Here’s the rundown on 2013

Parent Education events

School of the Woods will continue to provide learning opportunities about Montessori education for parents in the following months.

A splendid schedule of these events will be available during December and January, with the final session scheduled for February 21.

A math demonstration, 4th grade to calculus, will take place December 5, at 8:45 AM. That is the only event until school resumes after the holidays.

January will be chock-a-block with parent events. We will continue the Open House Programs -- for Early Childhood, Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary.

There will also be Mornings of Learning for Early Childhood classrooms and Evenings of Learning for Lower Elementary (one for each classroom).

Our new feature this year will be the School of the Woods Book Club on February 21 at 7 PM. Please see page 2 for a description of the first-ever book club and what will take place.

Please see the listings of all events on the backpage calendar. If you have questions about anything on these schedules, please contact Barbara Bends in the Advancement Office.

Happy Holidays to All

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Edited by Eloise Rochelle

Did you get your share of fun in the Human Hamster Ball?

What will they think of next?

Our Chili Cook-off, always a great success, did not disappoint. It was held on October 28 and in addition to all the attractions we’ve come to look forward to, featured the new Human Hamster Ball this year.

There were all those chili cooks vying for the prizes in several categories of chili concoctions. They were augmented by the professionals – James Coney Island, Goode Co. Taqueria and others.

Throw in the RockWall, all those inflatable challenge courses, face painting, multiple raffles, entertainment by our very own DJ, and the much anticipated student talent show, and you’ve got another winning chili afternoon. We’ll have more news and photos in our Winter issue of View From the Woods, after the Holidays.
A Special Note about a great parent education opportunity

Join other parents and teachers for the up-coming Book Club event. It is scheduled for the evening of February 21, 2013 at 7 PM. More detailed information will be sent out soon.

The book chosen for this first get-together is *Montessori Learning in the 21st Century* by M. Shannon Helfrich.

To get a head start on your reading, please purchase your copy of this book, either through Amazon (Kindle version is also available) or your favorite bookseller.

News Age Press describes this book as follows:

In *Montessori Learning in the 21st Century*, Shannon Helfrich demonstrates how Dr. Montessori’s empirical knowledge of how children learn, regardless of class, culture, or country, has been validated by neuroscientific findings in the 21st century.

She also includes numerous engaging and informative stories and anecdotes, along with photos and diagrams, on why the Montessori approach works so well for children. She backs up her assertions with the latest science on the brain and how it develops and functions.

Shannon Helfrich has written this book for parents as well as for teachers, explaining the different “Planes” and the “Sensitive Periods” in child development that Dr. Montessori identified more than 100 years ago.

Shannon’s hope is that parents will find this book to be a great resource for supporting their children’s development in everyday life and in the home. And for those parents who choose a Montessori education for their children, this book will greatly expand their understanding of the Montessori approach, becoming their children’s greatest advocates as they experience a Montessori education.

AN AMS POSITION PAPER: MULTI-AGE GROUPING

Rationale: Educational theory and research indicate that learning is an individual process - in time frame, style, and interests - and that children learn from one another. (Hart, p.20; Healy, p. 283; and Gardner, p. 11). Even though most schools are organized by homogeneous, single-age grouping, research has not found this to be beneficial. Conversely, heterogeneous grouping, by ability and age, avoids identification of slow students, improves relationships between students, and facilitates the use of common learning objectives and expectations. It improves peer culture, resulting in peer instruction, peer modeling, and peer reinforcing. (Brookover, p. 11).

Montessori education theory supports multi-age grouping, and Montessori teachers have implemented it for over 100 years. This concept has recently moved into the mainstream due to the work of many educational theorists, researchers, and practitioners. Several states and early childhood organizations are recommending or requiring multi-age grouping in preschool and elementary settings.

Strategies for Implementation:

While the success of multi-age grouping has been demonstrated, it is helpful to analyze specific methods and practices as a guide:

- Children learn from one another. This can be seen in family and play situations where children are free to observe and interact in a variety of activities. Young children learn higher level cognitive and social skills not only through mental development, but also by observing others as models.

- Multi-age grouping usually incorporates a three-year age span based on sensitivities in physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development.

- Children from birth to age 6 respond most positively to environments with concrete, sequential materials which help them interact with and learn about the limits and realities of their world.

- Six to twelve year olds are interested in the world around them, utilize a more complex cognitive style,
and are highly social. The use of reason forms the basis for the development of imagination, which leads to a lifelong love of learning.

- For the twelve to eighteen year olds there are not key learning materials, but instead key experiences which enable the young adult to explore the world of human affairs, community, and culture. Interdependence (through interaction) supports the development of personality as well as exploration of ways that each can make contributions to the world.

- Each group of children remains together in the same environment and with the same teaching team for three years. Therefore, only one-third of the group is new each year, enabling children and teachers to get to know one another very well. This avoids the yearly stress children often face of new teachers, new rules, and new expectations. For the teachers, it offers the opportunity to know each child very well and follow each child’s development over time, personalizing instruction.

- Multi-age grouping helps children develop a sense of community and supports social development. Older children act as models and teachers of younger children. This aids development of personality, collaboration, and cooperation. There is less anxious competition because all children are not expected to have identical skills and perform equally. This leads to respect for the individuality of each person in the group and recognition that each child has unique strengths and contributions to offer the group. Comparisons are not made, and cooperation is encouraged, thus accommodating the uneven development which is especially evident in the birth to eight age range.

- Multi-age grouping encourages peer teaching, which helps the child both as teacher and learner. As children are working independently, the adult teacher has time for individual or small group instruction.

- Children work at their own levels, which may vary in different curriculum areas. Lessons are flexible and often differ, depending on interest, subject matter, and/or ability. Children learn from the many activities within the environment and often find interest in the work of another child or group of children. Because they see the older children interacting successfully with the advanced curriculum, children don’t develop fears of succeeding in higher level work.

- Collaborative learning is encouraged. This occurs not only when a teacher has formed a group for a specific lesson, but often happens without specific, assigned groups.

- Spontaneous grouping can occur when the teachers encourage children to assist one another. (Hart, p. 11).

- Curriculum and materials are multidimensional and concrete, especially for children from birth to age twelve. Children re-explore the same materials at different levels. For example, a group of geometric solid figures can first be sensorially explored, then named, matched to others, duplicated using paper, pencil and scissors, and eventually explored mathematically and geometrically. This repetition aids in true understanding and helps negate the current belief that a topic is studied, tested, then forgotten.

- The repetition also encourages children to assume responsibility for their own learning, makes them more self aware and thus able to see and correct their own errors.

- Multi-age grouping lends itself well to inclusion of children with special needs into classrooms with typically developing peers. The benefits of inclusion for all children have been demonstrated, and they range across all developmental and educational domains. (Esposito, 1987; Thompson, et. al. 1993).

References:
It’s so hard to pick out just the right hat!

Watch out! Here they come!

Human boy high-fives small green insect creature

GOBS OF GOBLINS
GOBS OF FOOD
It’s Halloween and fun day –
October 31, 2012

It’s always a fun day – Early Childhood kids wear their spookiest costumes, upper classmen get to play games and socialize, and parents, faculty and staff all participate.

Face and other body parts painting
Morality can be defined as "a set of value-laden behaviors embraced by a cultural group whose main function is to guide social behavior" (p. 222). Moral sense has been shown to be universal across all cultures according to an interesting set of data compiled through the Moral Sense Test developed by a group of Harvard researchers.\(^1\) Because we know the ability to make certain moral decisions is absent when specific parts of the brain are damaged, we can tell that moral sensibility is something we are born with.

"We are born with a universal moral grammar," says cognitive scientist Steven Pinker, "that forces us to analyze human action in terms of its moral structure" (p. 223). Yale psychologist Paul Bloom believes a sense of justice, our emotional responses to thoughtfulness and altruism, and our willingness to judge another person’s behavior are included in those inborn characteristics. Some researchers believe our moral sense [is] developed to aid...cooperation" (p. 222). In fact, even our primate cousins have been seen to display a capacity for altruism.

"Our brains come preloaded at birth with certain limited moral sensibilities, which then develop in a semi-variable fashion, depending on how we are raised" (p. 223). When a person is able to follow a moral norm despite the fact that there is no possibility of being caught or that there will be no punishment, we know morality has been internalized. Internalization of a moral code is the hallmark of a fully developed moral sense. We want our children to become aware of and "align" themselves with their own inborn sense of right and wrong. "You can create moral maturity in most children. And, perhaps surprisingly, there is neuroscience behind it" (p. 222).

Researchers who study moral development have found that somewhere around age three, children begin to realize their parents are not omniscient. One way children test this hypothesis is by telling lies. Children become aware that they can tell their parents false information without being detected. In other words, children learn to predict what others will believe by manipulating what they tell them. This newly learned skill of being able to "pull the wool over the eyes" of their parents improves over time as they continue to test its limits. The fact that children of this age have difficulty understanding the difference between what is real and what is imaginary probably plays a part in this activity. By age six, the lies become more frequent and more sophisticated.

"This timeline of ever more sophisticated lying suggests to researchers that children have an age-dependent relationship with certain types of moral reasoning, too. Kids might be born with certain moral instincts, but it takes a while to coax them into their mature form" (p. 227). There are three components on this timeline of the progressively maturing moral sensibility. First, avoiding punishment, then learning to consider the consequences, and finally, acting on principle.

Two moral reasoning circuits are involved in this process: one allows us to make rational moral choices (make up our minds about something) and the other is based more on an emotional level. The
emotional level allows us to visualize the consequences of our behaviors. The ventromedial prefrontal cortex is connected to both these areas of the brain and gives us the ability to integrate these two aspects. The three steps in this process are: (1) the part of brain that involves emotions is activated, (2) the signal connects to the higher centers of the brain, (3) fact centers analyze the information and decide what to do.

During this process, the brain must judge right from wrong, separate the critical from the trivial, decide what is necessary and what is a choice, and then make the decision. The integration of these processes is so “tight” that researchers are not sure where one leaves off and the other starts. However, "children who aren’t guided to step two can’t get to step three" (p. 247).

The maturation of emotional regulation and executive functions play an important role in the process. Developing these two so they become integrated will help children learn to make internally motivated moral decisions. The learning that takes place by observing others also has a powerful influence on moral development.

An explanation is of primary importance if we are to guide children to moral decision-making. When children are punished without any discussion or explanation they do not make it to step three. The idea that they will be punished crowds out their ability to make a reasoned response to their internal moral compass because they are constantly on the lookout for an external threat to guide their behavior. Spanking is not only counterproductive, but it runs the risk of creating more aggressive behavior in the child. Hitting a child is a "lazy form of parenting" (p. 249).

Children need clear and consistent rules that are administered in safety (the child is not complying under a threat of harm) and are clearly stated, realistic, and visible to all. Parents need to make sure they are rewarding positive behavior and not inadvertently rewarding unwanted behavior. Too often when parents are overly busy, it is the negative behavior that gets attention. It may be necessary to make a note to spend time with your child when he or she is behaving appropriately.

Immediate and related consequences should be applied when rules are broken. Sometimes the consequence will occur naturally as a result of the behavior. These are the most effective. Other logical consequences may be applied by the parent and usually involve the removal of the child from an activity or the removal of a privilege. These must be consistently applied and emotionally safe. Consequences must be accompanied by some sort of "cognitive rationale" that explains why the rule and its consequences exist.

Your child’s particular temperament plays a role in how intense this process is. The child with a fearless and impulsive outlook on life needs a different approach than the child who reacts fearfully to sharp corrections. One temperament may react catastrophically to the same correction that another is able to shrug off. "Understand your own child and adapt your discipline strategies accordingly" (p. 248).

Parenting this way takes effort, but when explanations are consistently employed over a period of years, the child will automatically relate an "internal attribution" to the situation based on the rationale you have supplied during the corrections from past incidences. As the child matures, he or she will also be able to generalize the lesson to other situations. "Parents who provide clear, consistent boundaries whose reasons for existence are always explained generally produce moral kids ",(p. 247).

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(1) http://moral.wjh.harvard.edu/