Student Dance Recital

Dance/drama teacher Cindy Nevels is planning a lively dance concert for this year’s end-of-school event. There will be the usual two performances - Saturday, May 31 at 7 PM and Sunday, June 1 at 3 PM, Hamman Hall on the Rice University campus.

In keeping with this year’s School of the Woods themed gala, Le Cirque de l’Imagination, and the Woods High School presentation of “Pippin,” this dance performance has a carnival theme. Students will present trained dogs, clowns, tight rope artists and weight lifters. They all come together to dance their way into your imagination. Don’t miss it.

Very Important! Bridge meetings this month

Parents who have children who will be moving from Kindergarten to 1st grade, 3rd grade to 4th grade, 6th grade to 7th grade and 8th grade to 9th grade in the Fall are invited to attend these bridge meetings. The faculty will present a view into their children’s and family’s next school level. The four meetings will be held on the Wirt Road campus on May 21 at 11:45 AM.

Parents discuss Your Brain at Work by David Rock.

On April 8, an enthusiastic crowd gathered at the home of parent and teacher Bridget Tomlinson for a lively discussion of this book about how to harness the workings of your mind to improve thinking, control emotions and better interact with others.

The discussion began with comments on how the book helped many improve their effectiveness at work, then turned to how useful these tools also work in parenting.

All left with a better understanding of their own minds and a few tips for those tricky parenting situations we all face.

. . . . Barbara Bends
Quiet Time Is Important

"To be is to do - Socrates
To do is to be - Sartre
Do Be Do Be Do - Sinatra"

A quote from Kurt Vonnegut reminds me of that innate human need to maintain balance between doing and being.

Do Be Do Be Do. We get so busy doing that we neglect to stop and consider our being. When we get the balance between do and be, life is improvisational.

Doing gives us experience. Being helps us take the time to assimilate all that we have learned through doing. Taking the time to reflect about what we have done, and where we are going, let's us decide what to do next. It gives us time to make sure we are doing what we want to do and making the progress we want—not just keeping busy. If we've taken a wrong turn, pausing to "be" will help us make some important realizations—if we're headed in the wrong direction we don't need to go faster. We need to stop. Our be-ing informs our do-ing.

Quiet time is important for our children to take their experiences—their doing—and assimilate those experiences into their being. We, child and adult, need a place and time to simply "be." A place where we can stop in solitude and gather our thoughts while having time to examine those thoughts.

Children need opportunities to simply sit, rest, observe, quietly explore and be. We need to offer a balance between activity with tranquil and undisturbed time.

Children bustle off to gym class, to swim, to dance, to lesson after lesson in order to maximize their learning or prevent them from being bored. Instead of trying to cram learning with activity after activity, it is better to have an environment where children can quietly explore, investigate and inquire with help from a guide. If a child is interested in looking at rocks, an adult to offer a bit of information by perhaps pointing out the different structure of the rocks—igneous, sedimentary or metamorphic—and then to retreat, offers the child the quiet opportunity to do further exploration, thinking or simple consolidation of new and old information.

A child's learning is deeper when it comes from within versus being forced by using flash cards, worksheets, questioning and on and on.

If we each look at our individual style of learning, we'll perhaps see that we learn best when we choose our activity, do it to our satisfaction and then have a period of rest or contemplation to unify our thoughts. When I'm mentally stuck during a project, a quiet walk helps me consolidate new ideas and incubate my impressions into intentions.

Children's learning and growing also need this time to consolidate new experiences and then to choose what activity to do next to create meaningful learning. By the process of selecting what to do, our children reveal to us who they are. With time to choose, learning becomes personal and powerful. Through their choices, our children are telling us their likes, their dislikes, their interests, their passions, their weaknesses and their strengths. It all begins with being quiet and having time that is unencumbered with activities that aren't evaluated, judged or prioritized by adults.

When we fill up our children's days with busy work that does not tap into our being's powerful way to learn through quiet reflection and choice, we do our children a disservice.

Our children need quiet time to let actions and thoughts sort out and result in robust learning and growth. For optimum development we each need quiet time, to sit and think, and time to do nothing. Quiet time is important.

Do Be Do Be Do. A reminder to take some time to simply be.

Maren E. Schmidt, M.Ed.
www.kidstalk.org
THIS IS IT!
Thursday, April 17.

The day the eggs are searched out by all the Early Childhood and Kindergarten children.

Every egg was located and in addition, other delectables were provided by parents to complete the festivities.
BOOK REVIEW
by Elizabeth Stepankiw

Simplicity Parenting by Kim John Payne, M. Ed.,

Simply Having a Good Time: How to counteract the problem of "too much stuff, too many choices, too much information, and too fast

The authors of Simplicity Parenting advise us on how to structure life so it can unfold naturally, protecting the environment of the family and childhood. Often we can find ourselves with too much stuff, busyness, distractions, time pressures, and clutter - both mental and physical. Children need to slow the pace so they have time to explore the world; we need to protect childhood. "Childhood has its own mysterious processes, its own pace" (pg 12).

Sometimes we end up in a recurring cycle of stresses and reactions. Our complex, media rich, time-pressed, information overloaded lives cause what the author Kim John Payne calls "cumulative stress reaction" (pg 9). Constant low levels of stress create a "drag on a child's ability to be resilient: mentally, emotionally, and physically. They interfere with concentration, with an emotional baseline of calm, with a sense of security that allows for novelty and change...these stresses distract from the focus or 'task' of childhood: an emerging, developing sense of self" (pg 10).

Kim John Payne calls himself a simplification consultant. He found it "gratifying to see firsthand how effective simplification could be in restoring a child's sense of ease" (pg 23). He discovered that, "by reducing mental and physical clutter, simplification increases a family's ability to flow together, to focus and deepen their attention, to realign their lives with their dreams" (pg 23). He promotes principles that allow the natural unfolding of child growth and development to be free of adult levels of "stress, stuff, and speed" (pg 34).

When integrated into the home life, these principles can produce dramatic changes in the family's emotional atmosphere. "A conscious move, both practical and philosophical, toward a more rhythmic, predictable, child-centered home life" (pg 22), means that the home and everything done in it is not entirely oriented toward the child, but rather it is not exclusively oriented toward adults.

Kim John Payne gives us four areas to work on: the environment, the rhythm of the day, schedules, and filtering out the adult world.

Reduce the Clutter of Toys, Books, and Choices

Clearing out the child's room is important because children are "such tactile beings, ...too much stuff deprives [them] of leisure, and the ability to explore their worlds deeply" (pg 22).

According to the author, "the average American child has 150 toys." (pg 20). Children can be overwhelmed by the number of toys in their rooms. The idea is to have available the toys that the child most consistently and for the longest period of time enjoys using.

Often it is not the most complex toys that are the favorites - these usually have a very fixed purpose and do not allow the child's own imagination to
enter in. They rob the child from using his or her own imaginative experiences.

The best toys are active toys that allow building and digging, construction toys, dolls, stuffed animals, toys that "just receive" the child's attentions, figures of some sort, and scenes or houses into which the child can project the figures.

Creative materials such as clay, paints, crayons, drawing pad, dress-up clothes, and swatches of cloth are all good for hours of play. A table or desk the child's size for working on should be included. It is wise to keep the nighttime toys that your child finds most dear readily available.

Books are important, but Payne advises limiting those in the child's room to a few at a time so the child can really revel in and concentrate on what they are reading. Use big baskets or crates to sort and store toys removed from the child's room.

Stored toys and books can form a library when they are packed and labeled so the child can change them out as time goes on and interests change. Like a library, one must be turned in before another is taken out.

**Increase Rhythm and Predictability in the Home**

By looking with an objective eye at the patterns of the day, parents can increase the rhythm and predictability in the home. Creating a rhythm for our daily lives provides "small islands of calm and predictability in the flow of time...meals and bedtimes can establish the major chords of a day's melody" (pg xiii).

We create connections with the consistency of the daily activities we do together. The repeated activities of the day create the rhythm of daily life, one that provides stability and security to our children.

Besides keeping mealtimes and bedtime consistent, previewing what is expected to happen in the day, especially if there are unpredictable events, increases a child's sense of security.

Sharing stories and reading not only creates rhythm, but it also extends your power as the parent, emphasizing the values that are important to you and creating a sense of identity in your family.

Politeness in everyday life also provides stability and predictability. Simply saying please and thank you creates a form of communication that can be counted on and confirms our connections with each other in a foundation for cooperation.

**Balance Scheduled Activities**

Since professionals such as David Elkind (*The Hurried Child*) first raised concerns about the issue of the "overscheduled" child in the 1980s, the amount of time the average child spends in structured activities has doubled. "Just as too many toys may stifle creativity, too many scheduled activities may limit a child's ability to direct themselves, to fill their own time, to find and follow their own path" (pg 137). Too much scheduled activity can "create a reliance on outer stimulation, a culture of compulsion and instant gratification" (pg 151).

Children need some unscheduled time in their lives so they can learn to "motivate and direct themselves." For each scheduled activity children need downtime for resting and replenishing. Sometimes that space of time of doing nothing can push forward the type of deep creative play that leads to the most interesting and self-directed activities.

As parents, we do want to provide opportunity for children to develop their own special interests and talents, but it is important to allow a balance of time for free play as well. The "torrent of constant doing" (pg xiii) can create anxiety. Although it can be "messy," free play builds children's skills for flexibility and adaptability. Kim John Payne advises us to balance active days with calmer ones. Schedule in free time and resist the temptation to completely fill it with lessons and appointments.

[continued next page]
Filter Out the Adult World

Parents can protect their children’s right to grow and develop at their own pace in childhood by filtering out adult information and concerns. An important step in simplifying daily activities is to limit the amount of "screens" in the home. Besides the fact that passive entertainment can take the place of engagement and connection with our children, "television is a direct counterforce to simplifying...[it] runs on commercials, the siren song of 'stuff'" (pg 168). It can take away from the value of the unstructured time created by simplifying schedules. Its dependence on sensationalism, violence, and creating fear introduce children to concerns that have no benefit for them.

It is through the manipulation of their physical environment, problem-solving activities, and the interaction with other humans that children push forward toward healthy development. Television provides none of these. Children need to "know that they have a place in a good world, and a future of promise" (pg 190). Involving children in adult issues and problems through topics of conversation or media exposure runs the risk of taking this promise of hope from our children.

If we trust that by giving children "time and security, [they] will explore their worlds in the way, and at the pace, that works best for them" (pg xiii). Children move out from the family to explore the world and come back again to the security of home in a pattern that allows them to move towards more and more independence. Your relationship with your child works best when it is characterized by connection. Making time for this provides the refuge children need for growth.

Although each family must choose what works best for them, hopefully Kim John Payne’s four strategies for simplifying the home life will help enrich your children’s lives as well as the time you have with them.

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Wynken, Blynken, and Nod

by Eugene Field

Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe —
Sailed on a river of crystal light,
Into a sea of dew.
"Where are you going, and what do you wish?"
The old moon asked the three.
"We have come to fish for the herring fish
That live in this beautiful sea;
Nets of silver and gold have we!"
Said Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.

The old moon laughed and sang a song,
As they rocked in the wooden shoe,
And the wind that sped them all night long
Ruffled the waves of dew.
The little stars were the herring fish
That lived in that beautiful sea —
"Now cast your nets wherever you wish —
Never afraid are we;"
So cried the stars to the fishermen three:
Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.

All night long their nets they threw
To the stars in the twinkling foam —
Then down from the skies came the wooden shoe,
Bringing the fishermen home;
"Twas all so pretty a sail it seemed
As if it could not be,
And some folks thought 'twas a dream they'd dreamed
Of sailing that beautiful sea —
But I shall name you the fishermen three:
Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.

Wynken and Blynken are two little eyes,
And Nod is a little head,
And the wooden shoe that sailed the skies
Is a wee one's trundle-bed.
So shut your eyes while mother sings
Of wonderful sights that be,
And you shall see the beautiful things
As your rock in the misty sea,
Where the old shoe rocked the fishermen three:
Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.

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Wynken, Blynken, and Nod,
Sculpture, formerly a fountain,
by Mabel Landrum Torrey.
Washington Park, Denver.

This poem was written by Eugene Field in 1889, originally titled "Dutch Lullaby."
**DON’T FORGET ABOUT BOOKS TO READ OVER THE SUMMER**

*Wait! Wait!* by Hatsue Nagawaki. An ideal book for young children that gently follows their rhythms and preoccupations. With a text of few words, frequent repetitions, and delicate illustrations by Komako Sakai, which children will quickly identify with, the book follows a young child’s discovery of other creatures and the recognition that while those creatures can suddenly appear they can also go away and disappear just as quickly. Hardcover, 24 pages. **Ages infant to 4.**

*Elecopter* by Michael Slack. The author has created a hybrid elephant/helicopter who patrols the savannah, saving all creatures from imminent dangers. Giggle-inducing humor and nail-biting action are also part of the equation. Whatever her mission, she always succeeds. Illustrated by the author in digital collages of neon blues, yellows and magentas. Hardcover, 32 pages. **Ages 2 to 5.**

*Hi, Koo! A Year of Seasons,* by Jon J. Muth. Bestselling author/artist Jon J. Muth takes a new look at the four seasons! With a featherlight touch and disarming charm, Muth --and his delightful little panda bear, Koo--challenge readers to stretch their minds and imaginations with twenty-six haikus about the four seasons. Published Feb. 2014, 32 pages. **Ages 4 to 8.**

*Mr. Wuffles!* by David Weisner. A touch of whimsy about a cat named Mr. Wuffles. He does not care about toy mice or toy goldfish. He’s *much* more interested in playing with a little spaceship full of actual aliens. When the space visitors dodge the cat and take shelter behind the radiator to repair the damage, they make a host of insect friends. A humorous exploration of cooperation between aliens and insects, and of the universal nature of communication involving symbols and gestures of friendship. 32 pages. **Ages 4 to 8.**

*A Year Around the Great Oak Tree,* written and illustrated by Gerda Muller. A fact-filled substantial book first published in Germany two decades ago, this is a new English translation (July 2013). During fall, Benjamin and Anna visit their cousin Robin, who lives at the forest’s edge. When Robin takes them to his favorite oak tree—“nearly three hundred years old”—the autumn leaves are yellow, red and brown, and they watch hawks and squirrels. They return each season to visit the tree and observe the changes. A charming celebration of the changing seasons. Hardcover, 32 pages. Suitable for a wide range, **3 to 12 years.**

*Listen to the Birds:* An Introduction to Classical Music, by Ana Gerhard. The book is a collection of 20 little stories plus a CD of classical music selections inspired by *bird-song.* Children learn how composers like Saint-Saëns used cello and piano to mimic a swan’s movement, or how Vivaldi recreated the call of the goldfinch with the flute. With CD and book, children have a full and rich auditory and visual experience. For example, in “The Goldfinch”, the author describes it and its personality and then ties that in to Vivaldi’s *Il Gardellino.* Illustrated by Cecilia Varela. 64 pages. **Ages 7 to 12.**

*Sailing the Unknown,* by Michael J. Rosen. This spare, fictionalized diary from the youngest crew member aboard the Endeavour in 1768 recounts the events and adventures experienced by the sailors under the command of Captain James Cook, famed for landing in Australia. Nicholas Young, 11 years old at the outset, is in charge of the ship’s milk goat and helps out in other chores. He chronicles the nearly three-year expedition to far-flung locations in journal entries. A great introduction to exploration. Visually stunning and packed with sophisticated language and intrigue. Illustrated by Maria Cristina Pritelli. 40 pages. **Ages 8 to 12.**