Raise-the-Roof Raffle drawing
Coming up fast . . .

The drawing for those four Visa gift cards will be March 2. It will be a part of the Parents’ Organization meeting which will take place at Woods High School at 8:45 AM.

Tickets will continue to be sold in the main office, at all campus events, and in the carpool line until 08:59:59 AM on drawing date – or perhaps even later, until the moment the first winning ticket is plucked from the hat.

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

Make a date with the Parents’ Organization

The School of the Woods Parents’ Organization will hold its February 9th meeting in the evening, 7 PM. The evening meeting means that EVERYBODY can attend.

School of the Woods founding parent in 1962 returns for a visit

Maggie Grimes, one of the original seven parents who founded School of the Woods in 1962, came to town on November 16 for a campus visit. Mrs. Grimes has lived in Seattle for some years, but she still has family in Austin.

On campus, Head of School Sherry Herron welcomed her and conducted a general tour of all the buildings and classrooms – quite a step up from the early sixties.

Re-enrollment for the 2011-12 academic year is now – February 1 through 9
Problem Solving: Assisting Your Child when Problems Arise

When children have conflicts the first thing to do is to wait until all parties involved are calm before you talk about it. It is wise for the adult who is responsible at the time to resist the temptation to be a “judge” and solve the problem for the child, even though it may be evident who is at fault.

Children who are supported in talking out problems learn higher order thinking skills from the process and you do not run the risk of falsely assigning blame. Children learn skills at school for problem-solving techniques—it is always best to allow children the time to solve a problem on their own. If they are not able to do this respectfully, then it is important to help them through the process. It is best for the adult to avoid any judgments unless they are an eyewitness to a behavior that is just not acceptable. If you must correct a child, the way to model respect is to make the correction and consequence, if needed, in private, not in front of an audience. Children may need help identifying their feelings. They need to know that whatever they feel is ok—it is their feeling—but the difference will be in how they decide to handle the feeling.

Many problems can be solved by letting the other person know how you feel and what you want them to do:

I feel ... (state the feeling)
when you ... (describe the action)
because I ... (say why)

Optional last sentence: I want/need/would like you to...

Make sure the tone of this I statement is honest—sometimes these statements end up being used in a way that is merely assigning blame. The other person may or may not be able to respect the wishes of the person making the “I feel” statement. It is possible that the child may need help finding another solution or may have misinterpreted the actions of the perpetrator. Sometimes a problem calls for a more deliberate process—the steps below work well for a group of two or more and even world mediators. Ask these questions, you may want to write some of the answers down for reference:

1. What is the problem as each person involved sees it? You may want to “step into the other person’s shoes” by repeating what you heard them say. You may encourage children to do this as well. Be sure to allow each person time to speak uninterrupted. For younger children it may be helpful to have an object of some kind that the child holds—no one except the person holding the object is allowed to speak. When one child is through speaking then they pass it to the other child.

2. Why is it a problem? What are the effects of this problem?

3. Whose problem is it? How does each person involved feel about it?

4. What ideas do we have for fixing this problem? Consider all possibilities—this is a brainstorming process so no idea should be criticized or laughed at.

5. Which idea seems like it will be the most helpful? A T-shaped pro and con chart may be needed here. Sometimes children will choose to solve a problem in a way that you as the adult know will not work. It is a good idea to allow the children to experience their own solution and come to that conclusion themselves. This is part of the learning value of problem solving processes.

6. How will we know if this solution is working? Choose a time that seems appropriate to revisit the problem and its solution. Give enough time to test the solution. If the solution was not helpful you can go back to the brainstorm list and choose something else to try.

If the children in your house have a constant supply of problems and you suspect they are really trying to get undue attention from you, you may want to make sure the problem-solving process inconveniences them in some way; for instance, you may have to delay some other activity that is desired.

... Elizabeth Stepankiw
Creating Optimal Environments for Adolescents

By Dr Betsy Coe

This is Part 4 and final part of Dr. Coe’s views on educating adolescents in a Montessori environment.

Academic Program and Scheduling

Both the middle school and high school have multi-aged grouping of students, a strong academic program which emphasizes “less is more,” and global and peace education; it allows for different levels of work, multiple intelligences, and different learning styles.

Our program has multi-aged groups of 12-14 years, 14-16 years, and 16-18 years. However, in high school grades 9-12, all four ages are mixed for community meetings, health and electives.

In middle school, courses of study are in cycles of six weeks. Early adolescents need this time period for an opportunity of closure and a period of self-assessment to ask, “What worked? What did not? What did I learn? What am I going to do differently next cycle?”

Each cycle then becomes an opportunity to learn and grow. Students must master certain areas with 80% accuracy on written and performance assessment. We have an immersion of science work for 2-1/2 weeks and then humanities for 2-1/2 weeks. Since both areas are project oriented, the quality of work improves when students can devote their energies to one project at a time.

Classes are organized in large time frames: morning and afternoon work periods, lunch and personal reflection in the middle of the day, and Spanish and physical education at the beginning and end of the day.

Monday through Thursday the schedule is exactly the same each day. Friday is the time for electives, service learning, painting, sculpture extended physical education, speakers, and other activities. Since early adolescents have so many changes going on internally, it is important to provide a schedule that allows for a dependable, routine schedule with few transitions and distractions.

The high school schedule is constructed as:

- Monday-Wednesday-Friday – Classes of 75 minutes
- Tuesday – Thursday – classes of 120 minutes
- End of each day is dedicated to electives and Personal study time.
- Sciences and history are taught in one semester; that is, there is double time for each class.

Both middle school and high school curriculum is organized, presented and studied through overarching themes during each semester.

There is a concerted effort to balance awareness of self, community, culture, and environment as a basis of peace and global education at all levels of the school. At the early childhood and elementary levels, Montessori had a framework to implement these awarenesses. In the secondary, we are very conscious of inclusion of these ideas into every subject area and participation in the larger community.
DEC. 17, 2010 – CELEBRATING JUST BEFORE OUR WINTER BREAK

Go to www.schoolofthewoods.org for more pictures.
What Motivates Us: Autonomy -- Learning to Be Your Own Boss

Our “default setting” is to be autonomous and self-directed. Unfortunately, circumstances...often conspire to change that default setting and turn us from Type I (internally motivated workers) to Type X (externally motivated workers). ...People need autonomy over task (what they do), time (when they do it), team (who they do it with), and technique (how they do it). Companies that offer autonomy, sometimes in radical doses, are out-performing their competitors.

. . . . Daniel Pink, Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us

In the middle of the twentieth century a few scientists began discovering that humans have a third drive (the first two are those of satisfying biological needs and response to reward and punishment in the environment). That third drive is the need to satisfy internal motivations for doing what we do.

The three essential components of a system in which we take advantage of our “default setting” in our personal lives, business, and education are: autonomy (which is the desire to direct our own lives), mastery (which is the desire to get better at doing something that matters), and purpose (which is the yearning to have a reason larger than ourselves for doing something). (Pink, Drive)

It is interesting to note that Maria Montessori described children driven by intrinsic motivations in her first Children’s House at the beginning of the twentieth century. She also noticed how much more children were capable of learning and doing when allowed to follow their own autonomous desire towards activities to build skills, and oddly, they were drawn to the very skills one needs for success in adult life!

The Montessori method of education is characterized by emphasizing self-directed activity on the part of the child:

“It was a spontaneous self-discipline coming from within. These transformed children moved about their little world in a quiet and orderly manner, each getting on with his own business.

“They selected their materials for work; settled down at their tables and got on with their affairs, without disturbing their companions; and afterwards quietly replaced the materials when finished with [them].

“Their bodily movements became more harmonious; their very expressions serene and joyful. Everything about them betokened a heightened interest in life, and with it a new form of dignity. They looked-as indeed they had become-independent personalities with power to choose and to carry out their own acts” (E.M. Standing, Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work).

Montessori students “taste” their own work. Montessori education places the seat of responsibility with the child, with all the personal rewards, the health, and the power this brings. The source [of education should be the student’s will to interact with the world. The student is in charge. The student is responsible” (Eissler, Montessori Madness).

These behavioral patterns aren’t fixed traits. They are proclivities that emerge from circumstance, experience, and context. Type I (intrinsic) behavior, because it arises in part from universal human needs, does not depend on age, gender, or nationality. The science demonstrates that once people learn the fundamental practices and attitudes—and can exercise them in supportive settings—their motivation and their ultimate performance, soar” (Pink, Drive).

Adapted by Elizabeth Stepankiw

Inside the Woods / February 2011 5
Middle School Fun Explained

At the Montessori Up Close evening, November 8, Woods Middle School students demonstrate to a group of potential seventh graders a favorite project called the podiatry map, or sometimes, the Island of Podiatry.

Starting with a drawn outline of a pair of feet, they produce a map of physiographic features – gulfs, archipelagos, plateaus, etc. – aided by a good textbook. This endeavor helps students understand topography and various land and water forms.

A Little Back-story

In the early 1900s, Dr. Montessori built her work with mentally-challenged children on the research and studies of Jean Itard and Edward Seguin. Itard is known for his work with Victor, the “Wild Boy of Aveyron,” an eleven year old found in the woods of France in 1799.

Victor lacked spoken language skills and is presumed to have survived without human intervention. Itard’s work established the idea that language can only be learned early in life. Itard also designed hands-on language materials for teaching Victor, materials that Dr. Montessori developed further.

Sequin expanded Itard’s work with deaf children and designed hands-on materials for understanding basic mathematics. In 1907, at the behest of the Roman Association for Good Buildings, Dr. Montessori began using her teaching materials, based on Itard’s and Sequin’s designs, with normal children in a Roman tenement. Working with these children, Dr. Montessori discovered what she called the “Secret of Childhood.”

What is the secret? It is that children love to be involved in self-directed, purposeful activities. When given a specially prepared learning environment of meaningful hands-on projects, along with the time to do those projects at his or her own pace, a child will choose to engage in activities that will create learning in personal and powerful ways.

A Montessori prepared environment includes the outdoors as well as the indoors and is filled with time-tested, hands-on materials that meet specific learning needs and encourage positive brain development. Above all, Montessori prepared environments are attractive to children and peaceful, giving children a place to learn and grow in peace and dignity.

From “Building Cathedrals Not Walls”
By Maren Schmidt, M.Ed.
Discipline is not punishment. It is a way to teach social behavior. With discipline, parents can teach their children how to manage their own behavior rather than parents controlling children’s behavior for them.

Using discipline as a teaching tool takes time and patience. It involves allowing children to make mistakes and letting them learn from those mistakes.

Sometimes we overreact to our children’s mistakes by yelling or spanking and then feel guilty and stressed as a result. How can we set fair limits and enforce them without causing those feelings?

Why Kids Need Limits

Dr. Alfred Adler, founder of Individual Psychology, wrote that people are social beings and are motivated by the desire to belong. Children want to know how they belong in their family, their neighborhood, school, etc.

Children act, parents respond, and children are guided by that feedback. This process helps them learn how to belong. They “test” their limits to feel secure.

Another reason children push against limits is reported by Erik Erikson in *Childhood and Society*. At about 15 months, the “age of separation” begins and children grow in independence and autonomy. They push against limits for the chance to learn new ways of becoming self-reliant. As they learn new skills, their abilities increase and their limits expand.

Communicating Limits

For children to know what is expected of their behavior, parents need to know first. That means you should consider the child’s particular stage of development and make a list of behavior that is acceptable to you. Once you know what you expect, you will be able to communicate your expectations (dishes go in the sink) and limits (“I know you can put your dish in the sink all by yourself”). Focus on a few expectations at a time and allow for plenty of practice as your children become more responsible.

When children understand what their parents expect of them, as well as the consequences for their behavior, they can be responsible for their choices of behavior.

Keeping Limits

If children break the family rule, it's important to create follow through with a consequence. If they know the consequences before the rule is broken, then they experience the enforcement of the consequence as the result of their own behavior and not as an arbitrary punishment. They learn that they, not their parents, are responsible for actions and that they have a choice to cooperate . . . or not to cooperate.

When parents are inconsistent about keeping consequences, children learn that they are not accountable for their own behavior and that their parents will excuse them from the discomforts of life. Though parents must protect their children from real danger, protecting them from their own mistakes interrupts this significant learning process. This learning time before children internalize or “own” a rule can be frustrating for the whole family.

Exactly what parents do to discipline may change with each new situation, but the underlying process remains the same – encourage positive behavior and independence, reduce choices, use natural and logical consequences.

No matter how many options you have, your children will surprise you with “crisis situations” needing immediate discipline. You may be too angry to effectively deal with the situation. If you want to hit or yell, help your children and yourself by taking a “time out” – tell your child, “I am so angry I can’t speak” or “I need time to think.”

You can also remove yourself – go to your bedroom, the bathroom or call a baby sitter and leave the house.

Leaving will keep you from venting your anger on your children. Also, children who hear you admit your anger, and see you take action to manage it, will learn from your example. When you are calmer, tell your children specifically what your concerns are and talk about more acceptable behavior.

With three-year-olds and older, invite them to suggest fair consequences for the next time rules are broken and agree on the ones you will use. Children who take part in the disciplining process are more responsible for their behavior and less resistant to enforced consequences.

Discipline can be a less stressful part of parenting when children know their limits before they break the rules, practice making choices daily, and by age three, take part in deciding the consequences.

---

*Adapted from Parents’ Time-Out, Vol. 1, No. 2*