SCHOOL of the WOODS

WOODS LOWER SCHOOL

WOODS MIDDLE SCHOOL

WOODS HIGH SCHOOL

May 2017

INSIDE THE WOODS

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Edited by Eloise Rochelle

www.readyharris.org

Everyone should know where to turn for information in dire emergencies. We in Harris County are fortunate to have the Regional Joint Information Center (JIC), which gathers data from all regional emergency organizations.

It is the best source for timely and accurate information and covers a wide range of situations - hurricanes and other bad weather conditions, power outage reports from CenterPoint Energy, school closings through SafeSchoolsAlerts.org, traffic through the Houston TranStar Traffic Map, as well as flooding locations and industrial mishaps.

All this information is presented in English, Chinese, French, Spanish and Vietnamese. Harris County Judge Ed Emmett is director.

March 10 – Whoa, horsey

Students in Lower Elementary classes had a real treat on March 10 – a visit from the police. School of the Woods parent Armand Schattle is a member of the Houston Police mounted patrol and he came to the campus with his patrol partner, Claire Caster. Along with their horses, of course. Armand talked with the students about safety issues and explained how they patrol the downtown area on horseback. As the visit was right in the middle of the Rodeo dates, the kids asked a lot about that. The dark horse is named Kirby and is a Percheron, a breed imported from France in the early 1900s. The light-color horse is named Lil' Pappas and is an American Quarter Horse. One of the children volunteered the information that the American Quarter Horse is the state horse of Texas. Who knew?

How Exercise Can Boost Young Brains

The news that children think better if they are active is hardly new. Recent studies have shown that children's scores on math and reading tests rise if they go for a walk beforehand, even if the children are overweight and unfit. Other studies have found correlations between children's aerobic fitness and their brain structure, with areas of the brain devoted to thinking and learning being generally larger among youngsters who are more fit. But these studies were short-term or not definitive.

In a recent study, researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign* approached school administrators at public elementary schools in the surrounding communities and asked if they could recruit the school's 8- and 9-year-old students for an after-school exercise program. The program lasted for a full school year, with sessions available every day after school for nine months.

This group was of particular interest to the researchers because previous studies had determined that at that age, children typically experience a leap in their brain's so-called executive functioning, which is the ability to impose order on your thinking. Executive functions help to control mental multitasking, maintain concentration, and inhibit inappropriate responses to mental stimuli.

Children whose executive functions are stunted tend to have academic problems in school, while children with well-developed executive functions usually do well. The researchers wondered whether regular exercise would improve children's executive-function skills, providing a boost to their normal mental development.

The research involved 220 local youngsters. The group was assembled at the university for tests to measure their aerobic fitness and current executive functioning. The researchers then divided the group in half, with 110 of the children to participate in the after-school program and half to continue with their normal lives and serve as a control group.

The active group was bused every afternoon to the university campus, where they participated in organized, structured bouts of what amounted to wild, childish fun. Wearing heart rate monitors and pedometers for monitoring purposes, the children were guided through exercise that doubled as romping -- games like tag, dribbling a soccer ball -- coupled with exercise designed to improve both aerobic endurance and basic motor skills. There was about 70 minutes of moderate or vigorous intensity in each two-hour session

At the end of the program, both groups returned to the university to repeat the physical and cognitive tests. Those in the exercise group were now more physically fit than they had been before, while children in the control group were not.

More important, the children in the exercise group also displayed substantial improvements in their scores on each of the computer-based tests of executive function. They were better at "attentional inhibition," which is the ability to block out irrelevant information and concentrate on the task at hand, than they had been at the start of the program, and had heightened abilities to toggle between cognitive tasks.

Children in the control group also raised their test scores, but to a much smaller extent. In effect, both groups' brains were developing, but the process was more rapid and expansive in the children who ran and played.

After-school programs like the one in this study require little additional equipment or expense for most schools. Extended physical education classes during school hours could also ensure that children engage in sufficient physical activity for brain health.

Adapted from the article "How Exercise Can Boost Young Brains," by Gretchen Reynolds, New York Times, October 8, 2014.

The study results were published in the October 2014 issue of *Pediatrics,* Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, titled "Effects of the FITKids randomized controlled trial on executive control and brain function." C.H. Hillman, et al, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The Child's Inherent Love Of Nature

What do you do to find yourself when you are out of sorts? Frustrated? Sorrowful? Despairing?
If you are like most people, you try to find a quiet spot to commune with nature and seek peace or solace. Solace, a word from the Latin *sol* for sun, meaning to find the sun. We have to be close to nature to find the sun, and in the process we find ourselves.

This connection to peace is formed within each of us as a young child.

Humans are born with an innate ability to constructively connect to the world around them using all their senses–seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. As infants, we attach ourselves lovingly to items that we see, touch, taste, hear and smell. Think of all the blankets and stuffed toys in the world, doted on for years by their small owners. As every parent knows after a bleary-eyed midnight search for a lost "blankie', a misplaced object of affection can create inconsolable anguish in a child.

Wherever we go in the world, even when security blankets and stuffed animals are left behind, nature is there to comfort us. The sun, the moon, the stars belong to us forever. The wind, the smell of rain, the feel of rocks, dirt and sand, the rustle of trees, the colors of flowers, the shifting forms of clouds, the prickle of grass between our toes—are there wherever we go. The call of a bird, an earthworm, a squirrel running up a tree can help us connect to that peaceful part of us.

These childhood connections to nature remain strong throughout all of our lives. Research shows that as we age, or if we are ill, we regain and maintain health faster in the geographic places where we spent the first six years of our lives. On a trip to pick apples, my husband called his mother to ask if we could bring her apples. "I'd love to have some King apples," she said. "We had a King apple tree in our yard when I was a kid." Her first choice of apples was the kind that grew in her backyard when she was five years old.

We are meant to connect to our time and place through our love of nature. This connection to the earth creates a way for us to remember who we are, and that the beauty of the universe belongs to every one of us on this planet. All we have to do is be.

Even though I have been alive for over 18,000 sunsets, my favorites are the red purple pink big sky ones of my Oklahoma childhood. There is something indescribably comforting in those bold water-colored sundowns.

This love of nature formed in childhood, from apples to sunsets, gives our soul roots. From these roots we sprout wings, carrying us on the adventure of our life.

Have you taken a child on a walk today? Taste the rain, smell the sun, hear the trees, watch the wind, and touch a heart.

Maren Schmidt
www.kidstalk.com

Helping Your Child with Emotions

Adapted from *Brain Rules by* John Medina

by Elizabeth Stepankiw

In his book titled *Brain Rules*, author John Medina gives parents a recipe for raising children who are able to form happy relationships with others. It turns out that not only are these key points a recipe for helping your child learn how to have deep, rich friendships, but also a host of other factors that enhance your child's future.

Happy kids have better emotional regulation (are able to calm themselves more quickly), higher academic achievement, less depression and anxiety, and fewer infectious diseases, as well as a higher compliance rate with parental wishes and greater loyalty to parents. How parents deal with a child's emotional life has the greatest power to predict the ability to form friendships, which in turn influences future happiness.

According to Medina, parents can maximize their child's emotional development by paying close attention to the child's emotions in a very particular way. It is critical to focus these efforts on a child when their emotions become intense. These are the times when a child's behavior "push[es] you out of your comfort zone" (p. 199). Because the child needs to understand what these strong emotions are and why they are happening, it is the adult's job to help them learn to label the feeling so he or she will be able to make the links necessary in the neurological systems involved.

A developing child's "neural architecture" is not in sync with the emergence of emotions and the ability to understand and organize information. At birth, a baby is likely to be able to express distress, disgust, interest, and contentment. By six months, the infant is able to feel sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and joy. During the next year, most children will feel embarrassment, jealousy, guilt, and possibly pride. "This means that *children will experience the physiological characteristics of emotional response before they know what those responses are" (p. 207)*. It is the reciprocal emotional relationship between caregiver and child that determines how successfully the brain will integrate the nonverbal and verbal systems involved.

Healthy emotional relationships with infants and children involve what Medina calls "balanced emotional surveillance" (p. 204). Parents are not controlling their child's every move, but rather are able to read their child's emotions in a secure and unobtrusive way. As an example, Medina relates the story of a father whose daughter is suffering from a bout of jealousy on her sister's birthday, despite the fact that the parents have given her a special gift of her own:

"You seem sad. Are you sad?" is what the father said. The little girl nodded, still angry, too. The dad continued. "I think I know why. You're sad because Ally's gotten all the presents. You only got one!" The little girl nodded again. "You want the same number and you can't have it, and that's unfair and that makes you sad ..... Whenever somebody gets something I want and I don't, I get sad, too." (p. 206)

The father in this story goes on to explain to his daughter that there is a word for that feeling. He respectfully asks if she wants to know what it is. He holds his whimpering daughter as he explains that it is called being jealous. He reflects back to her what has happened during the day and why it is she would feel jealous. He is willing to openly express his feelings and is teaching his child to do the same. This interaction has a calming effect on the child.

Medina explains that "large feelings are often scary for little people-tantrums often self-feed because of this fear" (p. 207). He relates another story, this time involving his own child:

One day, as he was subsiding from a particularly fierce temblor, I looked at him squarely and said, "You know,

son. We have a word for this feeling. I would like to tell you that word. Is that OK?" He nodded, still crying. "It is called being 'frustrated.' You are feeling frustrated"...He suddenly looked at me as if he had been hit by a train. "Frustrated! I am FRUSTRATED!!" Still sobbing, he grabbed my leg, holding on for dear life. "Frustrated! Frustrated! Frustrated!" he kept repeating, as if the words were some kind of harness tossed to him from a first responder. He quickly calmed down (p. 208).

Another story scenario described by Medina is of a fictional mother waiting in line at the post office when her child begins to escalate her demands for a glass of water. The ideal response would involve acknowledging the child's feelings: "You're thirsty, aren't you? Getting a big gulp of water would feel so good. I wish that drinking fountain was working so I could lift you up and let you drink as much as you wanted " (p. 214).

Even though this response may appear to some that it would make the situation worse, "empathy reflexes and the coaching strategies that surround them are the only behaviors known consistently to defuse intense emotional situations over the short term--and reduce their frequency over the long term" (p. 215). Many parents may not have been lucky enough to experience this healthy modeling in their own childhoods because the emotion is often confused with the action that may follow. An angry person may choose to hit, for instance; the anger and the hitting are not the same thing.

We can better help our children if we learn to handle and recognize our own emotions. John Medina suggests that parents may need to practice knowing when they are feeling a strong emotion and learn to identify that emotion quickly, and be able to verbalize it.

Practicing the ability to recognize emotions in other people is another step toward becoming more adept at helping your child with emotional recognition and labeling. Parents who get involved with their children's strong emotions must be careful not to put a judgment on the emotion. There are no bad emotions, they just are; emotions are reflexive, something that is not a choice. "No technique known to humankind can make a feeling go away, even if nobody wants the feeling around" (p. 211). It is the behavior that follows the feeling that is a choice.

These moments are wonderful opportunities to teach your child how to solve problems and decide on an appropriate response to a situation in which they feel a strong emotion.

According to researcher John Gottman, you will raise a happy child if at least 30 percent of these interactions with your child demonstrate empathy (p. 217). Approach your child with an attitude of warmth by acknowledging emotions, give your child a name for those emotions, and relate in a way that empathizes. When needed, talk about possible solutions with your child's active participation, and clearly communicate that you expect your child to respond with an acceptable behavior.

To help your child acquire the social skills to make and keep friends, practice using the "empathy reflex" described above. Not only does this help you have a better relationship with your child, but husbands and wives who practice this on each other build more stable, long lasting relationships with each other (particularly if the husband practices it on the wife). It is not as important for spouses to resolve every difference as it is to respond in a way that shows understanding.

This simple and effective process involves two simple steps to use when you encounter somebody's "hot" feelings (strong emotional change). First, describe the emotional changes you think you see. Next, make a guess as to where you think those emotional changes came from. It is important at the same time to make sure the person knows that you realize it is happening to them, not you (p. 85).

By modeling the "empathy reflex" repeatedly throughout the growing years, you will assure your child's ability to maintain healthy relationships into adulthood.

AMS POSITION PAPER

COMPARING MONTESSORI WITH TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

The American Montessori Society (AMS) is a nonprofit education society founded in 1960 whose purpose is to help children develop their potential through the educational principles of Dr. Maria Montessori. This includes the following: developing Montessori programs, accrediting schools, granting credentials, encouraging research, organizing seminars and symposia, and promoting all areas which relate to the dissemination of Montessori philosophy.

Montessori children are unusually adaptable. They have learned to work independently and in groups. Since they've been encouraged to make decisions from an early age, these children are problem-solvers who can make appropriate choices and manage their time well. Encouraged to exchange ideas, discuss their work freely with others, such students' good communication skills ease the way in new settings. Research has shown that the best predictor of future success is a positive sense of self-esteem. Montessori programs, based on self-directed, noncompetitive activities, help children develop strong self-images and the confidence to face challenges and change with optimism.

Montessori	**Traditional**
1 Emphasis on cognitive structures and social development	1 Emphasis on rote knowledge and social development
2 Teacher's role is unobtrusive; child actively participates in learning	2 Teacher's role is dominant, active; child is a passive participant
3 Environment and method encourage internal self-discipline	3 Teacher is primary enforcer of external discipline
4 Individual and group instruction adapts to each student's learning style	4 Individual and group instruction conforms to the adult's teaching style
5 Mixed age grouping	5 Same age grouping
6 Children encouraged to teach	6 Most teaching done by teacher and collaboration is discouraged
7 Child chooses own work from interests, abilities	7 Curriculum structured with little regard for child's interests
8 Child formulates concepts from self-teaching materials	8 Child is guided to concepts by teacher
9 Child works as long as s/he wants on chosen project	9 Child usually given specific time for work
10 Child sets own learning pace to internalize information	10 Instruction pace set by group norm or teacher
11 Child spots own errors through feedback from material	11 Errors corrected by teacher
12 Learning is reinforced internally through child's own repetition of activity, internal feelings of success repetition	12 Learning is reinforced externally by rewards, discouragements
13 Multi-sensory materials for physical exploration development	13 Few materials for sensory, concrete manipulation
14 Organized program for learning care of self and self-care environment (shoe polishing, sink washing, etc.)	14 Little emphasis on instruction or classroom maintenance
15 Child can work where s/he is comfortable, moves and talks at will (yet doesn't disturb others); group work is voluntary and negotiable	15 Child assigned seat; encouraged to sit still and listen during group sessions
16 Organized program for parents to understand the Montessori philosophy and participate in the learning process.	16 Voluntary parent involvement, often only as fundraisers, not participants in understanding the learning process.

Speaking of that . . .

If you have ever yearned to learn a foreign language, take solace in the fact that you already speak several of them.

Linguistics is the study of languages. Modern linguistics as a scholarly pursuit of language history developed in the 18th century. The main challenge in this research has been the lack of empirical data, as spoken language leaves no traces.

The beginnings of language are thought to have been based on animal sounds and human emotional cries, and the need to communicate with each other in order to hunt, farm and defend themselves, which gave them a distinct survival advantage. Current researchers postulate that a "mother" language started with one particular population in West Africa when total Homo sapiens numbered only 10,000 to 300,000 people around 50,000 years ago. This was the start of the great diaspora from African origins to around the globe. From that humble beginning, speaking evolved into the estimated 7000 languages used by a world population of some 7.5 billion today.

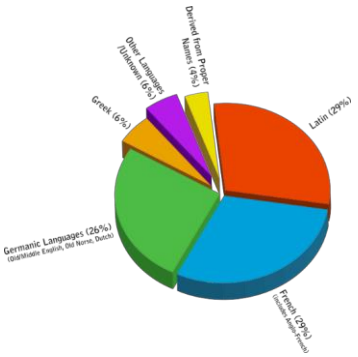
There are three major language families – Indo-European (largest), Sino-Tibetan and Afro-Asiatic, each having multiple sub-categories. The Sino-Tibetan family, which includes Mandarin and the other Chinese languages, and Tibetan; the Afro-Asiatic family, which includes Arabic, Hebrew, Somali; the Bantu languages, which include Swahili and Zulu, and hundreds of other languages spoken throughout Africa. The Indo-European family is the most widely spoken and includes languages such as English, Greek, Latin, Russian, Hindi, and even Sanskrit (see illustration).

With all the moving around by so many humans for so long a time, it's not surprising that there are many instances of overlapping words throughout languages.

English is particularly interesting as it seems to be a mash-up of multiple languages. This is certainly due to the many invasions of the English Isles by a variety of prehistoric populations, then invasions by Vikings, Islamic tribes, ancient Celts, Germanic tribes, Romans, Normans, even ancient Greeks. Today's English reflects all of those cultures. Even for 300 years – 1066 to 1362 - French was the court language in England.

The pie chart here shows roughly where current English words came from.

Latin	29%
French	29%
Germanic	26%
Greek	6%
Other Languages	10%
From proper names	6%



There are vast numbers of words which occur across many languages. They are cognates and have exact or similar spelling and have the same meaning but may be pronounced somewhat differently. One word found across a wide selection of unrelated languages is "metro" which has the same meaning and nearly identical pronunciation in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, Turkish, Tagalog, Basque, Finnish, and Hungarian. Example: The sentence "Mijn pen is in mijn warme hand" is in Dutch. The same sentence "My pen is in my warm hand" is written identically in Afrikaans and English, but if spoken by an Afrikaaner it would sound more like: *May penn uss un may vurrem hund.*

Just a few cognates across the languages:

English	Spanish	French	Dutch/ Afrikaans	German	Russian	Polish	Swahili	Chinese	Hindi	Arabic
Mother	Madre Mama	Mere Maman	Moeder Ma	Mutter	Mati	Matka Mama	Mama	Ma	Ma	Um
Father	Padre Papa	Pere Papa	Vader	Vater	Tsets	--	Baba	Baba	Papa	Ab
Milk	-		Melk	Milch	Moloko	Mieko	--		--	
Coffee	Café	Café	Koffie	Kaffee	Kofe	Kawa	--	Kafei	Kofi	
Three	Tres	Trois	Drie	Drei	Tri	Trzy	--	--		
Sugar	Azucar	Sucre	Suiker	Zucher	Sakhar	Cukier	Sukari	--	Shakhar	Sukkar
Banana	Banana	Banane	Banaan	Banane	Banan	Banan	--	--	--	
Chocolate	Chocolate	Chocolat	Chocolade	Schokolade	--	Czekolada	Chokoleti		Chakoli	Chocolate