

SCHOOL of the WOODS

WOODS LOWER SCHOOL
WOODS MIDDLE SCHOOL
WOODS HIGH SCHOOL

October 2014

INSIDE THE WOODS

Two Book Discussions scheduled for this year

Last year School of the Woods launched its Book Discussion Group as part of the Parent Education Learning Opportunities programs.

Parent participation was good and parents found the event stimulating, so this year, a second book discussion has been added – one on October 30 and one on March 24.

Information has been distributed about these dates, as well as the entire schedule of learning opportunities. Parent Education is sponsored by the Parent Volunteer Community.

The first book is titled *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind, Survive Everyday Parenting Struggles, and Help your Family thrive*. Promises to be interesting reading.

In this issue . . .

Two book discussions this year.....	1
Visit amshq.org.....	1
A Peek at new ads.....	1.
Two essays by Maren Schmidt.....	2-3
Poem: The Great Figure.....	3
The Montessori Environment.....	4-5'
Advice to Parents.....	6
Books for a range of ages.....	7
Calendar.....	8

Edited by Eloise Rochelle

Chili today, hot tamale

Last issue, we gave you the lowdown on what's going to happen at the Chili Cook-Off and Fall Festival. Always a splendid afternoon, we'll see you there on October 26, from 1 to 4 PM

Just for Fun: check out Montessori History

Visit the American Montessori Society website at <http://amshq.org/Monessori-Education/History-of-Montessori-Education>.

It has acres of informative content and links.

OOOPS! Dept., our mistake.

Contrary to our notice last month about scrap materials for art, teachers Lise Lawrence and Kathleen Packlick have asked, please DO NOT bring large pieces of Styrofoam or packing peanuts. Can't use those. Thanks.

We have newly designed ads

Here's a little peek at what our new ads will look like. They will be rolling out over the next month or so in all the various print media that we employ.



Two essays by Maren E. Schmidt

Noise Surrounds Us

Blaise Pascal, the 17th century philosopher and mathematician, wrote, "All man's miseries derive from not being able to sit quietly in a room alone."

Almost three hundred years later and human misery still stems from not being able to listen to oneself think.

An edition of *Ode* magazine was dedicated to the topic of silence. Several journalists detailed their journey into being alone and quiet. One writer found being in a sensory deprivation unit not quiet at all, but disturbingly noisy, as he listened to his heartbeat, his pulse beat in his ears, and paid attention to his breathing. What each traveler into the quiet world found is that there is no silence.

Noise surrounds us.

Sitting quietly with our thoughts and listening to our inner being is unsettling at first.

How easy it is to distract ourselves. Turn on the television, the computer, and the video game. Pick up the phone, or our music devices. Open the refrigerator door hunting for something because we feel hungry not for food, but for the quiet.

Paying attention to our inner sensations of feeling, hearing, seeing and thinking takes focus and concentration. Sitting quietly alone is the key to discovering where and who we are in the universe. It's much easier to party than to sit and open the package. What a gift we have though when we can sit, as Pascal suggests, alone in a room and not feel lonely.

Our world today is filled with more distractions than in Pascal's time, distractions that help us avoid direct confrontation of who we are. We let "noise" distract us from our dreams, our desires, and ultimately our lives, because we fear hearing our breath, our heartbeat, and the blood rush through our ears. Only in the quiet can we listen to that voice that coaches us to be the person we were meant to be. If only there weren't so much noise.

Today take five minutes to listen to your breathing and to your heartbeat. Listen to your dreams. Tomorrow listen for another five minutes. Listen everyday until you are quiet for twenty minutes a day.

"Learn to be silent. Let your quiet mind listen and absorb," Pythagoras recommended over 2500 years ago.

Sit comfortably in a room alone and your children, and others around you, will be affected by the concentric waves of peace and quiet that you create.

In today's world our children are at risk for never having the opportunity to learn to sit quietly. Movement is crucial to child development, but being still and quiet is also of vital import. Without a sense of direction, movement is misdirected. Without movement, inspiration is never fulfilled.

What are those things that keep our children from having quiet time? Take a few minutes and make a list of all those activities that prevent quiet from being in your family's life. Television. Radio. Computers. Personal music devices. Cell phones. Video games. Over-scheduling.

Don't let the noise of life prevent your children from having the opportunity to listen to themselves, and discover who they are.

Children Love Quiet

Somehow between Madison Avenue and Hollywood, and all the places where kiddie culture is fed, we're given the view that children are rowdy and eternally needing to be entertained.

Picture a scene of children getting out from school. What do you imagine? More than likely it's children shouting and running from the school building.

Though the movies would have us believe otherwise, children actually love quiet.

The portrayal of children in our popular culture tends to emphasize hyperactivity and hyper-noise. Children require movement and appropriate, yet creative, methods to express themselves, which unfortunately, are not readily given. If we, as adults, had to do what some children must everyday, we'd be portrayed as running out of buildings screaming at the top of our lungs.

Our world is a noisy place and most of us haven't learned how to move softly through space. Years ago after a function in our church fellowship hall, the volunteer clean up crew began to drag chairs and tables across the room in order to place them in storage racks. The rumble deafened. Screeching metal legs against the linoleum made chalkboards and fingernails seem melodic.

My daughters covered their ears, wondering out loud, “Why don’t they carry the chairs quietly?”

“Because, “ I said, “I don’t think anybody’s shown them how.”

My daughters looked at each other quizzically. As if on cue they each picked up an end of a table and carried it across the room. As they moved across the floor, the noisy volunteers stopped to see youngsters carrying a six-foot table, quietly. Very quietly indeed.

Our children love quiet, but as the church volunteers demonstrated, we neglect to show them how to move quietly, how to appreciate the quiet, and how to listen.

Children enjoy a listening game where everyone gets quiet for about two minutes, which is a very long time for three and four-year-olds, and for some 34-year-olds, too.

I’d set an hourglass type egg timer in the middle of our group to give the children a focal point and concept of how much longer they should sit and listen. In the quiet the children heard each other sigh, squirm, and change positions. In short the children became aware of how a simple movement disrupts the mood of the group. At the end of the two minute period I would go around the group and ask each child what they heard as they listened.

Without exception, the children were amazed what they could hear. Birds outside even though all the doors and windows were shut. Cars at the stop sign a block away. A fire truck leaving the station a mile away. The rumble of a train. The neighbor’s tractor or leaf blower. The refrigerator. The heat clicking on. The air going through their noses. The clock ticking in the adjoining room. The faucet dripping in the bathroom.

In the quiet the children listened.

After this five to ten minute listening exercise the children appeared more confident and controlled in their actions, left the group lesson with a tranquil smile, and worked rest of the morning with deeper concentration than before the lesson.

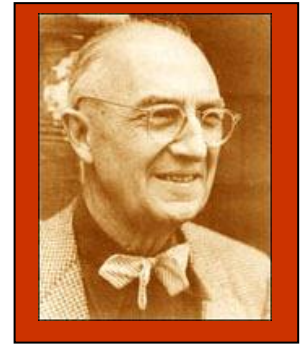
Children love quiet. All they need is to learn how to listen and to be heard. Just like the rest of us.

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

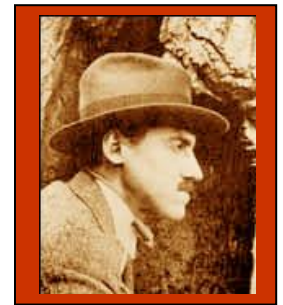
Art Inspires Art

The Great Figure

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
fire truck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city



William Carlos Williams



Charles Demuth



William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

Sour Grapes: A Book of Poems
Four Seas Company, Boston, 1921

Charles Demuth (1883-1935)

The Figure 5 in Gold (1928)
Alfred Stieglitz Collection
Metropolitan Museum of Art

THE MONTESSORI ENVIRONMENT

School of the Woods and Montessori methods support students' development in four major ways.

by Dr. Betsy Coe

The Mission Statement of School of the Woods says that the school integrates Montessori education with contemporary education methods to develop life-long learners who are competent, self-motivated, morally aware, and personally and socially responsible. Such people must also necessarily possess high self-esteem, and that is where our school and Montessori make a difference.

The four major ways that School of the Woods impacts the student's development positively are these:

- It provides a safe environment for making academic mistakes
- It provides a safe environment for making social mistakes
- It uses constructive learning methods
- It utilizes non-stigmatizing grading methods

Learning from one's mistakes is universally viewed as a positive sign of growth. When people make a mistake, realize its consequences, and problem-solve a solution, they grow. A person's self-concept is the greatest indicator of life-long success.

This article will be presented in four parts.

PART 1: ACADEMIC MISTAKES

Education Reformer TheodoreSizer⁽¹⁾ wrote that our society is producing non-thinkers. In the quest for not making a mistake, students are encouraged to do memorization, the lowest level of learning, according to Bloom's Taxonomy.⁽²⁾ It is less a risk to repeat memorized facts and be assured a good grade than to take the risk of divergent thinking, which may not yield the "right" answer -- the student thereby risking his good grade. The student is asked to learn the right answer and this product becomes the educational goal.

What is different in a Montessori classroom? It is that the emphasis is on process in the learning and the product or the answer is a secondary goal. In every learning sequence, students spend much time in process -- the interaction with materials, trial and error, trying out their thoughts, finally discovering the rules on their own.

After students have made the learning really theirs through process, then the product is emphasized. This is extremely important in today's world where, it is said, 90% of what a

child will need to know in his lifetime will be discovered in his lifetime. Thus, many of the answers or facts which are taught will be obsolete, and the process of learning how to learn will be the tool necessary for a successful life in the real world.

Another avenue that encourages students to profit by their mistakes is the interaction of the teacher as a coach. According to philosopher/educator Mortimer Adler, coaching is the feedback that a teacher can give when the teacher/student ratio is small. For instance, a student writes a paragraph; the teacher proofs it with the student, giving the student feedback for corrections. This consistent, positive interaction leads the student to grow to a higher level of writing -- the mistakes are the avenues of growth instead of a negative experience.

In a Montessori classroom, the teacher/student ratio is low so that the teacher can coach the students. Dr. Montessori referred to the teacher as the directress, indicating that the goal is not to dispense knowledge or fill up an empty head, but to direct and coach students into their own knowledge.

Students who have guidance in their learning and constant positive interaction from the teacher, at whatever their academic level, have positive self-esteem. This finding has been supported in previous testing of School of the Woods students -- more than 90% felt that they "were good in their schoolwork" on the self-concept test. This perception of themselves held, regardless of their academic level.

PART 2: SOCIAL MISTAKES

Research suggests that pro-social behavior is fostered in an atmosphere where students can interact with their peers without the teacher being the center of attention.

Students learn from receiving the immediate feedback of peers, trying out alternate strategies, and solving problems on their own.

This process can only happen in a classroom where students are allowed to talk during school hours, to work in large and small groups, to participate in peer teaching, to sit in different places in the room, and to solve their own problems. This classroom describes one that is student-centered versus one that is teacher-centered.

The Montessori classroom is a student-centered environment. To give and experience feedback in different social situations, there are large group meetings every day, many small group lessons, and individual work periods. Students move around the room each day, working next to different peers. This allows them to experience lots of feedback. The classrooms have multi-age spans, which encourages peer teaching.

The Montessori Environment. . . cont'd

In receiving feedback, students are given the opportunity to experience the natural consequences of their behaviors. That is what encourages growth and being responsible for one's actions. The teacher serves as a model and a guide for students to try out new behaviors.

Responsibility is another social skill that is supported in the School of the Woods environment. When students break or damage something, they must either repair it or replace it by working after school to earn the money. Even accidents are handled this way, not as a punishment but to learn responsibility for one's actions. This learning must take place in everyone's life – better now than when behind the wheel of a car or in later life when the consequences are much greater.

Students who feel control over their actions have a positive self-concept. School of the woods gives that opportunity to its students.

PART 3: TESTING IN THE MONTESSORI SCHOOLROOM

How does testing and grading affect the self-concept of students? According to much research, once students are identified as “poor” students by graded tests, they find it very difficult to change their images. One of the reasons poor students have trouble changing their images is that the skills for which they received bad grades have never been remedied. In addition, students may be expected to move on to the next higher skill which can't possibly be understood if the previous sequential skills have not been mastered.

At School of the Woods, testing is viewed as a practical life skill needed in order to function in our world but not as an avenue to learning. The student is not “tested” to see if knowledge has been gained because the teacher has interacted with the student throughout the learning process and does not need that tool to evaluate progress.

However, the ability to take tests is a skill that is taught throughout the elementary, middle school and high school curriculum. Pacing yourself, looking for key words, checking all possible answers, strategy of when to answer, etc., are specific skills taught so that students will be able to function in the world.

In the Montessori classroom, students master a specific skill before they move on, regardless of the timeframe required. There are no poor students, just students at many different levels.

Recent research indicates that during brain growth, the right as well as the left side of the brain must be active in order for the nerve tracts to receive an optimal coating of myelin.⁽³⁾ Whole brain activity must include manipulative

materials with opportunities for divergent and creative thinking, leading a person into formal thinking.

The Montessori curriculum encourages the use of manipulative materials and open-ended activities at all levels. Open-ended activities encourage the student to engage in analysis, syntheses, and evaluation, which are right-brain activities. Since the abstract, objective left-brain activities are not our only goal, students can spend their time and energy in a variety of whole-brain activities.

PART 4: GRADING THE SCHOOL OF THE WOODS STUDENT

Grading students by means of an A-F scale began when schools found it necessary to keep track of large numbers of students. Teachers did not have time to write personal notes about students' progress. A grade in the form of percentages then began to replace the personal progress report. Soon, the reliability and validity of grades began to be questioned because there was a wide difference in scores among different teachers on the same set of papers and because the same teacher scoring papers at different times was inconsistent.

This led to the one-right-answer objective test. With the use of the objective test came the decline of composition skills and critical thinking. This problem has yet to be solved, and the objective test is still in practice today.

At School of the Woods, students are not given letter or number grades before the ninth grade. The teacher writes a personal report about each student. Conferences with parents about the student's progress are scheduled four times during the school year. Beginning in first grade, students are expected to participate. A personal conference gives much more information to both parents and student than a percentage score because it can address strengths and weaknesses and a plan for future action can be a part of the assessment.

SUMMARY

In addition to educating the whole child in the most imaginative and most productive way, Montessori education methods maximize the child's concept of his self-worth.

Assessment of the child's progress discussed applies to all grades through Middle School. Letter grades are given to Woods High School students to facilitate negotiations with colleges and universities.

⁽¹⁾ Sizer, Theodore, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, 1984.

⁽²⁾ Bloom, Benjamin, *The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 1956.

⁽³⁾ Myelin: a fatty protein forming a sheath around nerve fibers; *myelin sheaths* protect and insulate the nerve fiber and increase the rate of transmission of nerve impulses.

Advice to Parents
Words of Encouragement
Make a Lot of Difference

Edward Fidellow writes in his booklet titled Getting Your Money's Worth, "of all the gifts we receive in life, encouragement seems to be one of the greatest."

He goes on to say, "the advantage of a Montessori environment is the emphasis not on how many wrong did you get (passing) but on how many right (mastery) and the encouragement to keep working and mastering without comparison and competition with your peers...In Montessori you've been given the gift of a methodology that embraces encouragement. Use the gift liberally."

When your child brings work home from school and you notice not so perfect letter formation in the writing, misspelled words, or any number of other imperfections, it is important for you as the parent to remember that your child's academic learning is a long progression taken one step at a time.



Each step in learning is an accomplishment worth encouraging. As Fidellow points out, "words of encouragement, like water in the desert, refresh

and sustain. All of us have experiences where one word of encouragement meant the difference between quitting and continuing."

So what words can we say to support our child's present and future cognitive, physical, and emotional development?



In her book Positive Discipline, Jane Nelson tells us the difference between encouragement and praise. Praise emphasizes the final product and expresses a favorable judgment. It is an expression of approval. Praise robs the person of ownership of their own achievement and invites people to change for others.

Encouragement gives the person ownership and responsibility for effort and invites people to think for themselves.

Words of encouragement include things like, "good job" or "looks like you worked hard on that" (comments on the deed or effort), "thanks for helping" (shows appreciation), "how do you feel about what you learned" (asks for self-evaluation), and "I like the way you..." (builds on strengths).

Avoid phrases like "good girl," "you did it right," and "I'm

proud of you," which are judgmental and create a dependence on others. Some good questions to ask yourself when you are not sure if your words are those of praise or encouragement are outlined by Jane Nelson:

- Am I inspiring self-evaluation or dependence on the evaluation of others?
- Am I being respectful or patronizing?
- Am I seeing the child's point of view or only my own?
- Would I make this comment to a friend?

When commenting on your child's efforts, it is important to focus on the idea of working for improvement, instead of expecting perfection. "Again, one of the significant hallmarks of Montessori is...the tremendous power of encouragement released so that each child becomes all that he is intended to be" (Fidellow).

... Elizabeth Stepankiw

A poet's lament from Ancient Greece . . .

*Yesterday I ate tough mutton
and a cabbage ten days old;
I won't say where I went to dinner,
for my host is of a cold
revengeful temper, and he might
invite me back another night.*

. . . Automedon
ca. 1st century BC

Translated by Robin Skelton
The Norton Book of Classical Literature. Bernard Knox, ed.

A crop of great books for PreK-Lower School students



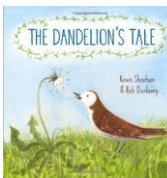
Superworm, by Julia Donaldson.

Superworm is super-long. / Superworm is super-strong. / Watch him wiggle! See him squirm! / Hip, hip, hooray for SUPERWORM! When a baby toad jumps into the road, Super-worm becomes a lasso and saves him. 32 pgs. Hardback, 2013. Ages 2 to 6.



Some Bugs, by Angela Diterlizzi.

Features more than 45 bugs who live in relative harmony and busily go about their buggy tasks in the grass, on the wing, and around the pond with bright, eager bug eyes. Ages 4 to 8; 32 pgs, 2014



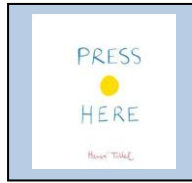
The Dandelion's Tale, by Kevin Sheehan.

This story about the friendship of a dandelion that is dying and a sparrow gives a reassuring, yet emotionally powerful introduction to the natural cycle of life. 32 pgs, 2014. Ages 3 to 7.



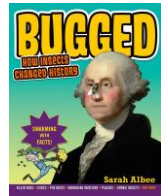
Goodnight Songs, by Margaret Wise Brown (of *Goodnight Moon* fame).

This is a selection of 12 verses from a recently found trunk of her previously unpublished work. Each verse is illustrated by a different artist. Written in 1952, the verses were meant to become songs. 28 pgs, 2014. Ages 3 to 5.



Press Here, by Herve Tullet. Press the yellow dot on the cover of this book,

follow the instructions within, and embark upon a magical journey! Each page is a surprise. Recommended for ages 4 to 8 but any age would find it fun and interesting. 56 pgs; 2011.



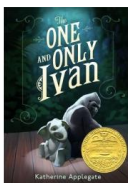
Bugged-How Insects Changed History, by Sarah Albee. There are about ten quintil-

lion insects in the world—and some of them have affected human history in tremendous ways! Beneficial bugs have built empires. Bad bugs have toppled them. *Bugged* is not your everyday history book. Ages 8 to 12, 168 pgs., 2014.



Firefly July, A Year of Very Short Poems,

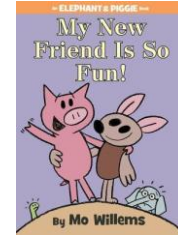
Selected by Paul Janeczko. This is exquisite collection of poems: fleeting moments transformed into words. He has an innate understanding of his readers and balances the sounds and images of individual selections so that echoes build and resonate throughout the collection as a whole. 48 pgs, 2014. Mainly ages 6 to 9, but all ages will like it.



The One and Only Ivan, by Katherine Applegate. Ivan, an easygoing gorilla living at the Exit 8

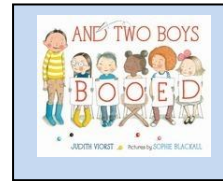
Big Top Mall and Video Arcade. is accustomed to humans watching him through the glass walls of his domain. He thinks about

his animal friends who live there with him. A new arrival, baby elephant Ruby, makes Ivan see their home with new eyes and it's up to Ivan to make changes for the better. Hardback, 320 pgs, ages 8 to 12. 2012.



My New Friend is So Fun, by Mo Willems. Gerald is careful. Piggie is not. Piggie cannot help smiling. Gerald can.

Gerald worries so that Piggie does not have to. Gerald and Piggie are best friends. In *My New Friend Is So Fun!* Piggie is having so much fun with her new friend. But where does that leave Gerald? Hardback, 60 pgs. Ages 6 to 8. 2014.



And Two Boys Booped, by Judith Viorst. On talent show day. a

boy is ready to sing his song, He's practiced a billion times, plus he's wearing his lucky blue boots and his pants with all ten pockets. But as all of the other kids perform before him, he gets more nervous. How the boy overcomes his fear of performing in front of the class makes a charming and funny read-aloud, complete with ten novelty flaps to lift. Hardback, 32 pgs, ages 4 to 8.

