

The Voyager Vignette

Key Dates

December 2009

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Dec. 6 | Family Gift & Craft Day |
| Dec. 15 | Annual Giving Pledge Cards Due |
| Dec. 17 | Holiday Fest |
| Dec. 18 | Staff In-service (No School) |
| Dec. 21 - 31 | Winter Break (No School) |

January 2010

| | |
|-------------|----------------------------------------|
| Jan. 1 | Winter Break (No School) |
| Jan. 4 | Staff In-service (No School) |
| Jan. 5 | School Resumes |
| Jan. 18 | Holiday: MLK Birthday (No School) |
| Jan. 19 | Staff In-service (No School) |
| Jan. 28, 29 | Parent/Student Conferences (No School) |



Sr. class students worked as a team to manage the "twenty-man" canoe.

Inside this issue:



| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Jr. Classroom News | 2 |
| Sr. Classroom News | 3 |
| Board News | 4 |
| All-School Community Service | 4 |
| Calendar | 5 |

Maximizing Brain Development and the Optimal Classroom Environment

By Renée Kok

Education is a topic we as a nation grapple with every day. The questions are big, the decisions controversial and the outcomes critical. What is the best way to educate today's students for tomorrow's global economy? What matters more, small class size, curriculum, or the quality of the teacher? How do children learn and what do they need to know? While the debate goes on, we are happy to report that current brain research supports Montessori education.

Every human is born with a set number of brain cells, or neurons. Neurons grow, become entwined with other neurons forming cords and eventually mature to become **robust**. As the brain grows and develops, it moves through the stages of feeling and thinking to the ability to make judgments. Elementary age students are competent feelers and emerging thinkers. Brain function consists of accepting input through the senses, processing that data resulting in output, such as writing and talking.

Since we are all born with a set amount of brain neurons you may be wondering, how can we maximize our allotment? There are two ways: 1) enhancing natural growth and development through nutrition, sleep and exercise and 2) learning.

If learning is one of the two ways to maximize brain growth and development, we are very interested in what learning environment provides the best opportunity for young brains to grow. How and where do students learn best has been the subject of numerous studies over the past 50 years. Here is what the experts generally agree are eight evidence-based principles for optimal education:

1. Movement and cognition are closely related and deeply entwined. Since we learn by processing input through our senses, movement and multi-sensory opportunities are critical. The perfect school environment would encourage movement.
2. Students learn best if they are interested in what they are learning about. The perfect school environment would have curriculum and materials designed to capture the interest and imagination of the students.
3. Extrinsic rewards reduce motivation. The perfect school environment would value and encourage the love of learning and avoid grades and gold stars for young children.
4. Children (and adults) thrive when they feel a sense of choice and control. The perfect school environment would allow student choice within structure.

Junior Elementary Classroom News

To start things off this fall, the junior class welcomed a new teacher, Cami. We have enjoyed getting to know Cami, sharing our Voyager traditions with her, and learning all of the wonderful things that she knows. ("She knows a LOT of Math, " said one student.)

Our classroom is filled with enthusiasm and curiosity every day! Students started the year with lots of energy and an eagerness to learn. We got right to work and have not stopped since. All of our new students are doing a wonderful job filling out contracts, making choices, and organizing their work.

We began our year with the telling of the Montessori Great Lessons. Students chose to conduct some of the Laws of the Universe experiments with their buddies. The Timeline of Life was rolled out, and we explored the stories of the development of animals and plants. We took an afternoon to walk to the library and enjoyed hearing Carmine read creation tales and fables to us. Some students have written their own stories and plays based on some of our foundational History lessons, like the days of the week myth.

While we will work through the entire scope of vertebrate and invertebrate lessons, the focus for our special experiences will be on fish and amphibians. We recently took a field trip to Chico Creek to watch the salmon make their way upstream. Before our trip, we prepared by looking closely at a salmon and its life cycle. Rick G. helped us to dissect a chum salmon, and we studied the external and internal parts of this fish. Next, we will have a surprising amphibian encounter.

Our community of readers enjoy sharing what they are reading every Wednesday. Reading takes place during our quiet reading time meeting, at lunch, and on the playground - any time! We are all really interested in reading mysteries this year. All students continue to work through systematic phonics lessons, in combination with leveled reading boxes, word work, and the Montessori language lessons. Many students are writing creative stories, adding poems to our 'poetree,' and submitting works to our weekly newsletter. Would you like to receive it in your email inbox? Send a note to anne@voyagerschool.org.



Senior Elementary Classroom News

The Senior Class was off to a fast start this fall. As you may recall, because of the Hood Canal Bridge closure last spring, the third-year students did not go to OPI for the traditional trip. Instead, the entire senior class went the second week of school. The academic focus was geology and the group focus was teambuilding. With admirable determination, they solved the crossing-the-river on disks problem, the floating stick challenge and paddled a long canoe.

The official school year started upon our return from OPI. There have been several changes and additions this year. The weekly GOB (grammar on board) is on Monday afternoons and the MOB (math on board) is on Friday afternoons. We have added SRA Rate Builders on Monday and FAB (fresh air break) three days a week. FAB was the result of 1) students' comments about how much they liked the outside breaks we take during the standardized test day, and 2) our recognition that research shows that physical activity before study helps children focus. FAB is 10-15 minutes outside engaged in coordinated group activities, including marching, skipping and stretches.

FAB is now one part of our teambuilding program. Gardening time has also provided several other opportunities. The class worked with Rick S. to build picnic tables and benches and then presented them to the school. Every week, the class has worked together to maintain the orchard, blueberries and the plantings west of our classroom. After the students harvested fruit, Ana helped them make pandowdy and turnovers for tasty lunch desserts.

We have two cultural studies underway this fall. The fourth-years studied our closest relatives and then moved on to human evolution. They had a field trip to the Woodland Park Zoo to visit our closest living relatives. The early human lunch is scheduled for mid-November. The fifth-years have a geography study, which includes learning landforms and finding examples of them in atlases and on the Internet and later creating an imaginary island. We are looking forward to a cultural afternoon before Winter Break to present the students' cultural work.

We have started our first session of lit circle for the year. One group is reading *Black Beauty*, and the other group is reading *My Side of the Mountain*. To prepare for lit circle starting in October, Eileen taught the figures of speech and roles that are a part of the circle discussions.

Thank you to:

- The entire senior class for helping to prepare the classroom before school started
- Jenny D. for making the placemats and napkins and introducing the embroidery project
- Zach for the birthday treat
- Ana and Candice for reading with students during SSR
- Ana for working with the students to pick and cook apples from the school orchard
- Jenny G. for planning the Woodland Park Zoo trip
- Veni for going with the fourth-year students to the zoo and taking photos
- Kris for preparing materials and providing direction for senior gardening
- Rick S. for supervising the construction of picnic tables and benches for the senior class community service project
- Irene for doing lit circle this year
- Ana and Brandi for their work on the early human lunch



Maximizing Brain Development and the Optimal Classroom Environment

Continued from page 1

5. We learn best when our learning is situated in meaningful contexts. The perfect school environment would bring the real world experiences into the classroom at every opportunity.
6. Children respond well collaborative learning situations. The perfect school environment would encourage and provide opportunities for peer interaction.
7. Children thrive on order, routine and ritual. The perfect school environment would be prepared and orderly and the adults would be consistent and dependable.
8. Every interaction a child has during the course of the day influences the adult the child will become. The perfect school environment would have loving and warm adults who respect and value the contribution each child makes to the school community.

All of these principles should be familiar to you as parents of Montessori students. They are the foundation on which our school is built!

From The Board

Thank you to everyone who has donated to the Annual Giving Campaign. As I noted at Back-to-School Night, Annual Giving is our most important fundraiser of the year. Quite simply, your donation to Annual Giving closes the gap between the tuition we charge and the actual cost of educating students at Voyager. Keeping tuition as low as possible is an important goal of the Voyager Board.

To date, 33% of families have contributed to the campaign. Our goal this year is 100% participation of all families, board and staff to raise \$ 27,000. If you have not made your donation yet, please return your donation or pledge card by Tuesday, December 15. Thank you for supporting Voyager.

Jenny Gillatt

Board President

All-School Community Service

During the past 5 years, Voyager students and families have graciously contributed to Helpline House, a local non-profit agency, by donating hundreds of pounds for Voyager's Annual Food Drive held before the start of the holidays. This year was no exception.

On Tuesday, November 24, students from the jr. and sr. classroom helped deliver over 240 pounds of food! Like other local area agencies, Helpline House has seen an increase in the amount of people needing assistance. Close to 350 families in the Bainbridge Island community receive support each week through the food bank.

Not only do our students have a desire to participate in the food drive, they also see how they can make a significant difference for the people in their community.

Other drives held during the school year include, coats, books and snacks drives.



December 2009

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 <i>Family Gift & Craft Day (10 :00 - noon)</i> | 7 | 8 <i>Curriculum Night 7:00 PM</i> | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 <i>Annual Giving Pledge Cards Due</i> | 16 | 17 <i>Holiday Fest 7:00 PM</i> | 18 <i>Staff In-service (No School)</i> | 19 |
| 20 | 21 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | 22 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | 23 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | 24 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | 25 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | 26 |
| 27 | 21 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | 29 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | 30 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | 31 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | | |

Schedule of Events

- Dec. 6 Family Gift & Craft Day (10:00 - noon)
- Dec. 8 Curriculum Night 7:00 PM
- Dec. 15 Annual Giving Pledge Cards Due
- Dec. 17 Holiday Fest (7:00 PM)
- Dec. 18 Staff In-service (No School)
- Dec. 21 - 31 Winter Break (No School)

January 2010

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|-----|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|
| | | | | | 1 <i>Winter Break (No School)</i> | 2 |
| 3 | 4 <i>Staff In-service (No School)</i> | 5 <i>School Resumes</i> | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 17 | 18 <i>MLK Birthday (No School)</i> | 19 <i>Staff In-service (No School)</i> | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 <i>Conferences (No School)</i> | 29 <i>Conferences (No School)</i> | 30 |
| 31 | | | | | | |

Schedule of Events

- Jan. 1 Winter Break (No School)
- Jan. 4 Staff In-service (No School)
- Jan. 5 School Resumes
- Jan.18 Holiday: MLK Birthday (No School)
- Jan. 19 Staff In-service (No School)
- Jan. 28, 29 Conferences (No School)