

In this issue . . .

Grandparents Day.....	1
Heads Up! Important News.....	1
Meaningful Repetition Leads to Mastery.....	2-3
Maria Montessori Speaks.....	2
The Brain Seeks to Control Stress.....	3
The Brain Craves Clear and Precise Information...4-5	
The Usefulness of Good Discipline.....	6
Cylinder Gardening Project.....	7
Calendar.....	8

Edited by Eloise Rochelle

Grandparents and Grand-Friends Day is coming up

On Grandparents Day, all our Early Childhood students will welcome their grandparents and grand-friends to the school.

The children will show them all their favorite class work and give an energetic tour of the playgrounds.

This big event will take place on Saturday morning, November 19, between 9 and 10:30 AM. And, of course, there will be snacks to share, too.

Our first Grandparents and Grand-friends Day was held last November. Those grandparents who attended were thoroughly enchanted by the happenings.

Heads Up! Important News!

In November, School of the Woods hosts two open house programs which present information about Woods High School and Woods Middle School. Families from all levels are invited

Although younger students may be years away from middle school and high school, these two evenings showcase the importance of continuing Montessori education from very young through grade 12.

Our Montessori middle school and high school offer unique interactive and collaborative programs. The curriculum extends all the Montessori concepts, designed to meet the needs of adolescent students.

The Middle School Open House is November 14 at 7 PM at the Middle School building on the Wirt Road campus.

The High School Open House is next, on November 15, also at 7 PM, at Woods High School, 7812 Bobbitt, directly across the street from the main campus.

In January, there will be Open House programs for Upper Elementary, Elementary and Early Childhood levels.

There is a lot to learn!

HAPPY
THANKSGIVING

Meaningful Repetition Leads to Mastery

Compiled and discussed by Elizabeth Stepankiw

“Control leads to compliance; autonomy leads to engagement...engagement as a route to mastery is a powerful force in our personal lives.”

..... Daniel Pink

Researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi became famous in his field for his insights on a human experience that he came to describe as “flow.” When experiencing flow, a person is so completely engaged in what they are doing that their sense of time and place melt away. This happens when what a person has to do is not too easy, not too difficult, but a notch or two beyond the person’s current abilities. When the mind and body are stretched in this way, the effort itself is the most delicious reward (Daniel Pink, Drive).

Contrary to what we usually believe...the best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times – although such experiences can also be enjoyable if we have worked hard to attain them.

The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to the limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience

In the Montessori classroom the environment is full of materials and lessons appropriate to the age of the children they serve. Self-directed movement is built into the structure of the classroom. With these things, the ultimate goal is to create situations in which the task and the developmental needs of the child “match” and the child becomes absorbed in his work. This is what Csikszentmihalyi called engagement - the state of “flow.” Montessori described her first “never-to-be forgotten” discovery of this phenomenon while observing an engaged child:

I watched the child intently without disturbing her at first, and began to count how many times she repeated the exercise; then, seeing that she was continuing for a long time, I picked up the little arm-chair in which she was seated, and placed chair and child upon the table; the little creature hastily caught up her case of insets, laid it across the arms of her chair, and gathering the cylinders into her lap, set to work again. Then I called upon all the children to sing; they sang, but the little girl continued undisturbed, repeating her exercise even after the short song had come to an end. I counted forty-four repetitions; when at last she ceased, it was quite independently of any surrounding stimuli which might have distracted her, and she looked round with a satisfied air, almost as if awakening from a refreshing nap.

Maria Montessori

Spontaneous Activity in Education

Our brains are designed to be engaged in meaningful activity. When humans are deprived of engagement in their lives, Csikszentmihalyi found that they are plunged into a state “eerily similar to a serious psychiatric disorder.” (Pink).

Different types of brain plasticity dominate during certain times in a person’s life: It occurs during normal brain development from infancy to adulthood and as an adaptive mechanism to compensate for lost functions or to maximize function.

Today neuroscience has been able to identify the exact mechanisms (particular proteins and different types of brain cells) of what is often referred to as brain plasticity-the fact that the neural circuitry in the brain reorganizes itself in response to experience or sensory stimulation.

MARIA MONTESSORI SPEAKS

The Forgotten Citizen: excerpts from a letter from Maria Montessori to all governments, in 1947

My life has been spent in the research of truth. Through study of children I have scrutinized human nature at its origin both in the East and the West and although it is forty years now since I began my work, childhood still seems to be to be an inexhaustible source of revelations and – let me say – of hope.

Childhood has shown me that all humanity is one. All children talk, no matter what their race or their circumstances or their family, more or less at the same age; they walk, change their teeth, etc., at certain fixed periods of their life. In other aspects also, especially in the psychical field, they are just as similar, just as susceptible.

Children are the constructors of men whom they build, taking from the environment language, religion, customs and the peculiarities not only of the race, not only of the nation, but even of a special district in which they develop.

Childhood constructs with what it finds. If the material is poor, the construction is also poor. As far as civilization is concerned the child is at the level of the good gatherers.

In order to build himself, he has to take by chance whatever he finds in the environment.

The child is the forgotten citizen and yet, if statesmen and educationists once came to realize the terrific force that is in childhood for good or for evil, I feel they would give it priority above everything else.

All problems of humanity depend on man himself; if man is disregarded in his construction, the problems will never be solved.

No child is a Bolshevik or a Fascist or a Democrat; they all become what circumstances or the environment make them.

In our days when, in spite of the terrible lessons of two world wars, the times ahead loom as dark as ever before, I feel strongly that another field has to be explored, besides those of economics and ideology. It is the study of MAN – not of adult man on whom every appeal is wasted. He, economically insecure, remains bewildered in the maelstrom of conflicting ideas and throws himself now on this side, now on that. Man must be cultivated from the beginning of life when the great powers of nature are at work. It is then that one can hope to plan for a better international understanding.

TWO ESSAYS BY MAREN SCHMIDT

The Brain Seeks to Control Stress

Brain researchers believe that a newborn's brain creates neurons at a rate of over a quarter a million per minute.

The young brain grows and absorbs information without evaluating, filtering or giving priority to the information.

The brain receives each event with the same import as every other experience.

The young brain hasn't learned how to filter critical information for survival, as true or false, real or fantasy, or good or bad. The brain receives violence, disrespect, hurtful language and physical abuse with the same sense of reality as calmness, kindness, positivity and gentleness.

Loud noises, harsh lighting, disruptions, irregular schedules, though, are among the activities that create stress in the young child and communicates to the brain and body to be on danger alert.

The brain seeks to control stress in the young child and begins to create a brain structure based on acceptance or avoidance of the stimuli in the child's environment.

During the first six years of life the child is in a sensitive period for learning about human relationships and what it means to be human. When the environment is such that the brain perceives the child's surroundings as hurtful, brain structure begins to reflect that perception by pruning down neuron development for hearing, touch, hunger, etc. to compensate for the stressful sensory overload. Likewise, if the environment is calm and nurturing, the brain develops to accept and grow in response to that life-affirming presence.

Our electronic babysitters may contribute more to children's misperceptions of what it means to be human than the actual experience of living with people.

Some facts to consider:

36 percent of all children have TV's in their bedroom
50 percent of households have 3 or more TV's
49 percent of households have video game players
73 percent of households have computers
99 percent of children live in a home with a TV set

The pervasive nature of electronic media in our children's lives is substantial. Children's Saturday morning programs have averaged 20 to 25 violent acts per hour. The content of the media—violence, abusive language—affects the stress level of a child and thus the development of the brain and personality.

The brain during the first two years of life is absorbing information as if everything experienced were normal and brain development responds accordingly. If normal is loud, violent, or abusive, and not the expected loving interaction with adults, the child's brain development begins to incorporate defensive mechanisms that work against the child's natural tendencies to be curious and seek out new, challenging and meaningful experiences, the core of true learning.

We need to minimize the amount of distress in our young children's environments. Noise levels, lighting, abrupt disruptions, and the threat of violence from television or others needs to be managed by the adults in the child's life in order to maximize healthy brain growth.

If you have a television in your home, step outside sometime today while the television is playing, and look through a window at the television screen.

- Imagine that you are a newborn, a two year old, a three year old.
- What are the lighting, the changes in images and the type of images conveying to a child's mind?
- Think about how your child's brain is reacting to these stressors, and how you can minimize these stressors.

Remember, a child's brain grows in response to its environment.

The Brain Craves Clear and Precise Information

During the first six years of life, the child's natural development includes the formation of language, with the most intense activity occurring during the first two and a half years of life.

It seems like common sense to say that the more words a child hears during those first two years of life the larger the child's vocabulary and aptitude for language will be.

Research proves that intuitive deduction showing that children whose parents spoke to them an average of two to five thousand words per day started kindergarten with an excellent vocabulary.

Multiply 5000 words per day by five years and you have over 9 million words. For the child who is exposed to only 1000 words per day, this five-year number drops to around 2 million words, and language skills usually lag behind for a lifetime.

To get a handle what a thousand words looks like; this column is about 500 words. A normal rate of speech is 120 words a minute, so a thousand words is about eight to nine minutes of speaking.

A flood of language does not guarantee optimum language development, though.

Children say the names of things first and we are a help to our children if we name things in a clear and precise way in order to avoid confusion.

I once spent a delightful hour with a six month-old handing him three pieces of fruit and giving him the name. After he held the banana for about thirty seconds, I would say "banana." This activity mesmerized him. I'd hand him another piece of fruit and say the name. Apple. Orange. Banana. He'd hand me back a piece of fruit, smiling and confident that he would get another piece, along with a name. On we went for an hour, interrupted only by the fact that he had a plane to catch. His dad laughed as they left the boarding area, "I think you had him at banana."

This experience with the six-month old emphasizes the ways in which we as adults can enhance language development before a child begins to talk:

- Speak clearly
- Name things one at a time
- Whenever possible hand the child the object being named
- Speak using real words—no goo-goo-duckie-poo baby talk
- Read aloud for at least ten to fifteen minutes per day
- Speak in whole sentences, slowly, kindly and respectfully
- For example, "Orange. This is an orange."

After the child begins to speak:

- Ask questions to encourage and help the child to begin to form sentences.
 - Who gave you the orange?
 - When did you eat an orange?
 - Why didn't you like the orange?
 - Where did you put the orange?
- Read aloud for at least ten to fifteen minutes per day.
- Show words as well as say them as you read.

Research show that perhaps the biggest help to a child's language development we can provide is acting with loving-kindness. Talk, read and listen to your child every day with loving kindness.

You can't talk to or love your child too much. And a smile may be worth a thousand words.

Maren E. Schmidt
www.kidstalk.com

The Usefulness of Good Discipline

Discipline is not punishment. It is a way to teach social behavior. With discipline, parents can teach their children how to manage their own behavior rather than parents controlling children's behavior for them.

Using discipline as a teaching tool takes time and patience. It involves allowing children to make mistakes and letting them learn from those mistakes.

Sometimes we overreact to our children's mistakes by yelling or spanking and then feel guilty and stressed as a result. How can we set fair limits and enforce them without causing those feelings?

Why Kids Need Limits

Dr. Alfred Adler, founder of Individual Psychology, wrote that people are social beings and are motivated by the desire to belong. Children want to know how they belong in their family, their neighborhood, school, etc.

Children act, parents respond, and children are guided by that feedback. This process helps them learn how to belong. They "test" their limits to feel secure.

Another reason children push against limits is reported by Erik Erikson in *Childhood and Society*. At about 15 months, the "age of separation" begins and children grow in independence and autonomy.

They push against limits for the chance to learn new ways of becoming self-reliant. As they learn new skills, their abilities increase and their limits expand.

Communicating Limits

For children to know what is expected of their behavior, parents need to know first. That means you should consider the child's particular stage of development and make a list of behavior that is acceptable to you. Once you know what you expect, you will be able to communicate your expectations (dishes go in the sink) and limits ("I know you can put your dish in the sink all by yourself"). Focus on a few expectations at a time and allow for plenty of practice as your children become more responsible.

When children understand what their parents expect of them, as well as the consequences for their behavior, they can be responsible for their choices of behavior.

Keeping Limits

If children break the family rule, it's important to create follow through with a consequence. If they know the consequences before the rule is broken, then they experience the enforcement of the consequence as the result of their own behavior and not as an arbitrary punishment. They learn that they, not their parents, are responsible for actions and that they have a choice to cooperate . . . or not to cooperate.

When parents are inconsistent about keeping consequences, children learn that they are not accountable for their own behavior and that their parents will excuse them from the discomforts of life.

Though parents must protect their children from real danger, protecting them from their own mistakes interrupts this significant learning process. This learning time before children internalize or "own" a rule can be frustrating for the whole family.

Exactly what parents do to discipline may change with each new situation, but the underlying process remains the same – encourage positive behavior and independence, reduce choices, use natural and logical consequences.

No matter how many options you have, your children will surprise you with “crisis situations” needing immediate discipline. You may be too angry to effectively deal with the situation. If you want to hit or yell, help your children and yourself by taking a “time out” – tell your child, “I am so angry I can’t speak” or “I need time to think.”

You can also remove yourself – go to your bedroom, the bathroom or call a baby sitter and leave the house.

Leaving will keep you from venting your anger on your children. Also, children who hear you admit your anger, and see you take action to manage it, will learn from your example.

When you are calmer, tell your children specifically what your concerns are and talk about more acceptable behavior.

With three-year-olds and older, invite them to suggest fair consequences for the next time rules are broken and agree on the ones you will use. Children who take part in the disciplining process are more responsible for their behavior and less resistant to enforced consequences.

Discipline can be a less stressful part of parenting when children know their limits before they break the rules, practice making choices daily, and by age three, take part in deciding the consequences.

*.Adapted from Parents' Time-Out,
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Lower school classes pursue Cylinder Gardening Project

One of our Early Childhood classes and two from Elementary are engaged in a Cylinder Gardening



Program this fall. The program was developed by Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension Service and offered to schools for children to participate in. The children learn

to identify vegetables and observe how they grow, to properly perform gardening practices and to develop gardening as a lifelong activity.

Cylinder gardening requires only a small patch of land and little pre-gardening preparation or experience. Plants mature from seed in 30 to 90 days.



Any kind of large container can be used, even constructed raised beds. The containers are then filled with potting soil, followed by planting the seeds or starter plants, subsequent watering and care and then harvesting.

The children are growing beets, bush beans, carrots, kohlrabi, lettuce, pumpkins, radishes, snow peas, squash, tomatoes and turnips.



Research shows that by growing plants, children will not only learn about science and the environment but they will also gain a sense of pride, responsibility and determination.