

SCHOOL of the WOODS

WOODS LOWER SCHOOL
WOODS MIDDLE SCHOOL
WOODS HIGH SCHOOL

March 2017

INSIDE THE WOODS

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Edited by Eloise Rochelle

Last coffee meetings are this month

This month is your last chance to be in on the coffee conflabs with our top administrators.

On March 7, Dr. Betsy Coe will meet with Middle School and High School parents for "Betsy's Buzz."

Head of School Sherry Herron will meet on March 8 with parents of students in Woods Lower School – Early Childhood, Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary.

These informal gatherings are always interesting, and deserve to be part of your school year routine.



WOW!

Upper Elementary students recently presented their cultural class projects to classmates. Students select a country, perform their own research and prepare a 'storyboard' to illustrate economy, farming, customs and other information about it. A favorite activity.

The Age of Anxiety

By Kathy Corey

The general perception today seems to be that children are at greater risk, facing more threats from the outside world than children of decades ago. Parents at all socioeconomic levels voice concerns about dangers children face daily: kidnapping, injuries, competition for placement in programs, schools, and activities considered necessary for admission to college.

These perceptions of the child's immediate world are at odds with one another. One set suggests children are not safe without constant adult supervision and that they are better off at home, watching TV, playing video games, or using other technology, because we know where they are and are comforted by the illusion that we are in control. The other set suggests that, by age 3, a child should be active in extracurricular activities where he can develop academic, social, and athletic skills, because, after all, college is just around the bend.

No doubt, there are risks involved in growing up. And some risks do differ from those faced by children in the 1950s and 60s, eras glorified as times when children led idyllic, safe existences in well-kept, middle-class neighborhoods. These are misperceptions, however: Families in poverty, families where both parents work long hours, families cursed with alcoholism and/or drug addiction, and families dealing with divorce, abandonment, or domestic violence are not new but rather ongoing reflections of the human condition that affect all children, ours and theirs, and the social realm in which we all live.

As parents and grandparents, we can only effect change in our communities and in the wider world if we change our perceptions and behaviors. The cure for ego confusion (seeing our children as representations of ourselves, who, thus, must be perfect at all times) is first to recognize that we have it. Then we must inform ourselves, using reputable sources, about typical child development.* Finally, we must adhere to Montessori's charge "to follow the child" (Montessori, 1949, p. 231), an endeavor that entails much observation. And observation, as Montessori teachers know, is a skill and an art requiring knowledge, effort, and patience.

Consider the following as some ways to be fully present with your children:

- Childproofing: We usually do a good job with outlet covers, drawer stops, and so on, for babies, but what about

older children? Call it "preparing the environment": Place and keep televisions, computers, tablets, and phones in public living spaces and set reasonable limits on their use; balance technology with exercise and indoor/outdoor play; and make time for reading aloud and silently in the presence of other family members doing the same.

- Share meals together, especially dinner and its preparation, as often as possible, five nights a week at least. Share with each other your day as well as thoughts and feelings, and resist the temptation to teach. We learn more through discussion and modeling than through lecture.
- Allow children to speak for themselves: Respect their feelings and their intellect, even if they are mistaken in their thoughts or behaviors.
- Show, rather than tell. It is the Montessori way.
- Be considerate of each child's need for privacy. There is no law that says children must share with parents their every thought, feeling, or action.
- Avoid comparison and competition between children, always and everywhere. Each child is entitled to his/her individuality.
- Set up home environments and family interactions that allow choices and freedom to choose. Meals, weekend plans, vacations, and gifts for family members are reasonable areas of choice.
- Understand that mistakes are opportunities for learning. All humans make mistakes; it is what we do with our mistakes that makes a difference.
- Demonstrate active respect in thought, word, and deed for all life. Be the best model you can be. You are being watched.

Children who feel loved and respected will develop their singular potential.

* See books by Louise Bates Ames and Frances L. Ilg (Gesell Institute of Human Development): *Your 1-Year-Old through Your 10- to 14-Year Old*, Dell Trade Paperback Books, and *Child Behavior* by Ilg, Ames & Baker, Harper Perennial Books.

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Montessori, M. (1949). *The Absorbent Mind*. Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House.

Kathy Carey, MAT, is editor of Montessori Life Magazine. She is AMS-credentialed (Early Childhood).

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The Latest Scoop on Museum Happenings

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 5601 Main St., Houston, 77005. Three notable exhibits are on view at MFAH now. . Refer to the MFAH website for costs and times.



Two Centuries of American Still-Life Painting: The Frank and Michelle Hevrdejs Collection, now through April 9, 2017. The exhibit traces the history of American

still-life painting over nearly 200 years up to the present day, and most works have never been seen by the public. The exhibit features 60 luminaries of the genre, including Georgia O'Keeffe, James Peale, John F. Peto, Wayne Thiebaud, Max Weber, and Andrew Wyeth.

Vignettes: Masterworks on Paper 1520 to 1870 -through April 16, presents more than 45 works on paper, almost half of which are recent acquisitions.



The prints, drawings, and illustrated books are featured in various themes: drawing after the antique, saintly visions, landscapes, the connection between art and literature, engraved portraits, and the treatment of animals.

Among the artists represented are Baccio Bandinelli, Eugène Delacroix, Guercino, Ford Madox Brown, and Rembrandt.

Sculpture of Ron Mueck – through August 13.

Mueck was born in Australia in 1958. After working in film and television in the United States and London, he shifted his focus to the fine arts in the mid-1990s. The 13 sculptures assembled in this



exhibition are about a third of his entire production. The figures are often caught in moments of silent communication or slumber and vary widely in scale: Some figures fill a gallery, whereas others stand no more than three feet high.

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 5216 Montrose Blvd., Houston 77006. The exhibit **Angel Otero: Everything and Nothing** is now on view and ends March 19. Otero is a native of



Puerto Rico now living and working in Brooklyn, NY. The exhibit

includes paintings, collages and sculpture.

Admission is always free at CAMH but it's closed on Monday, so go to the website for days and hours.

The Menil Collection, 1533 Sul Ross, Houston, 77006. In anticipation of the opening of the Menil Drawing Institute in October 2017, the museum is showing *The Beginning of Everything: Drawings from the Janie C. Lee, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and David Whitney Collections* – highlights of promised gifts from those collection, The exhibit is now open and ends June 18. Menil is always free admission and is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11-7.

Houston Museum of Natural Science, 5555 Hermann Park Dr., Houston, 77030. At the exhibit **Mummies of the**

World you will be face to face with the largest exhibit of real mummies and related artifacts ever assembled, offering superb insights into past cultures and civilizations. An interactive multi-media exhibit featuring 3-D animation, it explores how mummies are created, where they come from and who they were. Check the HMNS website for hours and costs. Closes May 29.



Dancing elevates learning

Dance is now being studied as a pathway to enhance learning, according to neuroscientists, and educators are paying close attention. Scientists are turning to dance because it is a multifaceted activity that can help demystify how the brain coordinates the body to perform complex, precise movements that express emotion and convey meaning. The hidden value of dance has been revealed in more than 400 studies related to interdisciplinary neuroscience.

Dancers possess an extraordinary skill set – coordination of limbs, posture, balance, gesture, facial expression, perception and action in sequences that create meaning in time and space. Dance is a language of physical exercise that sparks new brain cells (neurogenesis) and their connections. These connections are responsible for acquiring knowledge and thinking. Dancing stimulates the release of the brain-derived protein neurotropic factor that promotes the growth, maintenance and plasticity of neurons necessary for learning and memory. Neural plasticity is the brain's remarkable ability to change throughout life.

The brain is comprised of about 100 billion electrically active neurons, each connected to tens of thousands of its neighbors at perhaps 100 trillion synapses (the spaces between neurons where information transfers occur). These atoms of thought relay information through voltage spikes that convert into chemical signals to bridge the gap to other neurons. Dance is being considered a multimedia communication to enhance these actions and therefore, yields benefits beyond just the exercise.

Source: Judith Lynne Hanna, PhD, "How Dancing Ignites Brain Cells and Elevates Learning," *Principal Leadership Magazine*, National Association of Secondary School Principals, January 2016.

Left Brain + Right Brain = Whole Brain



Over the past 30 years, researchers have made great inroads into inner space, trying to figure out how our brains work.

Scientists know that certain parts of the brain control specific brain and body functions. Two hemispheres form the basic structure of the brain, connected by a bundle of neurons called the corpus callosum.

Between 24 to 48 months of age, the neurons in the primary motor cortex of the brain sprout a large number of dendrites, which are responsible for movement in the hands. The left motor cortex controls the right side of the body and right motor cortex controls the left side.

By the age of three years, 86% of children prefer to use the right hand more than the left. Researchers are looking into the proverbial chicken or egg question in regards to handedness. Does the use of the right hand create brain development in the left hemisphere and vice versa, or does brain growth create dominant hand use?

One thing we do know is that using the hands and brain development are closely connected. We would be wise to help our children use their hands in as many ways as possible in order to maximize brain growth and brain hemisphere communication.

Research has shown that certain kinds of thinking are directed in each hemisphere. The functions of the right hemisphere are referred to as "right-brain thinking" and the work the left hemisphere is

called "left brain thinking," even though research is also showing that certain brain activities may occur in any part of the hemispheres. Some examples follow:

Right-Brain Thinking:

Intuitive, spontaneous, emotional, nonverbal, visual, artistic, holistic, playful, diffuse, symbolic, physical

Left-Brain Thinking

Analytical, linear, explicit, sequential, verbal, concrete, rational, active, goal-oriented.

Communication between the hemispheres occurs via the corpus callosum, which grows rapidly during the first six years of life. It is because of the corpus callosum that we can use our whole brains, and certain creative skills depend upon critical communication and perception shifts between the cerebral hemispheres.

We need to encourage activities that help develop our children's corpus callosum by strengthening right/left brain connection. Walking, running and swimming are physical activities that require the functioning of both sides of the body and therefore stimulate both sides of the brain fairly equally.

Along with activities that use the whole body, we need to encourage activities that create cross talk between the hemispheres of the brain.

For example, singing involves the right-brain function of music and the left-brain strength of language.

Verbally expressing emotion uses the right-brain function of emotion along with the verbal skills of the left brain.

Drawing graphs uses the right brain's artistic function in tandem with the left-brain's analytical and mathematical skills.

Reciting nursery rhymes or poetry with motions takes advantage of the right brain's predominance

in motion and nonverbal skills while connecting with the left brain's verbal skills.

Nursery rhymes and children's songs have endured for centuries because they naturally address the brain development needs of the young child. By encouraging singing and learning a large variety of songs with your preschooler, you'll also be encouraging the brain's hemispheres to work together and strengthen vital connection through the corpus callosum.

Telling jokes uses the playful right brain and the verbal, goal-oriented left-brain. If we can shift our joke telling at the right time to left-brain control, we'll be more likely to remember and deliver the punch lines. Comedians rely on effective brain cross talk to make us laugh.

Using whole brain communication can help us calm a crying or emotionally upset child. By softly counting into the child's right ear, since the opposite side of the brain controls each side of the body, we begin to stimulate left-brain function, which is concerned with logic and rational thought. Because number work is a left-brain function, counting in the right ear helps the emotional right-brain brain shift to a left-brain rational perception. This supports the old adage, "Count to ten when you are upset." Counting helps us at any age to shift our thinking from our emotional right brain to our more rational left brain.

Singing can also help make the calming shift from right-brain to left-brain thinking. Keeping the right-hand side of a crying child next to you can help the child shift to a more left-brain perception.

In our children's first six years of life, a time of rapid brain growth, let's work to keep our children's environments full of music, language and creative activities that will stimulate and nourish both sides of the brain and the connection between the hemispheres.

Maren E. Schmidt, MEd
www.kidstalk.com

Observations: Meaningful Repetition Leads to Mastery

Compiled and discussed by Elizabeth Stepankew

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 independent 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

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.

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*

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.

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).

Dr. Montessori believed that the educational practices of her day, dependent on total teacher control, actually caused problems in children. She came to realize that when children have a stable environment in which they can experience engagement with the materials, many psychological and behavioral problems disappeared and the children were able to reach their full human potential.

Csikszentmihalyi and Montessori both came to understand how in humans the boundaries between work and play are somewhat artificial and that children, when left to their own devices, are our best example of this.

How To Make Vibrant, Naturally Dyed Easter Eggs



The tradition of dying Easter eggs has wandered in many directions throughout history, from the early practice of staining eggs red in remembrance of Christ's blood to what a lot of kids will tell you now: they color eggs to make them look like jelly beans.

Keep in mind the effect of the dyes varies depending on how concentrated the dye is, what color egg you use, and how long the eggs are immersed in the dye. I used half a purple cabbage, shredded, to dye four eggs. Err on the side of more material rather than less when creating your dye. Here's a handy guide to follow:

For cooked dyes, per cup of water, use:

- 1 cup chopped purple cabbage — makes blue on white eggs, green on brown eggs
- 1 cup red onion skins — makes lavender or red eggs
- 1 cup yellow onion skins — makes orange on white eggs, rusty red on brown eggs
- 1 cup shredded beets — makes pink on white eggs, maroon on brown eggs
- 2 tablespoons ground turmeric — makes yellow eggs
- 1 bag Red Zinger tea — makes lavender eggs

Add 1 tablespoon white vinegar to every cup of strained dye liquid. For every dozen eggs, plan on using at least 4 cups of dye liquid (one cup of a color will dye 3 eggs).

Your [hard-cooked eggs](#) should be at room temperature. Use white and brown eggs, preferably not super-fresh.

Pour the amount of water you need for the dye you're making into a saucepan — you can make separate batches of different colors or 1 large batch of a single color; follow the ratios given above for each ingredient to make more or less dye.

Add the dye matter (purple cabbage, onion skins, etc.) and bring the water to a boil. Turn the heat down to low and simmer, covered, for 15 to 30 minutes. The dye is ready when it reaches a hue a few shades darker than you want for your egg. Drip a little dye onto a white dish to check the color. When the dye is as dark as you like, remove the pan from the heat and let the dye cool to room temperature.

Pour the cooled dye through a fine-mesh strainer into another container. Stir in the vinegar. Arrange the room-temperature eggs

in single layer in a shallow container and carefully pour the cooled dye over them. Make sure the eggs are completely submerged.

Other dyes can be made without cooking.

Purples and Pinks

- 1 cup beet juice and 2 tsp of white vinegar
- 1 cup red wine and 1 tblsp of balsamic vinegar
- 1 cup pomegranate juice and 2 tsp white vinegar
- 1/2 cup grape juice and 1/4 cup deeply-steeped black cherry herbal tea

Greens

- 1 cup kale or spinach juice and 2 tsp white vinegar
- 1 cup deeply steeped green tea and 2 tsp vinegar

Browns

- 1 cup strong black coffee and 2 tsp white vinegar
- 1 cup Worcestershire sauce with 2 tblsp soy sauce

Gold-brown

- Simmer 2 tblsp dill seed in 2 cup water for 15 minutes and strain. Add 2 tsp vinegar

Oranges and Rust

- 2 cups water and 2 tblsp chili powder, 1 tblsp annatto and 2 tsp white vinegar

Blues

- 2 cups pureed blueberries and 2 cups grape juice

Lavender

- Mix 1 cup grape juice and 1 tblsp vinegar

Reds

- 2 cups cherry juice and 2 cups beet juice.

Pale red-orange

- Mix 2 tblsp paprika into 1 cup of boiling water, add 2 tsp vinegar. Let cool.

Transfer the eggs in the dye to the refrigerator and chill until the desired color is reached. Carefully dry the eggs, and then polish with a little vegetable oil and paper towel, for shine. Store the eggs in the refrigerator until time to use them.

Other colors can be made by boiling vegetables and fruits in water – carrot tops, fennel tops, orange peels, etc. – then strain out the solids and add vinegar. Lots of experimentation can be done here.

Adapted from <http://www.thekitchn.com/how-to-make-vibrant-naturally-dyed-easter-eggs-holiday-projects-from-the-kitchn-112957>, posted by Sara Kate Gillingham, April 17, 2014.