



Montessori Matters

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The secret...is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination.

~ Maria Montessori

The Power of Play

Notes from Nikki

Recently I read a parenting book by Stanley Greenspan entitled, Playground Politics. In the book, Dr. Greenspan (a child psychiatrist and developer of the *Floortime Method*) highlights the developmental nature of children's play and its importance in supporting typical social, emotional and physical growth in children. With a national focus on testing and "accountability" - along with diminishing resources - recess and unstructured playtime is being impacted. An organization called TRUCE (Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment) has a website and newsletter that has children's play as its mission. The following articles, from the newsletter entitled "Toys, Play & Young Children: Action Guide," are reprinted from the TRUCE website with permission: www.truceteachers.org

CHOOSING TOYS OF VALUE

Play is essential to children's healthy development and learning. Children use play to actively construct knowledge, meet social/emotional needs, and acquire life skills. The content of their play comes from their own experiences. Because of the pervasive influence of the electronic media - TV, movies, videos, DVDs, computers, video games - children spend more time sitting in front of a screen and less time playing creatively with each other. These changes in today's childhood are undermining play.

continued pg. 2

Cont. from pg. 1

Parents are constantly faced with decisions about what toys to buy and what toys to avoid. The influence of high-powered marketing and popular culture interfere with thoughtful decision-making at the store. This guide is intended to help adults promote children's creative and constructive play by making informed choices about toys, and by working with others at home, school, and in the community to promote positive play and toys.

Choose toys that provide opportunity for...

1. *Dramatic play* helps children work out their own ideas about their experiences. Provides a powerful way of learning new skills and a sense of mastery. Examples: blocks, dress-up clothes, fabric pieces, dolls, puppets, plastic and stuffed animals.
2. *Manipulative play* with small play objects develops small muscle control, eye-hand coordination, and visual discrimination – skills needed to read and write. Teaches about relationships between objects, essential for understanding math and science. Examples: construction sets and toys with interlocking pieces (basic Legos, Lincoln Logs, K'nex), puzzles, pegboards, pattern blocks.
3. *Game playing* teaches about taking turns, planning strategy, sequencing, rules, and cooperation. Examples: board games like checkers and chess, card games, jacks.
4. *Creative arts* encourage self-expression and the use of symbols, a vital skill for problem solving and literacy, and develop fine motor skills. Examples: poster and finger paints, assortment of blank paper of all sizes and colors, crayons and markers, scissors, glue, recycled materials, stamps, clay, weaving kits. The process of creating together doesn't always require a lasting product.
5. *Physical play* promotes healthy body awareness and coordination. Provide opportunities for social interaction. Examples: bikes, scooters, other wheeled toys, climbing structures.

Toys have limited play value when they...

1. Can only be used in one way and/or encourage all children to play the same way
2. Are limited to a single age or level of development
3. Are fun for the first ½ hour and then rarely get played with again;
3. Do the play "for" children, instead of allowing for children's unique exploration and mastery
4. Lead children to spend more time with TV or other media (ex: Lego Star Wars sets or Hannah Montana card games) and/or let the screen take control of their play
5. Promote violence, stereotypes or focus on sexiness and appearances (ex: Disney princesses, Bratz)
6. Introduce academic concepts too early and replace the kind of creative play that best prepares them for learning (ex: "educational" computer games, electronics reading kits)

Toys have enhanced play value when they...

1. Can be used in many ways
2. Allow children to be in charge of the play
3. Appeal to children at more than one age or level of development
4. Are not linked to video games, TV, or movies
5. Can be used with other toys for new and more complex play
6. Will stand the test of time and continue to be part of play as children develop new interests and skills
7. Promote respectful, non-stereotyped, non-violent interactions among children
8. Help children develop skills important for further learning and a sense of mastery
9. Can be used by children to play alone as well as with others
10. Can be enjoyed by both boys and girls.

CHILDREN WORK IT OUT THROUGH PLAY

Violent or traumatic events such as natural disasters, wars, and economic crises affect everyone. Some children experience these events directly, others receive information about them. Some children are included in discussions, some overhear adults talking, some hear or see it on the news. Many young children may be confused or frightened and try to work out their feelings and understanding in play. Adults can observe and guide the play by responding to what children say with simple, accurate information and keeping the play within safe physical and emotional boundaries.

Helping Children Use Their Play to Safely Work Out Scary Events:

When young children see scary things in their own lives or in the media (news or entertainment), it's normal for them to bring what interests, confuses or frightens them into their play to try to work out their ideas and feelings. Here are guidelines to help you respond effectively when such play occurs.

1. Watch children as they play to learn more about what they know, are struggling to understand, and may be worried about.
2. If the play gets scary or dangerous, gently intervene and redirect it. For example, ask how people might help each other, and provide toys such as rescue vehicles and medical equipment.
3. Try to follow the children's lead in the roles that you take rather than taking over the play. Help them come up with ways for extending the play.
4. After the play, talk with the children about what they played. Reassure them about their safety. Clear up confusions, Answer questions simply.

Helping Your Child Help You In The Kitchen **by Jeanie Fox**

Getting your child involved with daily activities is a wonderful way to help him feel competent and successful. When you give your child the opportunity to participate every day in your family's life, you will see his skills develop quickly and quite noticeably. A wonderful way is to have your child help prepare food for family meals. It is also a great way to work with your child in meaningful activities. As a parent, you must first observe what your child is capable of doing, what she likes to do, and then find ways that allow her to do them, or a particular aspect of them, successfully.

In order for these activities to be performed successfully, you will need to give your child the right equipment to do the job. Your child's "tools" should be stored in a place where he can reach them. You will also want your child to be able to clean it and return it to its proper place. To slice apples for a fruit salad, for example, your child will need to be able to open the refrigerator, reach for the apple, reach the sink and faucet to wash it, reach for the apple corer and stand at a table that is the appropriate height to slice it. These activities are learned over time and usually not in one day. These skills can be learned, step-by-step, with your help.

You can set up an environment in your home that will enable your child to gain competence as well as participate in daily activities with you in your home. What results is your child's self esteem is boosted and self-discipline will occur. You will find your child to be more satisfied in participating in meaningful activities alongside you, her parent. When this inner self-discipline has occurred, you may find you can more confidently involve your child in complete daily activities in harmony rather than stress!

Annual TV Turn-Off Potluck

April 20-26 is *National TV Turn-Off Week*! This nationally recognized event dovetails wonderfully with Montessori philosophy and the idea that children learn through real life experiences.

Here at MIT we will kick off this special week with a family event: our annual potluck dinner. Join us on **Monday, April 20th at the Poncey Highland campus from 6:00-7:30 p.m.** So mark your calendars and plan on joining us for good food and plenty of outdoor fun. Stay tuned for more details to follow in the upcoming weeks!

Learn more at: www.tvturnoff.org

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**APRIL 6-10: SPRING BREAK
NO SCHOOL**

**APRIL 18: OUT-DOOR WORKDAY
PONCEY HIGHLAND CAMPUS
GLEN CASTLE CAMPUS
9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.**

**APRIL 20: TV TURN-OFF POTLUCK
PONCEY HIGHLAND CAMPUS
6:00 P.M. – 7:30 P.M.**

**MAY 22: LAST DAY OF SCHOOL
12:00 NOON DISMISSAL**

**JUNE 8-19: CAMP LADYBUG
PONCEY HIGHLAND CAMPUS**

**JULY 6-17: CAMP LADYBUG
GLEN CASTLE CAMPUS**

Things to Do During TV Turn-Off Week

- Collect leaves
- Dance
- Find food in your cabinets to donate to a food bank
- Listen to music
- Watch clouds
- Go to the park
- Take a walk
- Do origami
- Play dress-up
- Do a puzzle
- Play store
- Have a lemonade stand
- Climb a tree
- Make a robot
- Blow bubbles
- Play card games
- Play dominoes
- Paint a picture
- Write a book
- Bake a cake
- Have a treasure hunt
- Make a fort
- Find fairies in your backyard

- Make-up a new game
- Build a tower out of blocks
- Make stuff with paper
- Make a family band out of items from the kitchen
- Sing
- Play the piano, drums, or guitar
- Do some science experiments
- Build a tower out of twigs or toothpicks
- Climb a tree
- Have a puppet show
- Write poems
- Make paper airplanes
- Write a letter to Grandma
- Make a musical instrument
- Make, and/or fly a kite
- Play in the sandbox
- Make a quilt
- Have a tea party
- Play a tambourine
- Collect, or watch bugs
- Make something out of clay
- Ride bikes
- Read a book
- Draw a picture

REFLECTIONS FROM THE AMI REFRESHER COURSE BY ANNE KING

Recently I was fortunate enough to attend the annual AMI Montessori Refresher Course in Houston. This is a time for reflection, rejuvenation and an opportunity to take a closer look at the work we do as Montessorians, perhaps from a different angle. Our presenter formulated her entire talk around the theme of matching verses from the Tao De Ching to relevant Montessori themes. I am fond of this idea and one of my favorite books, 'The Tao of Montessori: Reflections on Compassionate Teaching', takes this same approach.

I have chosen Verse 67:

There are three jewels that I cherish: Compassion, simplicity, and patience.

In our work and our living with children, it is essential to return to these three jewels as frequently as possible. As we strive to build and foster a relationship of calm, patience, love and humility with children, let us always return to these concepts.

Compassion allows us to leave behind our judgments and embrace our sameness. It opens us up to love for the child and to act for the sake of the child. Our love for the child allows us to will the good of the child.

Simplicity allows us to focus on that which is essential and provides a calmness to maintain perspective. Simplicity allows us to remain humble. Through our humility we discover what we don't yet know. Through our humility we find the courage to grow in wisdom through our successes and mistakes.

Patience replaces anger and allows us to leave behind our annoyances. Patience allows the child the time to act on his own. Patience allows the child's life and character to unfold at their pace.

Dr. Montessori provided us with a framework for living out these ideals. I feel so very fortunate to incorporate these principles as I help to guide each child through his or her own self-creation.

The child has other powers than ours, and the creation he achieves is no small one. It is everything.

--Maria Montessori

Summertime Fun

This summer, Montessori In Town will expand its locations for the ever-popular **Camp Ladybug** to include our new Glen Castle campus in Grant Park.

Sessions I and II (weeks of June 8 and June 15) will be held at Poncey Highland, while sessions III and IV (weeks of July 6 and July 13) will be held at Glen Castle.

Regardless of the setting, children enrolled in Camp Ladybug will enjoy a hands-on nature-based camp including gardening, art, cooperative games, water play, and picnic lunches. Registration deadline is May 15 and the camp welcomes all children from nearly 3 through 6 years of age. Contact Maureen at montintown@mindspring.com for more information.

Some may also enjoy the **Social Thinking Groups** for children 5 and up led by Julie Carnes (LPC and Montessori-trained professional) and Shelley Marcus (teacher and family consultant). Offered throughout the

month of June, these groups provide children an opportunity to better understand themselves and others through interactive play with like-aged peers. Group sizes are limited to maximize situation specific coaching and exploration. For more information contact Nikki for a brochure or email Julie Carnes at: j_carnes@bellsouth.net

Finally, you may consider **Move, Feel, Learn ~ Live It!** With Christy Kennedy (Occupational Therapist), Annemarie Messerschmidt (LCSW) and Carrie Heller (LCSW). The group for children ages 4-6 will be held the week of June 22. This program will integrate gross motor activities, fine and perceptual motor activities, oral motor and respiratory activities, the “engine” program (self-regulation), and social/emotional development in an active playgroup setting. More information can be found at: christykennedyot.com

PLAY: NOT JUST FOR CHILDREN

Thanks to Derek Eiler, Poncey Highland parent, for passing along this article about game designer Will Wright. Wright, creator of video games such as *Sim City*, *The Sims* and *Spore*, credits his Montessori education in inspiring his creative, open-ended and “problem solving” games. Check it out at: <http://kotaku.com/5164248/maria-montessori-the-138+year+old-inspiration-behind-spore?skyline=true&s=x>