

October 2013

INSIDE THE WOODS

Coming Up in October

Chili, anyone?

Our annual chili Cook-Off and Halloween Festival will be on Sunday, October 27. The Cook-Off is a favorite of our school community. You just can't not be there.

This chilihead event needs two things: lots of parent volunteers and a bunch of chili cooks. You can sign up for both of these with the **SignUpGenius button** on the School website. Two planning sessions will be held on October 2 and October 16. So pick up the ball and run with it.

All the grand food will be there, besides the cooks' chili – James Coney Island hotdogs, Goode Co. House chili, desserts, drinks, and of course, the many activities for the kids. Don't forget the Student Talent Show, too, and **THE HAUNTED CEMETERY!**

Your ticket covers everything above, except raffle tickets for lots of great items will be sold separately.

WMS teacher Patrick Phipps will serve as DJ for the day.

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Edited by Eloise Rochelle

Parent Education events continue

Be sure to refer to the calendar on page 8 for all the dates for Parent Education occurring in October. These are under the aegis of our Parents' Organization and you will find participation in all of them rewarding.

Special note about the Book Club: Even though the date is not until February 27, you would be wise to purchase the book now or soon. Reading the book is required for participation. Its title is *Your Brain at Work* by David Rock.

Flower Power sales are right now!

The window for ordering your Christmas greenery and Poinsettias is narrow – October 1 through 14, so be sure to place your order as soon as possible. These decorative items are high quality and will add to your holiday enjoyment. Proceeds go to classroom budgets.

Beware the Hobgoblins

October 31 – Halloween; a day of pretending. That's the day all of our Early Childhood students take over the campus, decked out in their finest disguises. They parade around and through the classrooms, placing spells on everyone.

We'll have photos of this nefarious bunch in the next issue.

"I think that maybe if women and children were in charge we would get somewhere."

James Thurber, 1894-1961
Humorist/Cartoonist

Promises, Promises, Promises

In building healthy relationships it is important that our words and our actions match positively. Where we can get into trouble is making promises. Once we make a promise, we have put our integrity on the line. Circumstances may change that make our commitment untenable, but to our children a bond of trust has been broken. Our children don't understand that the trip to the fair is cancelled because of flooding. They only see that you broke a promise. Due to circumstances beyond your control you go from being the fairy godmother or godfather to the big bad ogre. Who said life was fair?

One thing you can control is this: Don't make promises unless you are 100% sure you can follow through. In our culture it is easy to use the word promise and then push that promise aside when the circumstances change. In the case of committing to go to the fair, perhaps we don't mention going to the fair until the day of the fair, when we know that there are no obstacles to our success.

Another situation. Perhaps we tell our children we'll "think about" getting a horse, then forget to bring up the subject again. What a breeding ground for discouragement in our children. Having weekly family meetings allows us as parents to ask the children to put the item on the agenda. This helps make our children more responsible and also gives us time to think, without having to make, that's right, a promise.

Another downside of making promises is that we can get sucked into the "but Mommy/Daddy said" game. We make a promise to our children without checking it out with our partner and the children will try to divide and conquer, putting both parents (grandparents, aunts and uncles can also be hapless victims of this game) at odds with each other.

When we make few if any promises, while we manage to keep our words and actions in positive congruence, we model personal integrity to our children. This places us in a favorable position when we are faced with our children making promises to us and not keeping them. "I don't make or take promises," we can tell our children when they promise that they'll do their homework after their favorite show, or they'll do extra chores to pay back a loan for something above and beyond. The list can get long quickly. We can simply tell them that when they have finished their homework or done the extra chores, whatever the case may be, then we'll know that they are ready for the next step.

Helping our children learn to walk their talk and to positively match their words and actions, can be done when we are careful about promises, promises, promises

Maren E. Schmidt, M.Ed.
www.kidstalk.com

Good times are just around the corner . . .

Hold this date: Friday, March 7

That's the date of School of the Woods' next bi-annual super gala

Details are being finalized now – out to everybody soon!

Relationship Skills

Dr. Montessori saw the child as a whole being and considered not only the academic life of the child, but also the social, emotional and spiritual. The Montessori classroom offers the child opportunities to learn how to work cooperatively with others and independently solve problems as they arise in a way that is respectful to all involved. These skills will serve the child well for a lifetime.

At the beginning of each school year, a set of classroom rules is created, with the input of the children and teachers. At the center of these rules is the need to be respectful of others. Rules allow for the creation of an environment in which the children can feel safe, an important factor in creating a learning environment. The children also have the opportunity to input their own ideas, and thus are more likely to have the desire to follow the rules. The school itself has a master plan for conduct and the solving of extraordinary behavior issues. If problems persist the child's teachers and parents form a team to aid the child in the process.

Personal and group problem solving skills are taught in the classroom as opportunities arise. The main principles of good problem solving, whether as a group or individually, remain the same:

1. Problem solving occurs in a way that is respectful of all involved,
2. Each person has the opportunity to express their feelings,
3. Each person must listen to the other person's viewpoint,
4. Solutions are brainstormed until a consensus is reached.

Children learn to follow an "I message" format, which encourages the other person to listen to and understand the difficulty, rather than to feel guilty or angry. The first part of an "I message" allows us to think about and state our feelings. This focuses our attention on the problem rather than on accusations against the offender. Then the specific problem and

how it affects us is stated clearly. In the last part of an "I message," we are given the opportunity to respond. One example of an "I message" is: "**I feel** (state your feelings) **when you** (describe the undesirable action_); **I would like** (state how the problem could be solved." The teachers guide and support this process.

Problems that involve larger groups of children are solved in a similar manner. The main focus of problem solving is to learn how to create solutions in which all involved are winners, rather than to have a winner and a loser. Win/win solutions to problems include a time for those involved to cool off. Then each person states his or her feelings and the problem as he or she sees it. "I messages" are used to accomplish this in a non-accusatory manner. Each person may state the problem as the other person sees it. Each person says how he or she is responsible for the problem. Ideas are brainstormed until a win/win solution can be found. Solutions may be used through a stated trial period and then be reevaluated. New solutions may be brainstormed if needed.

TO ASSIST YOUR CHILD in developing good relationships skills, please encourage this process:

- a. Using the "I" message, ask the other child to stop the behavior'
- b. If the behavior does not stop, inform the teacher.

Good relationships skills build individual confidence and group unity and cooperation. Often problems that occur between people are simple misunderstandings and can be resolved easily with an "I message." Each experience is an opportunity for better understanding of those around us as well as ourselves. With consistent and thoughtful problem solving techniques, we are able to create a classroom environment in which each child feels safe and valued.

Working on the "Staircase of the Mind"

By Elizabeth Stepankiw

What parents and teachers can do to integrate the "reptile brain" that allows you to act instinctually and make split-second survival decisions and the "mammal brain" that leads you toward connection and relationships.

When a child is upset emotionally, it is important to acknowledge the emotions of the right brain and bring in the factual details and the logic of the left brain. This allows the child to use both sides of the brain together to strengthen the connections and aids the brain in integrating its different parts. Helping the child make sense of the world leads to emotional and mental health and builds flexibility, adaptability, and stability.

Authors Daniel J. Sieger, MD, and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD remind us that we can imagine the parts of the brain and their functions in many ways. In our previous discussion relating to *The Whole-Brain Child*, the brain was described in terms of its two hemispheres, right and left. But another way to look at the brain is in terms of the "downstairs," the more primitive brain stem is responsible for basic physical functions and the fight and flight response, strong emotions, bodily functions, and instincts. The "upstairs," which includes the prefrontal cortex, is where higher order mental processes take place like the abilities to think things through, to imagine, and to make plans.

When a child's upstairs brain is working at its best, she is able to make decisions and plan for the future, control her emotions as well as her body (think before acting), have an understanding of herself, show empathy towards others, and demonstrate a sense of morality (considering how others feel). The good and bad news is, these two areas involve the sophisticated and complex higher-order thinking skills. While the downstairs brain, the center of emotional and physical feelings, is well developed at birth, the upstairs is one of the last parts of the brain to develop and is not fully mature until the child reaches her mid-twenties.

According to the authors, "the upstairs brain remains under massive construction for the first few years of life, then during the teen years undergoes an extensive remodel that lasts into adulthood" (pg. 41). And, not only is this upstairs under construction for all the growing years and into young adulthood, but during times of extreme stress, these functions are unavailable until the emotions have time to subside. This is the case at any time during our lives.

We can't expect our children to always be able to make the rational choice, to think before acting and consider consequences when the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed. We can, however, push it forward so our children are able to make rational and empathetic decisions more often.

The integration of these parts of the brain is needed to help the child fully develop his potential, both emotionally and academically. We want our children to learn to become more adept at using the upstairs part of the brain before deciding to take action on something going on with the downstairs. The authors call this vertical integration, as opposed to horizontal integration involving the two hemispheres of the brain.

Parents and teachers can use the powerful tools described by the authors to foster the integration of these parts of the developing brain. Exercising these muscles may not pay off immediately but will slowly build the brain functions children need to reach their full potential, have flexibility, and have a sense of calm inside themselves. Taking the everyday moments of living life will give these "muscles" continuous exercise and build a strong human being - one who is able to think before acting and to fully consider all the consequences of their actions.

An important strategy, "engage, don't enrage - appealing to the upstairs brain," involves asking ourselves which part of the child's brain we want to appeal to in a potentially emotional situation. Ultimatums are not constructive at these times. In an emotionally charged situation, it is useful to acknowledge that you see a welling emotion occurring and a potential emotional meltdown. The more precise and specific the words, the more effective they will be.

Ask the child if he knows why the feeling is occurring or make your best guess. Appeal to the upstairs by engaging him in problem-solving. Although children need to be respectful, it can be helpful to offer choices in a dicey situation rather than set off an emotional conflict. When children have to convince the parent or teacher of their idea for a solution by telling you how it will be good for both of you, then they get the gift of practicing problem solving and decision making. Such situations, though difficult, help develop the upstairs brain.

Another good practice to follow is, "use it or lose it-exercising the upstairs brain." The brain needs to be exercised to build its muscles. Give children the responsibility of making decisions when it is appropriate. For younger children offer two choices (both of which should be acceptable to you). Make room for more decision making responsibility as the child matures.

Giving children an allowance is also a good way to teach children how to grapple with making a decision and living with the consequences. Resist rescuing. Actively teach your child to stop and think before acting. Even small children can learn to do this. There are many props for this, including the popular one of taking a deep breath. Even though children may not always be able to stop and think first, they will get more and more practice as time goes on if we give this strategy to them. Asking specific questions about a given situation will help your child look a little deeper into their own understanding of what is happening. Ask questions that encourage your child to consider other people's feelings, "How do you think _____

feels?," helps develop empathy. Draw attention to people's feelings in everyday circumstances. It is also helpful to give your child a journal and encourage her to write down her feelings about daily events. She can draw a story of something that has happened if she is too young to write. A journal is not to be used to teach writing skills but rather to teach children to reflect on what is happening in their lives and to better "understand their internal landscape."

To promote the child's ability to think beyond his own needs, talk about hypothetical situations and ask him to think about what he thinks is right or wrong-children often love these exercises. "We want to be intentional about developing the upstairs brain of our children" (pg 52). Developing the upstairs will help balance out the downstairs; this is essential for building mental health and resiliency.

Another concept to follow is, "move it or lose it-moving the body to avoid losing the mind." Movement of the body has a direct effect on the chemistry of the brain. Sometimes when a child is teetering emotionally or rigidly unable to act, it is good to have him move his body. A lot of the emotion we feel originates in the body, like when we say we have butterflies in the stomach or when our shoulders feel tense. Moving the body can help with the integration of the upstairs and downstairs brains when there is an imbalance. It is also reasonable to use some creative loving trickery if your child is having trouble shifting.

The authors acknowledge that there are times when parents themselves are in survival mode and unable to do follow these strategies all the time. But if you take the opportunity when it is possible, it will help your relationship with your child flourish. Opportunities present themselves during the normal operations of the day; you don't have to do anything more than seize these opportunities and use them to build strength and resilience into your child's life. Keeping these strategies in mind as you go through the day with your child will empower her to be able to make appropriate

(Continued next page)

choices, affect her environment, and solve problems.

The difficulties of parenting and teaching are opportunities to facilitate growth in a positive way. The authors have added a convenient reference chart that lists the type of integration, the strategy to use (there are more), and its practical applications appropriate to the age span of the child: 0-3, 3-6, 6-9, and 9-12. Interestingly, these are the same groupings Montessori used in her Planes of Development to explain classroom grouping based on the similarities in development.

The Montessori classroom environment is arranged to give the child autonomy, which allows him to learn to make decisions, exercise movement, and have the opportunity for social interaction. We now know, based on current brain research, just how important daily experiences are in building the brain, shaping the person we will become.

Montessori held onto the idea that "mankind can hope for a solution to its problems, among which the most urgent are those of peace and unity [by] turning its attention and energies to the child" (x, *The Discovery of the Child*).

Sources for this article:

[The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind](#) by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, 2012, Bantam Books.

[Discovery of the Child](#) by Maria Montessori, 1987, Ballantine Books.

The hippopotamus is strong
And huge of head and broad of bustle;
The limbs on which he rolls along
Are big with hippopotomuscle.

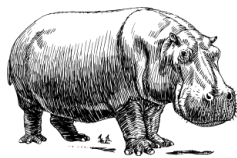
He does not greatly care for sweets
Like ice cream, apple pie, or custard,
But takes to flavor what he eats
A little hippopotomustard.

The hippopotamus is true
To his principles, and just;
He always tries his best to do
The things one hippopotomust.

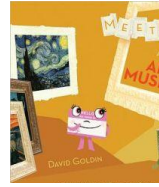
He never rides in trucks or trams,
In taxicabs or omnibuses,
And so keeps out of traffic jams
And other hippopotomusses.

The Hippopotamus

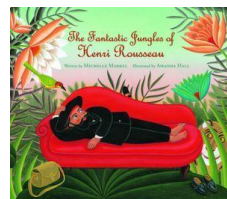
by Arthur Guiterman



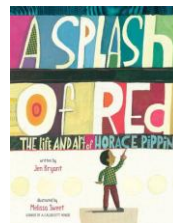
A batch of books about art



Meet Me at the Art Museum, by David Golden, explains the museum concept. Discarded on the museum floor, Stub (a museum ticket) is lost but Daisy the docent's helper (a name tag) finds him and offers a museum tour. Stub meets a badge who keeps the artworks safe, a computer who archives them, and other characters who work there. From the director's office to the library to the conservator's studio to the loading dock, Stub discovers who does what, and what goes on, behind the scenes. Actual artworks by famous artists tell Stub's story. 40 pages, ages 4-8.



The Fantastic Jungles of Henri Rousseau, by Angela Marlel. Henri Rousseau had no formal training; he taught himself to paint. He endured the harsh critics of his day and created the brilliant paintings that now hang in museums around the world. This vivid text artfully introduces young readers to the beloved painter and encourages all readers to persevere despite all odds. 24 pages, 2012. Ages 5-9.



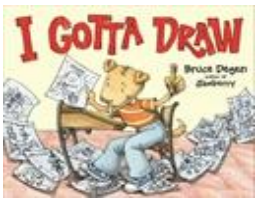
A Splash of Red, by Jen Bryant. The story of not-well-known artist Horace Pippin, grandson of a slave. A child in the late 1800s, he loved to draw—pictures for his sisters, his classmates, his co-workers. Even in W.W.I, Horace filled his notebooks with drawings from the trenches - until he was shot. Returning home, he couldn't lift his right arm, and couldn't paint. Slowly, with lots of practice, he regained use of his arm, until once again, he was able to paint. Soon, people—including famed painter N. C. Wyeth—started noticing Horace's art, and before long, his paintings were displayed in galleries and museums across the country. 40 pages, 2013. Ages 5-9.



The Stories of the Mona Lisa, Piotr Barsony. A little girl asks: "Dad, will you tell me a story?" The story her painter father tells is a history of art with the *Mona Lisa* as its central character. He takes daughter and reader →

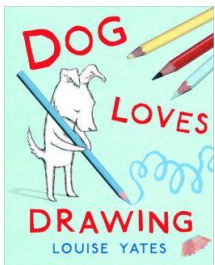
through an imaginary museum filled with an amazingly diverse collection of paintings, but curiously, each is a version of the *Mona Lisa* (rendered by painter Barsony himself). They reflect the techniques and styles of major artists of the last 150 years (Manet, Cezanne, Picasso, Pollock, DeKooning, Warhol, more). Children and adults alike will be engaged by this entrée into fine art. Ages 8-11, up. Hardcover, 56 pages, 2012.

Hey! Dogs can draw!



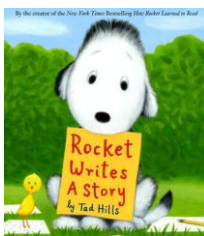
I Gotta Draw, by Bruce Degen. Little pup Charlie sketches compulsively, page after page and all over his school work. Prim teacher Miss Rich gives him a dread-

ful report card and then he's grounded. But then he does an assigned climate report entire in pictures, Miss Rich realizes his potential and frees him to draw during normal lessons. She sees how happy Charlie is learning that way, and encourages the others to draw and paint. Hardcover, 40 pgs, 2012. Ages 3-6.



Dog Loves Drawing, by Louise Yates. This is Dog of the bookstore (2010). One day a parcel arrives from Aunt Dora, a blank sketchbook. Dog draws a door, steps through it and draws a stickman for company. Together they draw more characters –

duck, crab, owl. They all have high adventures, ending in a mad dash home. The book employs three styles of art, watery colors, doodling and cartoon-like black lines of Dog himself. Hardcover, 32 pgs, 2012. Ages 3-7.



Rocket Writes a Story, by Tad Hills; a sequel to *How Rocket Learned to Read*. Rocket loves books and he wants to make his own, but he can't think of a story. Encouraged by the little yellow bird to look closely at the world

around him for inspiration, Rocket sets out on a journey. Along the way he discovers small details that he has never noticed before, a timid baby owl who becomes his friend, and an idea for a story. Hardcover, 40 pgs, 2012. Ages 4-8.

READ READ READ READ READ READ READ READ READ

How about a short cruise?

See big ships! If you've never cruised down the Houston Ship Channel, it's time you did so. The Port of Houston Authority offers a 90-minute free cruise aboard the *M/V Sam Houston*. * Since the Houston Ship Channel is closed to recreational traffic, this is the only way the general public can view Port operations. The tours are highly popular with adults AND children.



The Port is a 25-mile-long complex of diversified public and private facilities leading to the Gulf. It is the busiest port in the US in terms of foreign tonnage and second-busiest in the US in overall tonnage.



The *M/V Sam Houston* has been operating as the Port of Houston's public tour vessel since

July 30, 1958. It embarks from the Port's Sam Houston Pavilion at 7300 Clinton Drive. Passengers will view international cargo vessels, and operations at the Port's Turning Basin Terminal. The 95-ft. vessel holds up to 90 passengers and features air-conditioned lounge seating as well as standing room outside on the boat's deck. Back at the landing, you are rewarded with a **free** soft drink or water.



Reservations are required. Cruises are scheduled at 10 AM and 2:30 PM Wednesday through Saturday, 2:30 only on Sunday. The ship is in drydock during November. Detailed information is on the Port's website, portofhouseon.com. If you are not familiar with the deep East and Channel part of Houston, be sure to get specific driving instructions – also, a complete history of the Port (1909) - on the website, if you are interested.



* M/V = Motor Vessel

