**Sales drive for new Merchandise Line has begun**

School of the Woods has an exciting new fundraiser this year, Charleston Wraps, with more than 500 items to choose from:

- High quality gift wraps
- Great home and kitchen items
- Gourmet chocolates
- Collegiate sports merchandise
- Unique personalized gifts

The profits you raise stay in YOUR individual classroom to help fund your teacher’s wish list. Your classroom will receive approximately half of the purchase price of each item sold.

The Charleston Wraps sale will run through September 15th. Merchandise may also be ordered online at www.charlestonwrap.com. If you have any questions, please call Kristen Wright at (713) 721-5289.

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**Parents’ Organization announces new officers for 2010-2011**

The Parents’ Organization officers and committee chairs for our new academic year, 2010-2011, are:

**Officers**

President………………………………Cindy Oldham
Vice-President…………………………Kristen Wright
Treasurer………………………………Diane Koonce
Corresponding Secretary……………..Bridget Tomlinson
Recording Secretary…………………..Katherine Bodron

**Committees**

Back to School Social…………………..Janna Webber
Care Committee……………………Barbara Bends
Charleston Wraps Fundraiser………Kristin Wright
Chili Cook-Off……………………….Margie Udden
Classroom Representative
  Coordinator…………………..Katherine Bodron
Flower Power……………………..Rochelle Lootens
Hospitality Teacher Breakfast……...Jennifer Walz
Welcome & Thank You Coffees………Katherine Bodron
Spring Picnic………………………..TBA
Staff Appreciation………………….Denise Welling

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**THE PARENTS’ SOCIAL**

Don’t miss this first big event of the new school year! It’s always great fun. You’ll see some old friends and meet some new ones.

**Saturday, Sept. 11, 7 PM**

at the home of Janna Webber

2335 Quenby Road
The exploration of shared spoken language, the reading of the world through dialogue, is a vehicle for bringing change into the world.

These points are considered “truths” among experts in the field:

- Children who are read to learn to read more easily than those who are not.
- Reading to children helps build their curiosity, imagination, attention span, vocabulary and language skills. It also helps improve their spelling and writing abilities, promotes listening comprehension and helps them to think and communicate better.
- Children’s ability to comprehend what they read very much depends on the knowledge they already have, so the more they are read to the more knowledge they will have in store for use in future reading.
- Reading is a good conversational tool, providing parents and children with the opportunity to share thoughts and feelings. The child grows emotionally and important family bonds are built.
- Reading to your children lets them know that you value reading as an important activity in your life.

Some ways to achieve these goals:

- Establish a routine for reading aloud – a daily activity which will become a habit.
- Be proactive: move your finger under the words as you read; let your child turn pages with you; take turns reading paragraphs or pages; interject comments, such as “what do you think will happen next?”; look at and talk about the illustrations.
- Let your children see you reading your own books – i.e., be a role model. Talk to them about the things you read.
- Develop a family library – keep lots of books, magazines and newspapers and take them when you travel; give children books as gifts.
- There is no limit to the kinds of material to read – children’s books, biographies, science, adventure, even mail order catalogues. And make regular library trips so that your child becomes familiar with it and what it has to offer.

Adapted from “Tips for family reading”, Houston Parent, October 1995

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New Faces Among Faculty and Staff

Stephen Anthis
Woods High School

Elizabeth Bandy
Upper Elementary

Patrick Phipps
Woods Middle School

Ann Sutton
Woods High School

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Montessori – More Relevant Than Ever . . . by Elizabeth Stepankiw

Dr. Montessori didn’t have the means to test her theories of human development in the way we do today. She had no MRI’s, CAT scans, or rats in labs. She did have incredible powers of observation—her genius was in her ability to understand the principles of human development from her observations.

She defined some basic ideas about child development and how to maximize the human potential of our children and tested them out in specially designed classrooms.

She concluded that: the environment plays a pivotal role in human growth, learning is self-driven/directed, we learn to concentrate when we are working toward mastery, repetition is how we learn (the brain is like a muscle), we all want to belong to a group and learn by modeling after those in our group, and we all go through what she called sensitive periods in our learning-times where we are primed for certain types of learning in a way that we will never experience again.

All of these basic principles have become part of accepted brain science today after years of studies and research.

Dr. Montessori urged the teacher to be a scientist/observer in her classrooms. She called teachers directors to better define the role of the teacher in the children’s houses (her term for schools).

Today, Montessori teachers spend many hours preparing a Montessori classroom before the children ever arrive. Materials are carefully sequenced to follow a logical order and furniture is carefully chosen and arranged to beckon the child towards active learning experiences. Attention is paid to the social order and mix of the class and record-keeping is designed to support and respect the child’s learning.

After all the preparations, teachers will observe the children and direct them to the learning experiences that fit the needs of each individual child. The teacher’s role is to look for something called the “match” where the child’s activity and needs at that moment coincide.

Rather than filling “empty vessels”, as teachers do in a traditional role, the Montessori teacher seeks to help students develop from their own innate learning powers and drives. The child is the central figure and the teacher is there to act as a guide and a help in what we know today is the inborn human urge to grow and learn.
If your child will enter Middle School next year, here are some things to reflect on

The life of a middle school student is intense. Middle school deals with an entirely different plane of development.

The adolescent experiences more growth and change in all the domains – cognitive, physical, emotional, social and moral – than in any other developmental plane.

Metaphorically speaking, the knowledge-hungry, competent, capable “caterpillar” sixth grader usually morphs into a disquieted, yet somewhat paralyzed chrysalis in the seventh-grade year, only to emerge with the wet wings and wobbly legs of a butterfly during the eighth-grade year.

Montessori middle school teachers, therefore, do not see seventh grade as simply an extension of upper elementary and are trained to understand and embrace these major transitions that occur in adolescents.

Montessori education instills in a child qualities to prepare him for adolescent experiences and for later life as a university student.

Those traits are:
• Independence
• Organization
• Initiative
• Time-management skills
• Problem-solving skills
• Conflict-resolution skills
• Ability to create one’s Own structural space
• Understanding of how behavior affects the community
• Connection with adults in a learning environment
• Willingness to take risks when learning.

Parents who have not had their children in Montessori schools prior to middle school often know little about the Montessori approach. Frequently, they are looking for an alternative educational environment because their child’s adolescent needs are not being met.

For students unaccustomed to having the freedom of choice of a Montessori classroom, the responsibility required in the Montessori middle school can present another obstacle to overcome.

The middle school curriculum is challenging, broad and diverse – actually becoming one large Practical Life experience. Adolescents are growing and need space. They need to be free to move about but need to be visible all of the time.

An informal visit to Woods Middle School will show an ideal physical arrangement: one large open room, chairs and tables that can be rearranged to meet differing needs, lockers and bookshelves against the walls, computers with screens facing out to the larger area to maximize use and monitoring, and an adequate kitchen area.

Adapted from “Building Success Into Your Montessori Middle School Program,” by Ann Sutton; Montessori Life, Issue 4, 2007

Welcome coffee
Wednesday, September 15
8:45 AM

Just a few days after the great parents’ social, the Parents’ Organization traditional coffee welcomes everyone back to school, introduces new parents’ organization officers, and gets down to business.

It will be held at
Sherry Herron’s House
12 Hilshire Grove Lane

Be sure to attend and expect to encounter –
• Yummy pastries
• Healthy munchies
• Juices
• Fruits
• Coffee
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 over four issues of Inside the Woods.

PART 1: ACADEMIC MISTAKES

Education Reformer Theodore Sizer\(^1\) 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.
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.

But, the ability to take tests is a skill that is taught throughout the elementary and middle 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. 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 at least three times during the school year. Sometimes the student is invited 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 grades through Middle School. Letter grades are given to Woods High School students to facilitate negotiations with colleges and universities.

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(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, encourage-ment seems to be one of the greatest.”

He goes on to say, “the advan-tage of a Montessori environ-ment is the emphasis not on how many wrong did you get (passing) but on how many right (mastery) and the encourage-ment to keep working and mastering without comparison and competition with your peers…In Montessori you’ve been given the gift of a method-ology that embraces encourage-ment. Use the gift liberally.”

When your child brings work home from school and you notice not so perfect letter form-ation 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 achieve-ment 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 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*

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**Murphy’s Other Laws**

You may not have heard of these – they are from the Montessori teacher’s point of view:

1. The school will run out of milk only on days when everyone wants milk.
2. A 3-year-old, putting on his own shoes, is more likely to put them on the wrong feet the closer it is to dismissal.
3. At “Show and Tell,” the only item lost all year will be the one irreplaceable heirloom that has been in a family for 200 years.
4. The child who sat in the teacher’s lap all afternoon will have the flu the next day.

... more next month

*From Montessori Life Magazine*