

In this issue . . .

Annual Open House programs.....	1
Parent Education.....	1
Book Discussion Reminder.....	1
Montessori Education Overview.....	2-3
Lessons for Grownups.....	4-5
Sensitive Periods & Planes of "Development.....	6
Understanding Happiness.....	7
A Few Notes on the Statue of Liberty.....	7
Calendar.....	8

Edited by Eloise Rochelle

Don't miss the many Parent Education events throughout the year

You have your list of all the discussion get-togethers and other presentations. These are great occasions to add to your "smarts" about Montessori parenting and in a very congenial way, too.

On November 5, two are scheduled for Early Childhood, Elementary and Upper Elementary levels -- morning at 8:30 and evening at 6 PM. These will be led by Head of School Sherry Herron.



NOTE: We'll have a report on the first book discussion, October 30, in our next issue. But don't forget, the second one is March 24, so you have plenty of time to buy the book and give it a good reading. It's *Drive*, by Daniel Pink.

Our Open House programs begin this month

Each year, School of the Woods presents evening programs where interested persons can learn about the concepts of Montessori education at all levels.

These evenings are all open to the general public as well as to our family of families. There are five evenings, one for each of the school's levels. Each one begins at 7 PM.

The first two will be November 10 and 11. November 10 will be devoted to Woods Middle School, grades 7 and 8. It will cover curriculum as well as teaching methods and learning strategies for early adolescents.

November 11 will concern Woods High School, grades 9-12, and will also cover curriculum and concepts in teaching and learning at this age.

Although you may have attended many of the parent education learning opportunities the school has scheduled, participating in the Open House evenings will give you fresh viewpoints to consider, especially if your child will be entering Middle or High School next year.

How do you say "Happy Thanksgiving" in turkey?

GOBBLE, GOBBLE!

Of course!

MONTESSORI EDUCATION – AN OVERVIEW

Early Childhood Philosophy

The Montessori Early Childhood Program at School of the Woods is designed to provide opportunities for children to grow and progress in physical, social, emotional and cognitive development, according to each child's unique pace.

It provides children with developmentally appropriate classroom work and outdoor play.

Goals for children Ages 2 1/2 to 6

- Develop ability to think positively and constructively about themselves, their peers, and the enjoyment of learning.
- Develop large and small muscle coordination and refine movements.
- Develop ability to regulate impulsivity, to take responsibility for actions and to make appropriate choices.
- Develop ability to acquire specific thinking processes suitable for extending, refining and integrating knowledge, while remaining open to continuous learning.
- Develop interpersonal skills by thinking and communicating with others about their needs, feelings, concerns, and opinions.

- Develop ability to work independently with concentration, order, persistence, and accuracy.

Lower Elementary Ages 6 to 9

The Montessori cultural studies for elementary students are important activities throughout the school year! These include group presentations and follow-up work in zoology, botany, physical geography, political geography, social studies, and history.

This is the age when children's imaginations in combination with these demonstrations can lead to a life-long love of learning, exploration, and appreciation for our amazing planet. You can support these exciting lessons by taking your child to visit the museum and go on nature walks for weekend fun.

We begin the science studies with a lesson on nutrition (what to pack for lunch) and a look at the food "plate" published by the FDA. The food "plate" emphasizes the need to include more fruits and vegetables in our children's diets and to make sure they are getting at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Many of the children enjoy creating their own "plates" and menu plans.

We also discuss the differences between natural products and those that are processed by humans. Before we begin a detailed exploration of the characteristics of plants and animals

we compare the living and the non-living. We continue on, taking a look at the classifications of living things using a tree of life chart to display the increasing complexity of life on Earth. This chart includes picture examples of prokaryotes, protists, fungi, animals, and plants. Detailed explorations of life include a look at external parts, internal organs, and in time for Halloween, the skeleton, for the life forms most familiar to the children.

In geography, we take a look at the Earth as a whole sphere, then break it into hemispheres and flatten it so the children can understand how maps are made. We demonstrate the many landforms found on Earth with clay and water cuttings. These are a favorite for the children as they can make their own and label them.

Our continent studies include knowledge of the names and locations of land masses as well as oceans (with the use of wooden puzzle maps and paper maps) and then continue in more detail, beginning with a study of North America and the United States. In this process we focus on the early inhabitants and the explorers.

Biomes are also an important element of continent studies because they help create a better understanding of the plants, animals, and human societies that inhabit the land.

To add to the skills necessary for geography and science exploration, we learn about length measures (in both non-metric and metric systems) and discuss the requirements of scientific experimentation.

History is difficult unless we also have an understanding of the passage of time. We begin this work by measuring each day as it passes, first on a stick (like Robinson Crusoe) and then on paper.

Returning students are already requesting that we begin our traditional reading of the Crusoe story, which provides an excellent beginning point for imagining the progress of civilization throughout the ages (what would life be like if we were suddenly transplanted to a wild land)!

A series of small experiments in our history work leads the children to an understanding of natural phenomena and the beginning of the universe. They also enjoy hearing many of the creation stories from different cultures as well as the scientific story of creation.

In our history studies we also trace language, writing systems, and math from their earliest forms to the present time.

Each of the elementary classes has special days once a week for the children to share their own knowledge with classmates.

Sharing builds oral language skills and allows another outlet for your child's enthusiasm for her or his own learning. We hope the children will feel free to share any subject they are particularly interested in or experiences they have had of their own choosing and in their own time!

. . . Elizabeth Stepankiw

LESSONS FOR GROWNUPS FROM A MONTESSORI CLASSROOM

by Darcie Vandegrift

I am continually taught important lessons by my son's Montessori education. Montessori puts a respectful, loving philosophy into practice. The Early Childhood classroom is a place that embraces the rightness of the child's intentions while shaping the child's ability to line up these intentions with actions.

How distinct this approach is from what I experienced in my own childhood education. While a few of us might have been defined by the school as "good" or "smart," school was essentially a process that required distrusting and redirecting so that children might be kept "on task," or focused on what they "should" be doing, often ignoring what they would really like to do.

After experiencing a Montessori classroom, I have come to believe the opposite. The classroom structure (and, by extension, the structure of a home) can foster a child's practically innate desire to follow a path toward learning. This environment does not have to shoehorn all children into the same trajectory but rather sets the stage for each small person to proceed as the way opens for him or her.

The deep trust I have in Montessori comes from experience. My son, Anson, had his first early childhood participation at age 4, weeks after relocating from California to Wisconsin. His transition to this new school in Wisconsin was at first difficult. He cried each morning before school for several weeks, begging us to let him stay home.

I shed tears as well, once in front of his teacher as I mentioned how difficult the morning routine had become. Wisely, she advised us to change routines: What if we

carpooled with another child to school? This suggestion transformed our mornings almost from the first day we started driving with a friend. I began to suspect that there might be something to this Montessorian emphasis on environment.

Anson did not outwardly grieve the transition from familiar California to unknown Wisconsin the way we did. My husband and I missed friends and longed for familiar places. After the carpool started, Anson appeared to pass blithely through the day. At school, however, he chose different activities than the other children. Many of the kids his age worked with number chains, created words with the movable alphabet, or traced the sandpaper letters. My son rarely did any of these things his first months in Children's House, at least not to my knowledge. Teachers told me he often watched other children engage in these activities, but he did not participate. Instead, day after day, Anson chose to practice as one of his first lessons in the school.

He took to the table a small tray containing a cotton cloth, clear shoe polish, and a wooden duck. Then he enacted a simple ritual. Lid removed from polish. Cloth dipped in polish. Polish applied on duck. Lid put on polish. Items placed on tray. Tray returned to shelf.

"What did you do at school today?" I would ask, violating rule number one for how to start a conversation with your preschooler.

"I wandered around," he would tell me. "And I polished the duck."

The duck, his teacher informed me the second month of school, was well maintained. "Anson likes to polish wooden objects and repeats this often," his progress report duly noted. I

silently calculated how much we were paying per month (with what kinds of financial sacrifices) to subsidize our son's wood-shining habit.

This gut reaction arose from the timework messages transmitted to me through my education about what children "should" be doing in school. I mistrusted Anson's desire to learn, longing for him to rush to the things that "kindergartners must know." As parents, we receive messages everywhere about what kinds of evidence our children should provide to demonstrate progress. I jumped to the conclusion that duck polishing was, if not what my son would do throughout his year in school, at least an indicator that he would not create the kind of output necessary to "be a success." In a culture that values product, the seeming passivity of observing others or polishing the duck is slightly suspect. Shouldn't a student immediately jump into *producing something*, the way I was expecting myself to be *producing something* in the job I had moved to Wisconsin to begin?

Fortunately, the school's director suggested I read more about the Montessori classroom. I learned that children entering this environment *normalize*, a term that I understand to mean the way kids figure out how to listen to the loving voice within that just a few years earlier urged them to sit up walk, and speak those delicious first few words.

To normalize, children must learn the structure of the Montessori classroom through participation. Polishing the duck was not just cloth on wood (although I imagine that the textures and smells provided daily comfort for Anson during the transition to all places new in Wisconsin). This task, included as part of the Montessori Practical Life curriculum, helped to teach the order, both internal to my son and external of him, necessary for working in other areas of the classroom. The repetition done at his choosing provided

comfort and confidence during the process of learning to work in a Montessori classroom. One year later, as Anson draws maps, manipulates the addition board, and learns to write, his early period of duck polishing has served him well.

How much better would all of us be if we learned to trust ourselves the way my son did during this time? I am sure that my first year at work would have been less traumatic if I had been given the opportunity to observe and gain readiness instead of pushing to replicate the output of the best years in any old, familiar workplace.

We drive ourselves forward, always wanting evidence of achievement. I am guilty of demanding daily proof from myself that I am productive. Another report filed. Another flowerbed weeded. Another project begun.

Nonstop output is not only impossible, but our expectations that we work in this way exhaust us and set us up for failure. Big, "productive" accomplishments, whether learning to read or writing a novel, require a strong, healthy center that cannot be nurtured in the moment of rushing toward task completion. As my son demonstrated, rituals and routines, while not generating output, help create the environment for success and time for regeneration. The mindful pause, as Anson enacted when polish met wood, can help us prepare for future bursts of growth and help us to rest after completing such growth. I try to remind myself that this step of regeneration is vital. Sometimes you just have to polish the duck.

DARCIE VANDEGRIFT is associate professor of sociology and the chair of the Department for the Study of Culture & Society at Drake University in Des Moines, IA. Her son, Anson, is now 16 years old and attended Montessori through eighth grade. His younger sister is currently a sixth grader at Condes Montessori School, a public Montessori school in Des Moines.

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Sensitive Periods and Montessori's Planes of Development

"Ahhhh. The fulfillment of identifying a problem, sitting down to think about it, and using our hands to construct a solution brings us a peace and inner satisfaction unlike any other. This must be a hint of what it's like for a young child in a sensitive period when he is in the process of building himself."

Trevor Eissler
Montessori Madness

Dr. Montessori was among the first to write about sensitive periods as applied to human development. Her ideas have since been validated by scientists who study brain development and specifically a phenomenon called neuronal pruning in which the brain reduces the overall number of neurons.

You may hear these sensitive periods referred to as "critical periods" or "windows of opportunity" (Pedersen and Pedersen).

When a child is in a sensitive period, it means that for several intense periods each day lasting for weeks or for a year or more, there is a perfect opportunity to learn specific skills or to acquire specific capabilities with ease. It is possible to learn a skill once the sensitive period has passed, but only with extra effort.

"An opportunity is missed when this period passes. . . Sensitive periods stoke a fire in the belly, a physical or intellectual itch which must be fed or scratched" (Eissler).

During a sensitive period, the child's receptivity is increased, understanding will be deeper, and learning will be more enjoyable.

Dr. Montessori wrote about many sensitive periods in a child's development. In what she called the First Plane of Development (from age 0 to 6), that of the "absorbent mind," children are learning movement, language, order and organization, refining the senses, exploring spatial and social relationships, and they will have a fixation on small objects and tiny details.

They will become fascinated with writing and attempt to reproduce letters and numbers (Montessori discovered that writing precedes reading).

There will be a spontaneous interest in the sounds and symbols for reading as well as an interest in forming the basic concepts of quantity and number operations.

Children at this age will internalize polite and considerate behavior if they are exposed to those behaviors. If a child's environment offers all these elements, then a strong foundation for intellectual growth and emotional well-being is established.

The Second Plane of Development (ages 6 to 12) is a very stable and a more intellectual age. The two main sensitive periods for this age are for abstract understanding and imagination. Here the child uses creative imagination based on

reality to build an understanding of the world in which she lives and the interrelated functioning of the universe. Elementary children are able to store and organize a great amount of information from a wide range of disciplines (Heather Pedersen and Jason Pedersen, *What is Montessori?*).

In the Third Plane of Development (ages 12 to 18), the adolescent seeks to understand his place in society and looks for opportunities to contribute.

The adolescent is drawn to activities that involve high ideals and enjoys working on projects that require action. Youth in the early years of the third plane of development (12-15) are much like their counterparts in the first plane; they can be self-absorbed, they need adequate food and sleep to sustain rapid growth, and they need time to "just be."

Learning and mental development may even slow down as more time is spent on their own, with friends, and eating and sleeping. They continue to be concerned with justice and fairness, they will believe they can make a difference in the world, and will be focused on finding purpose in life.

What a gift of enthusiasm and hope for the world these students bring as they move into the Fourth Plane of Development to find their place in society

Understanding Happiness

In our culture, we use the word “happy” as though happy is a goal unto itself. An elusive objective, indeed.

The meanings of happiness and pleasure are used interchangeably. Happiness and pleasure are not the same concept and to think so is dangerous. Pleasure-seeking will not bring us happiness.

Conversely, happiness is rarely found in pleasant activities, or in activities designed to avoid pain or hardship.

In the dictionary, the word “happy” has sparse company along with its root word, hap, meaning luck, fortune, chance or an occurrence. Happiness, happen, hapless, haply, happenstance are happy’s only companions. From its original Old English roots, happy relates to having good luck or fortune.

Our forefathers saw the “pursuit of happiness” as an ‘unalienable’ right. We have the right, and the corresponding responsibility, to take advantage of the circumstances that ‘happen’ to come our way, to make events happen, to search for our luck, “follow our bliss.”

The “hap” we seek, though, is not guaranteed to be pleasurable. We are energized as we work toward our dreams and feel connected to something larger than ourselves. Obstacles and hardships are endured and overcome.

The experience of being fully engaged creates happiness. The completion of a meaningful task brings us pleasure and a “natural high.” Trying to recreate that natural high feeling of satisfaction and purpose without the corresponding activity or work can create addictive behaviors, which ultimately destroys one’s ability to pursue happiness.

In working with children, we need to help them learn that positively participating in their lives by making choices and taking full responsibility for those choices is the path to happiness. They will learn to see the “hap” or luck inherent in each situation and engage themselves fully in the pursuit of happiness.

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

A few notes about the Statue of Liberty

The idea for the Statue of Liberty began in 1865 when 31 year old French sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi and some friends envisioned a monument to the Franco-American alliance of 1778 that brought General Lafayette and his French army to America to fight with Washington in our American Revolution.



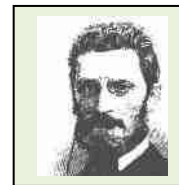
Bartholdi

The French historian, Edouard de Laboulaye suggested the name, Statue of Liberty. In 1870, Bartholdi undertook the design of the statue on his own initiative and began fund raising with his proposal for the huge statue. Construction funds were raised from the French people.

The sculptor hammered large copper sheets to create the statue’s skin. Because of the statue’s towering size and weight, the design engineers Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc and Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel (himself) designed an infrastructure of four gigantic steel supports and supervised their assembly. They also built a skeleton out of iron pylon and steel to carry the copper sheets. The design allowed the copper skin to move independently,



The Statue of Liberty being assembled in Paris



Eiffel

a necessary condition for the strong winds it would endure in New York Harbor. It was completed in 1885, 151 feet tall and weighing 225 tons. It was disassembled, packed in more than 200 crates, shipped to New York, and installed on Bedloe’s Island. American architect Richard Morris Hunt designed the installation site and after installation, its total height was 305 feet.

The poem below was written by Emma Lazarus in 1883, and is engraved on a tablet within the pedestal on which the statue stands. The Jewish Lazarus family had been in America since Colonial times.

The New Colossus

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips." Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Emma Lazarus (1849-1887)