are scaled up to meet the social and developmental needs of the older youth.

In addition to our weekly programs, Open Connections offers many events throughout the program year that are open to the entire OC community. These events provide additional opportunities for young people and adults to make and/or strengthen connections with each other. Such events include (but are not limited to):

- Family Work Day
- New Family Orientation
- Open Mic and Potluck
- Community Days
- Parents’ Meetings
- OC Film Festival
- OC Family Dance
- Open Connections Teen Symposium
- “What About Portfolios?” Workshop
- Pausing Ceremony
- Community Resource Fair
- Community Marketplace
- Theater Performances
- OC Family Dance
- OC Community Events
Open Connections provides additional services to current OC families. For more information, or to register for any of these programs/services, please call (610) 459-3366.

Open Connections Educational Consulting
Educational Consulting options are tailored to the individual family and youth. Typical services include (but are not limited to) the following:

• Working with the youth (and parents, when requested) to develop the big picture;
• Identifying areas of interest and helping to locate and secure tutors, mentors and other useful resources;
• Working to obtain an internship/apprenticeship;
• Identifying long-term goals and finding ways to work towards those goals;
• Helping to navigate the college search process; and
• Assistance with applying to colleges (or signing up for individual college courses).

As Co-Directors of Open Connections, Mike Hilbert and Julia Bergson-Shilcock conduct the Educational Consulting at Open Connections.

Evaluations
For families registered with their school district under the Home Education Law, one of the requirements is an annual evaluation with a PA-certified teacher or licensed school or clinical psychologist. We provide this service for interested families. Please call us at 610-459-3366 for details.

Test Preparation and Testing
Home Education Law requires youth to take a standardized test in third, fifth, and eighth grades. Open Connections offers a half-day “test prep” in the late winter in order to familiaize both parents and youth with what to expect if they take their test at OC. The Prep Session includes a chance to practice and ask questions about both the process and the content of the tests. We administer the tests in May to interested families.

Open Connections is located at 1616 Delchester Road in Edgmont Township, Delaware County, PA, just over 5 miles west of Newtown Square and 8 miles east of West Chester. Directions to OC are as follows:

From the Blue Route (I-476): Take exit 9 (Broomall/Upper Darby/Newtown Square). From the exit ramp, follow Route 3 west, towards and through Newtown Square. Cross Route 252 and Providence Road (VW/Audi dealer on left). Continue on Route 3 until you see Teikoku restaurant on the right. Get into the left lane and turn left at the light onto Delchester Road. Stay on Delchester for 7/10 mile. You will pass Stackhouse Mill Road, then see our sign and driveway on the right. If you get to White Horse Village on your left, you just missed us.

From West Chester/Downingtown: Follow Route 3 east to Delchester Road. Turn right on to Delchester and follow the instructions above.

From Media and the south: Take Route 352 to Gradyville Road. Turn right, at the Sunoco station, onto Gradyville Road. Soon after turning on to Gradyville, you’ll come down a hill and see the Edgmont Township building on the right. The road will fork at a stop sign. Bear left onto Delchester Road. Continue on Delchester past White Horse Village on your right. Continue down the hill and turn left into our driveway. If you get to Stackhouse Mill Road, you just missed us.
To learn more about Open Connections, visit our website at openconnections.org or give us a call at: 610-459-3366.