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The Raise-the-Roof Raffle
Did you receive your letter and raffle tickets?

Have you bought your chances to win one of the four drawings for four VISA gift cards in March 2011? Remember, the values are $2500, $1000, $500, and $250. That’s a lot of pocket change. There will also be a bonus participation drawing for an iPad.

Tickets are now for sale in the main office and will be for sale at all campus events. As the date for drawing nears, tickets will be sold in the carpool line.

Proceeds will benefit the construction of the Woods High School gymnasium, a facility to be used by all students and families.

YOU CAN’T WIN IF YOU DON’T BUY TICKETS!

Montessori Up Close! Continues in January

These evening sessions, conducted by faculty and devoted to explaining the Montessori method, began in November and featured Woods High School and Woods Middle School.

Three additional Montessori Up Close sessions will take place in January:

Tuesday, January 11, Upper Elementary;
Tuesday January 18, Lower Elementary; and
Tuesday, January 25, Early Childhood and Kindergarten – all at 7 PM.

These Up Close programs are especially valuable for parents who want to know more about how the Montessori method works so well.

Acorn Fund appeal letter

We’re nearing the end of 2010 and our annual appeal for contributions to the Acorn Fund are being mailed the first week of December.

The Acorn Fund is our school’s source of financial aid to deserving students.

Remember, too, that although an appeal is mailed once a year, contributions to this fund can be made any time during the year.

THANK YOU!
Creating Optimal Environments for Adolescents

By Dr Betsy Coe

This is Part 3 of Dr. Coe’s views on educating adolescents in a Montessori environment.

Responsibility for Learning and Assessment

The faculty makes the statement to our students that they are responsible for their own learning. We continue to reflect on and assess how they do this so that our words and their actions match. The students accept this responsibility knowing that we provide a curriculum which prepares them for college and guarantees acceptance. Additionally, we allow students the flexibility to contribute input into their courses of study and to choose how they demonstrate their knowledge.

Study guides are used at middle school and high school, with the understanding that procedural and declarative knowledge will have different formats. The three-period lesson is used. Period one is the presentation of a framework, simulation game or demonstration to “strike the imagination” and excite the learner.

Period two is the practice and extending and refining of knowledge with the use of multi-intelligences, different learning styles, and choices.

Period three is the synthesis and application of the information into real life. Our quest is to provide meaningful work.

The study guides give clear expectations, allow students to pace their work, learn time management, and make choices based on their interests and learning styles. Middle school offers modified, basic, and advanced work. High school students can choose academic honors and gifted and talented (GT) regular distinction by designing projects of interest that are approved by the teacher.

In middle school, we record grades on cycle summaries for parents, but do not give grades on the student transcript unless a high school requests it. Generally, we believe that we are offering three kinds of activities. First, those that require mastery of specific information and are assessed by written tests or performance with a rubric; second, coaching, which means that a teacher interacts with a student about a project to raise the quality of the result and it is an ongoing process; and third, experiences to reflect upon. For mastery learning, students must earn 80% to be complete with the activity, retaking portions that were not well understood.

After much deliberation, we decided to calculate grades in high school to enter on students’ transcripts. The high school study guides include the formula for students to calculate their own grades each quarter, the level of work, and the grade point average (GPA). Students are always enabled to control their grades.

We have chosen programs that allow everyone who meets the criteria to be honored, such as National Honor Society, and honor roll. Every day I receive some possible award that you can bestow upon only a few students, so we are choosing carefully.

At both the middle and high schools, there are student-led family conferences four times a year. Students prepare a portfolio of their work as evidence of their growth, assess their progress on academics and habits of mind, listen to the opinions of teachers and parents and set goals for the next time period. There are also opportunities to reflect on their goals intermittently, with self-assessment forms.

Students are expected to complete independent studies on topics of interest to them. In middle school, there is a systematic presentation about how to write research papers on topics of their choice. One is due each semester. In high school, freshmen and sophomores continue to write research and scientific papers.

Juniors use primary sources in their study, and seniors write a senior thesis. All require a paper, visual illustrations, and an oral presentation to the community of parents and students. At the senior level, the oral presentation is very formal and presented to their field advisor, faculty advisor, principal, and their parent and student community.
Halloween - not too scary
But tons of fun, Friday, October 29
When Friends Visit

Children usually love to visit the homes of friends. Being in new surroundings, enjoying special activities, and time spent together is exciting. Children need to learn visiting etiquette so they will be invited back!

Manners have the power to teach tolerance and appreciation of diversity as well. Your example is the most effective teaching tool, but taking the time to teach your child how to be a good guest will increase the chances of making the visit successful. Phrases like “please, thank you, excuse me, may I” become a habit if they are used at home.

When planning visits, it is wise to consider the child’s developmental readiness and individual temperament.

For younger children, practicing graces ahead of time will increase the likelihood of remembering them when needed! Make it a game to practice going to a friend’s house for a visit. Take turns being the guest and the host.

Teach your child to wash her hands before eating, stay seated while eating, greet adults with a handshake, pick up toys, clothes and playthings, ask where the bathroom is, flush, and wash hands, and say thank you at the end of a visit.

If your child makes a mistake treat the incident as a learning opportunity. Make corrections quietly and in private.

Children in the six to nine age group continue to need help in learning what they should and should not do when visiting friends. At this age, children are becoming especially conscious of their social relationships and a little teaching ahead of time will maximize their success.

Focus on one thing at a time. Saying please, thank you, may I, and excuse me should continue to be modeled and emphasized. Teach your child to not interrupt other people when they are speaking. Let your child know to never enter a bedroom without being invited in and not to touch personal items without permission.

If your child is hungry or thirsty, instruct him to ask politely for a snack or drink. If a food he doesn’t like is served the only thing to say is “No, thank you.”

The visiting child needs to know to ask for permission before using the phone, the computer, or any appliance.

Let your child know to respect the hosts’ quiet time and remember that every family has its own rules. Instruct your child to ask to call you if he feels uncomfortable or wishes to go home.

Children this age may or may not be ready for overnight stays. Children become ready at different times. If your child is very shy, or if he has not incorporated basic visiting manners into his behavior, you may want to wait until he is ready before encouraging sleepovers.

By grade four, children have learned to be good guests. But issues of privacy and appropriateness arise at this age, making it necessary to address specific situations such as: knock before entering the bathroom, always ask permission to enter a room by saying, “May I come in?,” use a robe when out of bed and still in pajamas- even to go to the bathroom.

If she makes an unexpected mess or accidentally breaks something, tell an adult as soon as it happens.

When ready to leave the table, she is to clear her plate, glass and silverware, ask if she can help set or clear the table, and if she can help with dishes.

If she is not sure of a household rule, ask. Respect bedtime and the call for “lights out”, pick up toys, games and other items used by putting them where they go, be kind to pets and your host’s siblings, and say thank you at the end of the visit.

Learning how to behave as a guest involves a set of social skills your child will use her whole life. Studies show that much of how people are perceived hinges on the manners they do or do not possess. Equipping her to succeed in social situations will
be among the most important teachings you will impart to your child. Focus on one manner at a time, keep your expectations high, use a kind and consistent approach, and above all, model the kind of behavior you are looking for.

If your child is hosting a guest it is a good idea to plan with him a mix of activities and some free play times; active times and some quieter times. Younger children have not usually learned to lose a game graciously, so non-competitive games are the most appropriate choices.

Talk to your child about how to help a guest feel comfortable while he is in your home. Make sure your child follows the same household rules you follow when you do not have a guest.

. . . Elizabeth Stepankiw

Three Gifts

From birth, we are given at least three gifts to create positive change in our lives. When these gifts are nurtured we can become the creative force in our own lives. The gifts allow us to become the writer, the director and the actor in the productions called “Our Life.”

Choice. From the beginning, choice is a part of our human make-up. It is the innate ability to choose that leads us to positive growth and happiness. Between stimulus, what happens to us, and response, how we act, there is a space.

Contained in that space is our freedom and our power to choose our response to any circumstance.

The more we practice choosing, the more confident we become in our ability to make positive decisions that lead to a life well-lived. Having the ability to choose is given to us, and we always have a choice for our response. We strengthen our skill by exercising our gift of being able to choose. It is with our choices that we write the scripts for our lives.

Natural laws and universal principles. The natural laws and universal principles that govern our lives are another present given to us. These principles and laws direct our lives whether we are aware of them or not.

There are physical laws, such as gravity, the rotation of the earth, and the earth’s rotation around the sun, to name only a few. Principles of human behavior, such as kindness, respect, honesty, personal integrity, and service to mankind, operate constantly in every culture on our planet.

Physical laws guide our actions because we cannot change the forces that are exerted on us. We choose to ignore the force of gravity at our own peril. We can’t stop day turning into night, or the earth from moving through the universe. Physical Laws control the consequences of our physical choices.

Likewise, we ignore universal principles with dangerous results. Choosing to use principles, such as respect, kindness and trust, enables us to tap into a moral authority to guide our lives through many hazards. If we choose to make decisions and place value in our life on activities not based on universal principles that are self-evident, factual, objective and impersonal, well, we will have a hard row to hoe.

Universal principles direct our lives with objective cause and effect. Disregard principles of human behavior and the effects can seem very personal and subjective. When we are cognizant of these underlying principles of life, we are more likely to make wise choices.

Inborn intelligence. Our third gift is ourselves, our bodies, our hearts, our minds and our spirits. We might say we are comprised of four distinct intelligences: physical, social/ emotional, mental and spiritual. How we choose to use our talents depends on the tools, people, ideas, and natural surroundings in which we find ourselves. Our intelligences allow us to act on our choices and principles.

Each of us is given three gifts: choice, physical and spiritual laws that are objective, factual, impersonal, and self-evident, along with the innate intelligence to act on our choices and values. As adults, let us recognize and use these natural endowments to help our children and well as ourselves.

Adapted from “Essays for Parents and Teachers,” by Maren Schmidt, M.Ed.

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From the faculty . . .
Favorite books for Grades 1-3

Teacher Margi Dhruv recommends three books for the Lower Elementary grades that are multi-functional and a pleasure to read and look at.

In two of these books, “Zen Ties” and “Zen Shorts,” author and illustrator Jon Muth has created an appealing Zen-master character, aptly named Stillwater. He is an unflappable really large panda...

Stillwater’s companions include his nephew, Koo, who speaks in Haiku verse, and three children - Michael, Addy and Karl. They learn Zen lessons for a meaningful life through their adventures with Stillwater.

The third book is “The Three Questions,” based on a story by Leo Tolstoy.

Through conversations with a variety of winsome animals, the boy character Nikolai seeks to find answers to his three questions about how to be a good person. The questions are: When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?

Jon Muth’s artwork is whimsical, humorous, and engaging, at the same time, depicting serious concepts.

These books are available through Scholastic Book Orders and benefit your child’s classroom.

Dr. Coe: “Montessori at Secondary Level model to be developed in Europe”

The Montessori Europe Congress was held in October in Bad Honnef, Germany. School of the Woods’ Dr. Betsy Coe joined Richard Ungerer, Executive Director of the American Montessori Society, in representing the United States. Other representatives came from Sweden, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Luxemburg, England, Scotland, Slovakia, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Russia.

The focus of the congress was the secondary level of Montessori education. The secondary model has not been developed in Europe. Discussions of the American model led to the group’s understanding of these basic ideas:

1. The Montessori secondary level school is a different kind of school – one that recognizes and builds on life experiences.
2. It is akin to a second rebirth – one where learning blends with social life and the student’s own self-construction.
3. It is imperative to recognize the adolescent’s physiological and mental changes.
4. Erkinder means the pedagogy of place – the awareness of the place in which the adolescent works.
5. Opportunities for valorization of the individual - a feeling of competency, confidence, and worthiness.
6. Adults should be strong role models – they are the raw materials needed by the adolescent.

The representatives agreed that there are no common principles for the secondary level in Europe, and that they should be developed. Having seen the details of the model at School of the Woods and recognizing that it has all the common principals and elements, along with implementation strategies, schools in Sweden, Germany, and Czechoslovak have asked Dr. Coe to consult with them on helping them develop an authentic Montessori secondary school.

’tis the season
For a multitude of celebrations

Have a wonderful Winter Holiday
What’s all that stuff in those classrooms?

Mother Nature has plainly not entrusted the determination of our intellectual capacities to the blind fate of a gene or genes; she gave us parents, learning, language, culture, and education to program ourselves with.

. . . . Matt Ridley

The external environment must satiate, constructively, the needs of a child’s internal development process because children are wired for adaptation. Based on her research and observations, Dr. Montessori wrote about the principle of adaptation. Adaptation encompasses family, culture, society, the world, the universe, and, in the cases of early childhood and adolescence, one’s own body and self.

The goal of the Montessori classroom is to unleash the natural drives to adapt, learn, grow, and reach one’s fullest potential (Pedersen and Pedersen). The environment of the child is prepared according to the needs of each three-year age group related to the sensitive periods.

In the critical early childhood years, children have a once-in-a-lifetime ability to take in their environment with what Dr. Montessori called the “absorbent mind.” At this age, children need to explore and discover; the materials are designed to invite activity. The early childhood environment contains furniture and materials that are scaled to fit the physical dimensions of the child’s body.

The classroom is usually divided into distinct areas, yet the subjects are not taught in isolation -- the curriculum is interdisciplinary and interactive. Practical life provides a bridge from the home to the school with child-size tools that really work. Young children refine gross motor control and hand-eye coordination, which leads to greater physical skill, perfection of movement, independence, and concentration. Sensorial materials aid the child in ordering and organizing by color, size, dimension, shape, form, sound, touch, taste, and smell, which provides a basis for the development of other skills, such as music, mathematics, or language.

The mathematics materials build on the child’s natural ability to reason, calculate, estimate, and sense quantity.

The children begin to work on a mathematical journey that will lead them from the concrete to abstraction through the manipulation of a variety of well-thought-out materials such as rods, spindles, cards, beads, cubes, and counters.

The Montessori classroom emphasizes spoken language as the foundation for all linguistic expression. Throughout the classroom precise vocabulary for activities is used and children are given classified nomenclatures to experience new vocabulary in science, geography, and social studies.

The materials for written language introduce the child to the alphabet letters and their sounds and encourage the child to begin composing words, sentences, and whole stories (David Kahn, What is Montessori Preschool?).

Like the early childhood classrooms, the Montessori elementary curriculum is an integrated, individualized, and academically challenging program that meets the changing developmental needs of the child. It balances the child’s developing imagination and powers of abstraction with down-to-earth, concrete, sequenced, hands-on materials.

Mathematics is presented through three-dimensional, manipulative materials that reveal simultaneously arithmetic, geometric, and algebraic correlations.

Grammar materials use symbols and visual patterns to help the child discover parts of speech and analyze the structure, style, and logic of sentences. Phonics-based reading and spelling curricula create a knowledge of the English language that builds a solid base for the growth of fluent reading and comprehension skills that will be needed as reading materials become increasingly complex.

The numerous interdisciplinary materials for the study of botany, zoology, geography, and history give many opportunities for the elementary child to learn new vocabulary and practice writing skills. In-depth studies and projects encourage healthy social relationship building in the classroom setting and later on as the child begins to explore the world outside the classroom (David Kahn, What is Montessori Elementary?).

. . . . Elizabeth Stepankiw

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