This is the Year of the BIG TO-DO

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
All about our school’s 50th year . . .

It really is going to be BIG. You’ve heard bits and pieces about our 50th birthday and details will continue to be made available as the school year progresses.

We’ll start with a special Kick Off meeting on Sept.15 at 8:45 AM which all interested persons are invited to attend, and then more updates at the Parents Social.

Sept. 17. The first celebration will be in October; the annual Chili Cook-off will feature happy birthday elements. That will be followed by a nod to the 50th during the Thanksgiving Feast in November and at the Holiday Feasts in December.

THEN: The BIG TO-DO itself – our biennial gala – set this time for March 3, 2012. And there will be more. Watch for all the news coming out all through the year.

Parents’ Organization announces officers for 2011-2012

The Parents’ Organization officers and committee chairs for our new academic year, 2011-2012, are:

Officers

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

Committees

Back to School Social………………Katherine Bodron
Care Committee……………………Barbara Bends
Charleston Wraps Fundraiser…………Kristin Wright
Chili Cook-Off……………………….TBA
Classroom Representative
   Coordinator……………..Katherine Bodron
Flower Power…………………………TBA
Welcome & Thank You…Committee
Spring Picnic…………………………TBA
Staff Appreciation…………………..Denise Welling
View From the Woods………………Eloise Rochelle

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Eloise Rochelle, Editor
A child’s sense of wonder

The following is an excerpt from the book, *A Sense of Wonder*, published in 1965 by scientist Rachel Carson, a Marine Biologist.

A child’s world is fresh and new and beautiful, free for wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with a good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder, so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unflagging antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.

If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder without any such gift from the fairies, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in. Parents often have a sense of inadequacy when confronted first hand with a world of complex physical nature, inhabited by a life so various and unfamiliar that it seems hopeless to reduce it to order and knowledge. In a mood of self-defeat, they exclaim, “How can I possibly teach my child about nature – why, I don’t even know one bird from another!”

I sincerely believe that for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is not half so important to KNOW as to FEEL. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and impressions of the senses are the fertile soil. Once the emotions have been aroused – a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love – then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning. It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts he is not ready to assimilate.

Exploring nature with your child is largely a matter of becoming receptive to what lies all around you. It is learning again to use your eyes, ears, nostrils and finger tips, opening up the disused channels of sensory impression.

For most of us, knowledge of our world comes largely through sight, yet we look about with such unseeing eyes that we are partially blind. One way to open your eyes to unnoticed beauty is to ask yourself, “What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?”

And then there is the world of little things, seen all too seldom. Many children, perhaps because they themselves are small and closer to the ground than we, notice and delight in the small and inconspicuous. With this beginning, it is easy to share with them the beauties we usually miss because we look hastily, seeing the whole and not its parts. Some of nature’s most exquisite handiwork is on a miniature scale, as anyone knows who has applied a magnifying glass to a snowflake.

What is the value of preserving and strengthening this sense of awe and wonder, this recognition of something beyond the boundaries of human existence? Is the exploration of the natural world just a pleasant way to pass the golden hours of childhood or is there something deeper?

I am sure there is something much deeper, something lasting and significant. Those who dwell as scientists or laymen among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. Whatever the vexations or concerns of their personal lives, their thoughts can find paths that lead to inner contentment and to renewed excitement in living. Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of the birds, the ebb and flow of the tides, the folded but ready for the Spring.

There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that day comes after night and Spring after the Winter.
Dr. Montessori describes the freedom (liberty) afforded to the children in the Montessori classroom as well as its limits (organization). A classroom with such a structure is where each child is able to reach his/her fullest potential.

She wrote, “The organization of the work, therefore, is the cornerstone of this new structure of goodness; but even that organization would be in vain without the liberty to make use of it, and without freedom for the expansion of all those energies which spring from the satisfaction of the child's highest activities.”

Even today in traditional classrooms, someone else decides most of the parameters affecting children's choices. Children are usually required to ask permission before leaving their assigned seats and the work choices are often made by administrators or state legislatures. The daily schedule is tightly controlled with the work blocked out by the hour. Children are told what they will study, when, and with whom. Time at home is often restricted as well by homework requirements.

The traditional learning environment is based on the idea that the teacher can apply knowledge onto a blank slate and reward, or punish, the child into learning. Montessori says, This method ignores the need for autonomy and the fact that we all have inner drives that help lead us to make appropriate learning choices.

Research on human learning makes it clear that restrictions on choice and movement do not provide optimal conditions for learning or well-being.

Children who have a sense of control over their activities will persist longer on tasks, perform at a higher level, become more interested in learning, and are more creative in their work. The "new structure" of the Montessori classroom contains choice within logical limits.

Children in Montessori classrooms are free to move around in the classroom as they choose their work. They may talk to other children, choose where they would like to work, and work for as long as they want. When they need assistance, they are encouraged to ask for it.

The child is usually able to complete all work with the use of materials designed for the specific needs of the child during class time. Therefore, homework is rare for younger children in Montessori schools. The freedoms in the classroom are controlled by the materials the child has been shown how to use and by the availability of the material. In addition to the materials and the arrangement of the furniture in the classroom, order is provided by classroom ground rules, which are often defined with the participation of the children. Limits on choices built into the organization of the Montessori classroom prevent children from being overwhelmed by choices.

As part of the process, children are also learning how to make good choices. Classroom rules center around the need to be respectful of others and the materials. Because each child's needs are respected, the classroom provides an environment of mutual respect and tolerance. Children are being prepared to handle the decision-making, freedoms, and limitations of adult life.

Observations by Elizabeth Stepankiw

(1) Maria Montessori, Dr. Montessori’s Own Handbook - 1914, p. 188.
(2) Angeline Stall Lillard, 2005, pp. 81-85.
Reading Aloud to Your Child: The Most Important Home Work

Being read to and discussing aspects of the subject matter with the reader are vital to the child's development

by Elizabeth Stepankiw
Elementary Classroom


According to *Educational Review*, the author’s central arguments are that conversation provides the natural context of language development and the child learns through exploring his world through interactions with other people.

The study called "Meaningful Differences in Everyday Experiences of Young Children" showed that parents heavily contribute to a child's ability to succeed in school by the number and quality of verbal interactions. In a British study called "Language, Learning, and Education," the most powerful predictor of achievement in school was found to be the amount of time the child spent listening to stories.

Experts tell us that a triangle of communication for language learning is formed between the parent, the child, and the object of the conversation. This doesn't occur when a child is watching TV or a movie because interacting with language is very different from just listening to words. The child must be actively engaged in the conversation with another human present and involved in back and forth conversation.

Current studies prove that the foundation of reading is language; the size of your child's vocabulary strongly correlates with reading success. The best home "work" is one that can be experienced with your child with you reading aloud. Words and stories generate a larger vocabulary and a realization of ways of thinking as you share your thoughts about the books you read. Your child will come to see reading as an adventure and at the same time share this with the person in life that your child loves the most.

Although there will always be times when life gets too hectic for daily reading, it is important to set aside a little time, even if it is just 15 minutes, as often as possible to read. It is also important to share the thinking side of reading: reading allows you to share the pleasure of new learning with your child.

In the book, *7 Keys to Comprehension*, Susan Zimmermann and Chryse Hutchins give strategies for creating an
ongoing conversation between parent, child, and written word:

The first key involves helping your child create sensory images. Point out the feelings, tastes, smells, and pictures that come to mind in the story. Your child will get a sense that reading a story is like creating a movie in your mind—share your own vision of the movie image that the story invokes for you.

Another strategy for enhancing the reading experience is to discuss the background knowledge we bring to the stories we read. Each person interprets a story a little bit differently depending what it reminds us of in our own lives.

You can encourage your child to become aware of background knowledge by sharing some of your own experiences in conversation related to the story you are reading and listening to what your child brings into the conversation. This can be done even before you begin reading by looking at the book together—front, back—and discussing what the book might be about.

To deepen your child’s understanding and to create dialogue and a sense of wonder, it is important to ask questions as you read. Quality questions include those that ask the whys of what is happening, where it is happening, who it is happening to, and how. A good way to encourage your child to learn to ask these questions is playing the "I wonder" game: I wonder what.... or why.... or how... etc. in relation to the anticipated information of the story.

Drawing inferences goes beyond what is on the written page; it involves making guesses about the information in the story—those things we come to understand, but are not stated as fact in the story. Practices for building your child’s understanding of inference include playing guessing games, looking at cartoons together to find the joke, inferring the meaning of unknown words, making predictions, and figuring out the big message in the story.

To facilitate synthesizing, another key to comprehension, spend time with your child talking about what is most important in the reading. Retell the main parts of the story together and then ask what it means.

Reading for meaning, talking about thinking, and creating a deeper understanding during your reading time will help build a rich and rewarding experience for you and your child!

(1) Cambridge University Press
Establishing a Parting Routine
As Your Child Begins School

By Pilar Higginbotham

Early Childhood Full Day Class

The beginning of the school year is a challenging time for young children. For many, it is their first school experience and the first time that they are daily away from parents. They feel these changes in their routine and schedule and it is reflected in changes in their behavior.

Separation is a necessary process that occurs throughout life. It starts with birth and evolves with each new experience, like the new sitter, the first schooling experience, the first time you left your child with a grandmother or sitter, the first summer camp, the first date, and so on.

These are considered minor separations; there are more severe separations, like when one parent moves away— not discussed here.

Separation for the young child can be an experience of successful mastery or of frustrating failure, and it can have a lasting effect on how the child will handle similar challenges in later life. Sometimes it can be difficult letting go of your child. Keep in mind that he/she will go through many challenges in life and you cannot always be a participant.

Every child is a unique individual, yet some behaviors are common to certain ages. Knowing this is helpful in understanding these transition periods.

Children from nine months to 20 months often have the roughest time with separation. They cannot keep the mental image of their parent in their minds as a comfort. During this stage, the child follows the parent around from room to room. They do eventually discover that a parent does not cease to exist when out of sight.

Children from 2 to 8 years old often handle separation with more ease, especially if they have had past success with separation. However, parents and teachers may see a return to younger or more immature behavior, like tantrums, wetting pants, thumb-sucking or baby talk. It takes time for a young child to adjust to the new school experience. With parents and teachers working together, providing support to the child, these experiences can lead to a new level of independence.

Here are some suggestions for helping a young child master the transition and separation process:

Prepare your child for the new school routine. Avoid the “morning rush” by preparing as much as possible the night before. Lay out clothes and prepare lunches.

Keep the new routine consistent. Children rely on such consistence for comfort and feel safe because the concepts of days and time have not fully developed at this age.

Prepare your child for being dropped off. Explain the drop-off traffic line (See drop-off/dismissal procedures in the
classroom handbook). Be sure to stress that you both will remain in your car and will say your goodbyes there as the carpool teacher opens the door. Express your confidence that your child’s day will be successful.

Some children have no problem during the first two weeks of school. However, during the third week, their behavior changes and they may have difficulty separating from you. This is usually a healthy sign, and means that your child is comfortable enough to show his/her feelings.

Identify and acknowledge their feelings. Give them encouragement by letting them know how confident you are in their progress.

Be positive. Help your child understand that he/she is leaving you to experience something wonderful. Discuss all the fun activities that will occur – not how much you will miss each other. Make your parting short and sweet. “I’ll be back later. Have fun!” Do not dramatize the moment with excessive hugs and kisses.

Let the teachers in the carpool line help your child get out of the car (and please refrain from socializing at this time).

Be prompt at the end of the day so that your child can know that he/she can depend on you.

Trust the professionals. The teachers have been prepared to deal positively with each child. They have experienced hundreds of parents and children dealing with separation! Let them tell you when to step back, when to stay and when to leave.

Once you leave, do not linger. Your lingering gives your child mixed messages and may upset other children who are adjusting to the routine too.

Be honest. Don’t promise your child things about which you are not able or willing to follow through on.

Handling separation in a positive way reinforces the love between you and your child by giving the message that with each challenge toward independence, your love is as solid and dependable as ever, even when you are apart.

Last, but not least – project a relaxed self.

Summation: Take the learning process of parent/child separations seriously. Changes can be stressful, frightening, and at the same time, are exciting learning experiences.

Keep a sharp eye on your School calendar

Things happen fast after school starts

It’s hard to understand it but things just do happen in a flash after Day 1 of a new school year.

Woods High School students leave for a three-day retreat night off the bat; then there is Labor Day, the Parents’ Social, and the 4th grade heads out for the yearly Crow Canyon Field Study trip.

October brings us the 5th grade trip to Michael, IL and the Anthropology Field Study. Woods High Intersession I, and the big CHILI COOK-OFF, which this year will be part of the celebration of our school’s 50th Anniversary.

School at the Woods

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