Have you noticed that big rock out front?

Some of our newer parents may have wondered about why it’s there, so here are a few words of explanation. Some years back, School of the Woods was given a large and lovely specimen of fossilized wood as its philosophical cornerstone. It was installed on campus in 2013, right out there in plain view, visible from both the main campus and Woods High School. The log is approximately 8 feet long and average diameter varies from 2.5-3 ft.

An assessment of the log by a professional geophysicist revealed that silica was the main fossilizing substance. Its weight was calculated to be in the range of 4 to 5 tons.

A specimen of this type has previously been identified as Engelhardioxylon texana of a subfamily, Juglandaceae (cousin to a walnut). It was common in the mid and late Eocene of the Texas Gulf Coast Tertiary period. The log was found near Giddings, TX, in Lee County.

How about that new sign?

The making of the sign was truly a high-tech process. Facilities Manager Guy Harrison says the base plate is ½-inch-thick steel, a low-carbon alloy. The letters and graphics are cut out by a computerized high-pressure Waterjet process, which allows high accuracy. As time goes by, the material will develop an attractive oxidized finish – a patina.
GRANDPARENTS VISIT THEIR GRANDCHILDREN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSES

Saturday, November 21, 2015 was a “grand” day for Early Childhood students, as many of their grandparents and grand-friends came for a visit and to get acquainted with the Montessori classroom.

The children were very excited and proud to welcome them and show off all their favorite work, tools and books. These photos show the collective upbeat mood of the morning.
Learning To Be Friendly With Error

If failure is not an option, neither is success. An interesting idea. But isn't it true that we learn most effectively when we've had to figure out a problem through trial and error?

On my typewriter (remember those things?) during my early 20's I had a saying taped to it that read: Babe Ruth struck out 1330 times.

Goodness, was I afraid of failure. Somehow I had snuffed out any risk taking in my life, or looking like I didn't know something. The quest for the good grade or the recognition for a job well done created a sickening feeling of fear in the pit of my stomach. A highly critical boss, who today we would say was verbally abusive, didn't ease my situation. I was terrified of making a mistake.

Luckily, I had friends who could fall flat on their faces doing something new, laugh, and get right back up. I admired their verve and I tried to model some of their unflappability.

When I started looking for and believing in ways to be friendly with error for myself, I began to see an imperfect world that struggled towards perfection, but never actually arrived to that point. Everybody made mistakes.

The important work I learned through my trials and errors was to engage in new activities with new ideas and new people. I discovered that learning and growth occurred at the leading edge of my experimenting.

As we experiment with the new we should try to minimize risk, control variables as well as understand the consequences and opportunities of our endeavors. I think we used to call this common sense.

Of course when we are trying something new we want to minimize the risk for failure or injury. We want to ensure success. Want to learn how to climb a hundred foot rock wall? First learn to tie a bowline, how to put on a climbing harness, and find an experienced teacher.

In short, learn to play safe and the next step seems challenging but headed in the right direction--up!

We also need to control the variables when we are learning so that we can focus and maximize what is put in our brain. This is one of the reasons for the advice to study with the radio/TV/computer/music off. Memory works differently in every person, and what may seem like background noise to one person may be the main attraction for another. Studying for an algebra test with Lady Gaga in the background? You might learn more lyrics than linear regressions.

Clarity supports positive learning experiences. If we know what we are supposed to be learning and why, the variables for learning can be addressed.

To be friendly with error means understanding the consequences of our actions. In Montessori classrooms we show three-year-olds how to use glassware and other fragile items. Yes, objects get broken, but the child who breaks a glass learns to self-correct by moving more carefully. The child who witnesses a breakage also learns about consequences. As adults, we realize that the crystal bowl may break, but recognize that when an accident occurs important learning follows.

True learning occurs at the edge of experimentation and we should create opportunities for children's investigation and exploration in a wide variety of situations that includes tools, people, ideas and nature. We prepare a place for this experimentation, aka learning, that can be directed through minimizing risk, controlling variables and understanding consequences. We want to create places where ideas, tools, people and the outdoors can be explored, experienced and evaluated. We want to create places where everyone wants to be in the game of life, even if they've struck out 1330 times.

Maren E. Schmidt
www.kidstalk.com
Aspects of the Montessori Classroom
Building Community:

By Elizabeth Stepankiw

Psychologist Abraham Maslow believed that most maladjustment and emotional illness in our society could be traced to the failure to satisfy the basic human need for belonging.

In her book about educational reform, *The Schoolhome,* Dr. Judith Rowland Martin writes that her understanding of the value of the Montessori school was not fully appreciated until she realized that what Maria Montessori had established was not simply a classroom in which children would be taught to read and write.

The Casa dei Bambini (Italian for Children’s House) represented a social and emotional environment where children would be respected and empowered as individual human beings. It was an extended family, a community in which children truly belonged and really took care of one another.

Dr. Montessori did not see the core of her work as a method or curriculum, but as a dramatic discovery that children around the world share common, or universal, characteristics and tendencies, even though each child is a unique human being.

Montessori described this sense of belonging as “valorization of the personality,” in which the child gains a strong sense of self respect and personal identity within a safe community. The child is able to retain a sense of curiosity and finds that mistakes are not something to be feared but an endless opportunity to learn from experience.

The emphasis on respectful behaviors (modeled first by the adults), freedom to be active and explore within limits, and the multi-age grouping found in Montessori classrooms provide children with opportunities for broad social development.

It builds in each child a tolerance and appreciation for people’s differences and brings opportunity for leadership roles. It means more small-group options relative to ability and interest. It means maximizing the potential of each individual child in an environment that has a place for everyone, providing a profound sense of belonging.

The classroom starts out each school year with students who have already established a heritage that they will pass on to the new children. Because of the mixed age groups, children can see what is coming next by watching older children and have the opportunity to reinforce knowledge by sharing it with younger children.

Because of their constant interaction, children learn to take responsibility for themselves and for each other. They learn to get along with children of different ages and abilities and to respect each other’s work and work space. They learn to treat each other with courtesy. They take an active role in maintaining the classroom by, among other things, putting materials away for the next person. The classroom becomes a thriving community.

Sharon Caldwell of The Montessori Foundation states that “Montessori works best when the approach is adopted as an integrated whole, when the parts work together, and when the school community evolves as an organism that is stronger than the sum of its parts.”

Many of us were taught to value survival and struggle, one-upmanship, and succeeding when success is measured at the expense of others. The children in the Montessori classroom learn as a result of the structure to value cooperation and empathy, ingredients necessary to create belonging and community.

Caldwell begins by listing two essential ingredients needed for the adults of the school to support and create a whole school community:

1) cohesive vision clearly communicated to the faculty, parents, and students; and consequently,

2) The “buy-in” from all groups in the community of that vision.

These two essential ingredients form to create intent, which puts us all together with a common goal and helps us transcend personal differences and challenges.

The next ingredient for building a strong school community is honesty of communication that is nurtured by openness.

Communicating in an open environment without being hurtful
or insulting to others creates a safe place for expressing needs, feelings, and wants.

The last ingredient Caldwell discusses is work. Work is a strong factor that cements a community. It brings us together as a social group, it is a great equalizer in a community, and it allows all members of the community to bring their own set of unique skills to meet the needs of the community as a whole (of course, our school also provides opportunity to have fun together).

Caldwell makes one last point that brings us back again to the reason we are all here together:

“Montessori school communities start and end with the children. Their opinions are solicited and respected, their labor valued, and their participation and company are regarded as a benefit rather than a distraction. It is, after all, the children’s house!”

1 *The Schoolhome*, Dr. Judith Rowland Martin


3 David Kahn, *What is Montessori Elementary?*).


### Encouraging Positive Behaviors At Home

Everything your child needs to know about life is developing long before kindergarten. Your school is helping your child develop positive skills, attributes, and character qualities every day. Explore ways that are comfortable for you to incorporate into your own household with routines and actions that build on these character qualities and traits.

Chores around the house, of all types, develop accountability and character. When you ask your child to do something, make sure it is done.

To help children learn to make wise decisions, present them with choices (example: Do you want to do your chores now or in one hour?). Never give a child a choice when there is really no choice. Let your child live with the consequence.

Create daily routine and family traditions. Not making frequent and abrupt changes in routine gives daily continuity and coherence to children’s lives. It is the occasional change that adds spice to the routine.

Work with your child to develop tenacity. Allow time for tasks to be finished and limit distractions that preclude concentration. Activities that foster concentration include reading, board games, puzzles, conversations with questions and answers that require thought.

Build confidence by helping your child develop a skill or a hobby they can be good at.

For the development of initiative encourage creativity. Have an attitude of non-criticism when things don’t turn out as they should. Help your child learn to clean up after herself.

Teach good manners by example: please, thank you, and may I.

Help your child learn to work well in a group by having him help to cook or clean. It takes more time but it builds a strong family bond.

Establish guidelines for at home movement. We walk inside, we run outside, we put things back where we found them.

Allow children to repeat activities until they are done well.

Deal gently with character flaws while encouraging character qualities.

Be aware that there are “teaching moments” all the time.

Occasionally use the off button on the sounds of civilization. Help your child listen to her own thoughts.

Foster success by helping your child know what the expectations are so he can meet them.

Promote a good work ethic by working with your child. Children tend not to work well alone on projects not of their own choosing.

Don’t make your child grow up too soon. Time is the essence of life. Give your child more time. Reduce his stress and yours. Start your morning earlier so your child has time to eat, time to make the bed, get dressed, etc.

Don’t invest much emotion in a child’s mistakes. Invest time in helping him work through them. Blame doesn’t bring success, happiness, or mastery. Give your child time to self-correct.

Prepare for beyond time and space. Share your spiritual life with your child.

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Adapted from Edward Fidellow, Getting Your Money’s Worth Workbook.

Happy Valentine’s Day

*Inside the Woods, February 2016*
MORE RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Early Childhood teacher Bridget Tomlinson has suggested some good books for a wide range of ages. They also would be good sources to use in talking with your child about tolerance, respect and the power of a single person.

*The Peace Book*, by Todd Parr. The style of this book is primary-color illustrations and simple statements that convey profound meaning beneath a jovial exterior. Readers learn how to bring peace to their neighborhood, both the essence of peace and what it feels like: "Peace is keeping for everyone," giving kids plenty to think about. 32 pages, 2009; ages 2-6.

*Same, Same but Different*, by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw. Elliot lives in America, and Kailash lives in India. They are pen pals. By exchanging letters and pictures, they learn that they both love to climb trees, have pets, and go to school. Their worlds might look different, but they are actually similar. An inviting point-of-view and colorful, vivid illustrations show how two boys living oceans apart can be the best friends. 40 pages, 2011; ages 4-7.

*The Colors of Us*, by Karen Katz. Seven-year-old Lena is going to paint a picture of herself. She wants to use brown paint for her skin. But when she and her mother walk through the neighborhood, Lena learns that brown has many different shades. Through the eyes of a little girl who begins to see her familiar world in a new way, this book celebrates the differences and similarities that connect all people. Ages 6-8, 1999; 28 pages.

*The Butter Battle Book*, by Dr. Seuss. This classic cautionary tale, introduces readers to the important lesson of respecting differences. The Yooks and Zooks share a love of buttered bread, but animosity brews between the two groups because they prefer to enjoy the tasty treat differently. The timeless and topical rhyming text is an ideal way to teach young children about the issues of tolerance and respect. This book is a must-have for readers of all ages. 42 pages, 1984; ages 5-9.

*Kid Presidents: True Tales of Childhood from America’s Presidents*, by David Stabler. In stories of 20 different U.S. presidents in this book, we learn that our country’s leaders were once kids with ordinary problems. They struggled with schoolwork, bickered with siblings, and angered their parents. Dwight Eisenhower dealt with bullies. Bill Clinton struggled with his weight. Barack Obama moved to Indonesia with his mother when he was just a boy, and had to get used to a new culture. 224 pages, 2014; ages 9-12.

Make a Trip to Armand Bayou Nature Center

Harris County has classified 22 major watersheds that each drain into 22 major waterways (see small map). The watersheds come in all shapes and sizes, some large, some small and include 12 major bayous, creeks and rivers.

Watershed boundaries are formed by nature and are largely determined by topography.

Our bayous and waterways are an integral part of the local landscape. Houston is widely known as the Bayou City. The rest of Harris County is much the same. In many places in the county, bayous offer distinctive vistas.

The one most interesting is the well-developed Armand Bayou Nature Center in Clear Lake.

This Nature Center has wetland prairies, forest and marsh habitats for animal life; and there’s also Martyn Farm, a late 1800s farm life demonstration, plus canoeing, and a pontoon boat cruise.

There are fees, so check its website, www.abnc.org.
December 18, 2015

Hello, Santa!

He came – he saw – he conquered: All the Early Childhood students’ anticipation of the upcoming holidays.

Santa had encouraging words for each one, and he also brought along one of his elves. His visit each year is always a big event.

Spirits were high.