

Book Study – NurtureShock – New Thinking about Children by Po Bronson & Ashley Merryman

This is a Book Study straight from the KHT Montessori Classroom. I actually cover a handful of book reviews. You do not need to purchase the books in order to follow along.

Chapter 1 – The Inverse Power of Praise

Chapter 2 –The Lost Hour

Chapter 3 –Why White Parents Don’t Talk About Race

Chapter 4 –Why Kids Lie

NOTE: I have decided not to cover Chapter 5 because it is about Kindergarten and the scope of the material is more specific to public and private school settings.

Chapter 6 –The Sibling Effect

Chapter 7 – The Science of Teen Rebellion

Chapter 8 – Can Self Control be Taught?

Chapter 9 – Plays Well with Others

Chapter 10 – Why Hannah Talks and Alyssa Doesn’t

Good Morning!

This week, we are going to start our second Book Study. This is a wonderful book full of insight that will make you stop and think about the many ways in which we influence our children’s lives. You don’t need to borrow or purchase this book. If you want to add it to your personal library or you would like to borrow it, here are the details:

Nurture Shock – New Thinking about Children

Po Bronson & Ashley Merryman

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Chapter 1 – part 1 – The Inverse Power of Praise

This is a very current book and it will challenge many things that you believe to be true. This is a good thing because to question is to grow.

You may follow along and ask questions and make comments. I will be sharing what the authors’ have brought to our attention through their research along with my personal “linking” to the “Montessori Method.” Here are my beginning thoughts on the first chapter titled, **The Inverse Power of Praise:**

I was so excited when I started to read this first chapter! Immediately I started to think about when I was a little girl. I was able to re-visit the way I was “brought up” and as an “adult child” looking back at the little girl I was...well; I really connected emotionally with my “inner child.” So, today, I will give with you my general reactions as I share how the authors touched my life:

In my family, I had an older brother and a younger sister...yep, I was the middle child! Both my siblings were very smart and I heard my mother a zillion times telling other adults how smart David and Debra were. She used to say that they didn't even have to study much because they were very smart and school was easy for them. Now, my mother also said a zillion times that, "Karen was a premature baby. She is a late bloomer. Karen isn't college material...we just know she is so pretty she will get married and be a mom and wife." (Smile) (Cry)

In High School I applied for a scholarship that was out of state to the Fashion Institute of Atlanta...I received a Full Paid scholarship....but my parents wouldn't let me go because they said, "Karen, you are home girl you wouldn't be able to make it honey. I can't allow it. You need to get a job as a secretary until you get married."

I would have loved to hear, "Karen, you are so dedicated to raising your grades...or Karen, all your hard work will pay off one day." "Karen, every time you learn something new your brain gets stronger. You have a lot to say about how happy and successful you will be as an adult."

It wasn't until I did get married that my husband said the things that my mom and dad never did...my husband said I was smart and could do anything and that he would support me in doing whatever my heart desired. I did go back to school when I had 3 small children. I took classes at a community college for years at night. Then, I took my AMS Montessori Teacher Training Course.

My husband and I raised our children with positive discipline. We nurtured them with love and peace. We did praise our children and because of the early influence of my Montessori training.....we praised in the "right" way and not in a "negative way."

My youngest daughter Becca received low grades in school once she was moved to a public elementary school. I never showed her any of her report cards. As a matter of fact, we had a rule in our home that nobody saw report cards before High School. I feel that they give "negative" praise at best and my children were not going to be defined by a "grading" system. My daughter would ask how she did and I would say, "You are working very hard to figure out how this school works. You should be very proud of yourself!" I told the teacher at conference that my daughter would be ok and not to say "negative" things to her...encourage her to work and I would do the same at home. It took two years, but my daughter's grades improved Not because she became smarter....but because she learned how to play the "school" game! You all know about the "school game", right? That's where you go to this building and you have a teacher and you figure out what the teacher wants you to do and you do it and then you are rewarded (pizza with the principal) or at least not ridiculed (called on to speak even when you didn't raise your hand). I taught my children how to survive once we moved to a place where there wasn't a Montessori elementary school. I had to explain that in public schools they would have to "learn" only what their teachers wanted them to, that they had to take tests, and to do a special report that they only had to work on for a week!

Then there was my grand daughter Madison whose teacher sent home a letter to her mother telling her that Madison was "slow" and was not reading well. I just about hit the roof with that one.....SLOW. I told her Mom not to tell Madison (3rd Grade) that her teacher said that, but to encourage her to read every night to her.

Well, I sat down to have Madison read to me one day and she didn't want to. I stopped to ask her why....and to Madison's surprise nobody had ever asked her before. She said she didn't like the "dumb" books that were on the list that the teacher had down for her to read. So, I put her in the car and drove to the book store. I shared with her about the wonderful world of books and asked her what she would like to read. I introduced her to "series" books and I don't mean The Babysitters Club. She fell in love with the Little House on the Prairie Books and Nancy Drew and Judy Blume, etc. I found out that Madison loved to read about real people and about animals. I bought a truck load of books and then I talked to her mom and told her why Madison wasn't reading.

My daughter went to talk with Madison's teacher and told her the reason and asked to see the book list.....the teacher said the books that Madison wanted to read were too hard for her....we convinced her to let her try to read them. Madison did and you know what? Madison just graduated from High School and she was in all honors classes....a very smart, compassionate and loving girl! Oh, and by the way...Madison is a bookworm that reads at least a book a week!

So, what we say to children is so very important isn't it? I know the mom and grandmother in me wants to tell each child that they are perfect and the best looking and the smartest in the whole world! Instead I tell them that they were lovingly created and that they are unique. We tell them that the greatest mystery in life is in finding out what your "special" gifts are and then figuring out how to use them to help others/world become a better and more peaceful place.

I believe we must pass on what we have learned as we have walked this "path" called life. This is what I believe:

- You can be many things during your lifetime, but not all at the same time.
- The world is not a perfect place, but it is home and that we need to love and take care of it.
- The way you live your life is what is important!
- Wake up every day and remember to be grateful!

Moment to Pause and Think! Can you think of something you could add to my list? What do you think?

Chapter 1 – part 2 – The Inverse Power of Praise

On page 11 of this book there is a comment at the bottom by a boy's father that was very interesting: "Thomas didn't want to try things he wouldn't be successful at..."

I never thought that it could be difficult to be the child that found learning to be very easy. I know many of us might fantasize about how great it would have been if learning had been a breeze for us when we were children...but think about it. If everyone told you how smart you were and that you were "gifted" then you might have had a terrible burden to carry. I think I would have been afraid that if I couldn't instantly do a "new" thing then others might think that I was "dumb." I think children don't think about how they feel about their intelligence, but subconsciously I bet those brain connections are being made all the time.

On page 12 you will find a comment in the middle of the page by Thomas's father. I was so glad to hear this kind and loving comment when he said, "Look, just because you're smart doesn't mean you don't have to put out some effort."

The Montessori Method guides children to develop a **love for learning**. When a child learns to research a subject, we don't put a number of pages on the report or tell the child how long he has to write the report. We nurture the child so that they learn to love to research a subject. We start out by letting them choose something they are interested in or passionate about and let them run with it...help them learn how to find what they need...give them the tools to succeed. A child can learn more from writing one report that they really "loved" doing, than with a dozen reports that the teacher makes them do. It is hard to grow a "passion" to research something when you are constantly worried about counting how many words you have written and what your "letter" grade is going to be.

On page 13 you will find this quote, "Giving kids, the label of 'smart' does not prevent them from under-performing. It might actually be causing it."

I believe that there are children that we call "smart" and have "sparkling" personalities that still add effort to each task they undertake and complete. I also believe that there are children that we call "smart" that are shutting down their ability to risk and try new things...to learn to their capacity. They become afraid to try new things because they might fail. They become afraid to disagree with an idea because others might "laugh" at them.

It is important that we praise the child for their effort and then they can change the outcome for themselves.

On page 15 you find comments on why each group of children "failed."

First, they talk about that children that failed a test that gave "effort" assumed they simply hadn't focused hard enough on taking the test.

Children that failed assumed that failing was evidence that they really weren't smart at all in the first place.

Moment to Pause and Think! We need to really think about "praising children." I believe that the "right" type of praise is important. But what is the "right" type? I will talk more about this in our next discussion. What do you think?

Chapter 1 – part 3 – The Inverse Power of Praise

Page 16

I have heard about parents that have had to take their children to "audition" or "interview" to get "on the list" in order to be accepted to attend a pre-school. I just find that wrong. Every child deserves the best place their parents can find for them. This isn't "college". I can understand being put on a "wait" list because of the demand. I know there are not

enough places available to take care of all our children. I also find this wrong.

It is a “crime” to start our children out into the world “competing”. I am not against Competitive games/sports, but I don’t believe they should be introduced to children under the age of 6.

That doesn’t mean you can’t play “Duck-Duck-Goose” or “Tag You’re It, it means the serious nature of competition has no place in a young child’s life.

On the other hand, I don’t believe we should bring our children up where they are the winner all the time. I think with careful observation you can tell when it is the right time to “win” at Candyland or Chutes and Ladders” and when you should let the child feel the joy of winning!

I like the quote down towards the bottom of the page:

“I like how you keep trying.” She tries to keep her praise specific, rather than general, so that a child knows exactly what she did to earn the praise (and thus can get more). She will occasionally tell a child, **“You’re good at math,” but she’ll never tell a child he’s bad at math.**

I agree....I don’t believe it ever serves the child to be told that they are bad at something. I might say, “I know, if we read this book again, it will get easier for you” but I would never say, “You are not a good reader.”

Page 17

I am so glad that intelligence is not innate! I love thinking about the brain as a muscle. My grandson when he was 4 years old once said to me, “Yia Yia, the teen numbers are too hard to practice.” I said, “Zane can you flex your arm muscle like me?” He did. I said, “What do you need to do to get a stronger arm?” He said, “Exercise it.” I said, “Did you know your brain is like a muscle? You need to exercise it like you do your arm so it will get stronger.

How do you think you exercise your brain?” He said, “I know...by thinking!” I explained how he needed to do his “work” so his brain would grow strong and he would be able to think great thoughts.....it was great seeing the “light bulb” turn on inside his brain when he realized his effort had a lot to do with how he learns.....the “light bulb” has gone on in me too! A side note about Zane. He is 10 years old now and attends a public school. He said to me the other day, “Yia Yia! I am going to use my brain when I get older to think of a way to help the world. I love science and math and I am going to do something to help!” It doesn’t get better than that does it?

Page 18

I think it was a GREAT day when the teachers threw out their red pencils! But should teachers stop correcting pages? I remember when quite a few schools started to “play down” grades and boost children’s self-esteem. Praise took over! The problem was and still is that teachers often forget about the skills that the child is supposed to be learning. I will give you an example about what happened to my oldest daughter Heather when she was a junior in high school.

Heather was always an “A” student. However, when Heather came home in her junior year of high school with her report card (I saw the usual “straight A’s), she handed me her latest theme that she wrote for English. I looked at the top and the teacher said, “Heather this is an outstanding paper! Great Job!” A+

I read the theme and took note of all the pencil circles that the teacher had given each paragraph. I was stunned. This was an “A” paper? I don’t think so! I asked Heather about all the circled parts and she said, “Oh, those are mistakes.” I asked her, “I don’t understand Heather. How could this be an “A” paper with all the things you need to correct?” She said she didn’t know. So, I asked her about when she would need to correct the errors and hand it back in....and she said, “Never.”

I sat down and said, “Heather, the story you told in your theme shows that you must love to write.” She said she loved to write about made up stories on the lives of people. I asked her if she wanted to write stories so that other people could read them and enjoy them. She said that’s what she really wanted to do. I then told her that if she wanted to write stories for others to read she will need to make sure that all of the mistakes were corrected before anyone picked up her work to read. She said she understood that, but her teacher didn’t care. I asked her if she was writing just to get a grade or because she loved to write. She said she guessed because she loved to write. I then told her she needed to do her best every time she handed in a writing project.

I also told her that I was going to call her teacher and have a talk. I let Heather listen to me make that call. I asked the teacher why Heather received an A and all the positive comments. He said it was because she was the BEST in the honors English class. I told him that I read Heather’s paper and saw all the circled parts. He said those were things that were wrong and needed to be corrected. I said that I wanted him to take the “A” grade away and to ask Heather to re-write the paper with the corrections in place. I told him that Heather wanted to go to college and she loves to write. I told him that I was concerned as a teacher and parent that my daughter was going to graduate from high school with all “A’s” and still be illiterate. I asked him to help her get into college and to be able to succeed in college by asking her to give her best effort every time she did an assignment or test.

The teacher agreed and Heather received the first “B” that she had ever had in school. She re-did the paper and she gave her best effort from then on in....she went to college and is a nurse!

I believe that we often protect our children from anything that might “hurt” their self-esteem. Under the age of Kindergarten I don’t believe a child should experience a world where they are judged. I believe that they should have successful experiences and that a “control of error” should be present whenever possible. Learning to take turns comes first and then a child learns about the merits of competition.

Moment to Pause and Think! Of course, every child is different...some can take competition at an early age...but we need to ask ourselves if it is really necessary. I think that sometimes we start our children out competing because other parents are encouraging their children...and we don’t want our children to be left behind. So, be honest...what do you think?

Chapter 1 – part 4 – The Inverse Power of Praise

Page 19

Baumeister said a very revealing thing when he said that he believed that the continued appeal of self-esteem is largely tied to parents' pride in their children's achievements: it's so strong that "when they praise their kids, it's not that far from praising themselves."

Page 19 – bottom of page

Dweck demonstrated that "Praise can vary significantly, depending on the praise given." All praise is not equal. The praise needs to be specific. Sincerity of praise is important. Only young children (under 7 years of age) can take praise at face value. Older children know if you mean it or not.

Page 20 – bottom of page

Judith Brook said that praising was an issue of credibility. "Praise is important, but not vacuous praise. It has to be based on a real thing – some skill or talent they have."

Then there is excessive praise where we have the child that can't do anything unless the teacher or parent is right there telling them it is "right" and "perfect" and "they are great." This is where the child is addicted to praise as much as the giver is.

Page 21

The issue of over praising at home is discussed. The parents think they are being supportive and the child starts to feel the high expectations and pressures build for them to deliver high "marks" every time.

Page 22

Children that have always had it easy with getting great grades and are always being praised for how smart they are, have a very difficult time when they first "fail" at something. Some of these children would rather not try anything new than fail. Others fail and start to believe that they must have been dumb all along and nobody found out about it before now.

The Montessori Method believes that children will mirror the adults that they are around. That is why it is so important for us to be neat in appearance and to be respectful to a child because they will do the same for others. Children are not going to be upset with us for discussing how important assignments, tests and school are. We want them to give their best effort and work for that and not the "grade." I have found with my own children and those that I have taught that if I teach them to give their best in whatever they are doing....the grades follow and the grades are usually very good. I don't believe in shaming or pressuring a child to perform above their "best."

Page 23

I remember hearing my mom say to me, "Try, try again!" What I find amazing is research supports that exerting more effort instead of giving up is an act of "Will" that helps make those important circuits connect in the brain.

Cloninger says that intermittent reinforcement is what is important.

The part about the "Social Praisers" made me laugh and cry. Learning to praise the process and giving unconditional love (page 25) is what is important to a child.

In today's world, where it often takes 2 parents working full time to make enough money to support the family, we try and fit in all the love we can at night after we get home from work.

This is the final statement on this page/ "eventually, in my final stage of praise withdrawal, I realized that not telling my son he was smart meant I was leaving it up to him to make his own conclusion about his intelligence."

It is a little scary when we take our hands off the steering wheel isn't it? I think it is even scarier to know that we never were in the driver's seat!

From the day our child is born, we have to start learning that our child's path in life is his and not ours. The best thing we can do is to love with our heart unconditionally and this means with our hands open. I know that we are afraid that our child will fly away...and they will...but they will come back to us.

I have found that if you set your child free, even as an adult, they come back to you with their spouse and children in tow. There is a deep feeling of love when your child calls you for your opinion or just to say what's on their mind. When they do this, you know that they know they are still cherished and that you will help them in the same way you did when they were young. You "follow the child." You don't tell them what you would do. You help them figure out what is best for them!

Moment to Pause and Think! Now that we have finished our discussion about "Praise," what do you think? Were you surprised to find out that maybe you need to change how you go about "Praising" a child?

Chapter 2 - part 1 - The Lost Hour

Well, this chapter was full of surprises for me!

I hope you take the time to read the entire chapter. It starts out with many years ago before "rush hour traffic," we used to get up at dawn and sleep at dusk. Farmers needed to get up early to get their work done before the sun would set and they would not be able to see. This was our natural rhythm. Our bodies knew when to get up and when to go to sleep. Nobody had to tell us. We did not run our lives by the "clock."

Today we get up early and we go to work and school and then we do "extra" curricular activities....rush home and eat (usually with FAST FOOD) and then we run out and do more "extra" curricular activities (music, dance, sports, meetings, etc)....and then we run home to

take a shower/bath (or skip it because it's too late and who will know?) and eat cereal from a box for a quick snack and then turn on the electricity so we can study, read, watch TV, surf the web, play video games and then when completely exhausted we fall into bed like maybe 11:00 pm. (kids by 10:00) hopefully! Whew! That was a "run on sentence...to match an insane way we are "running" our lives!

We believe that it won't take a toll on us or our children. Really? We need to think again and try to figure out a way to give our lives a "make-over!" Of course, everyone has things that we can't change right now...or maybe ever (like your husband has a job where he works at night). I do believe that there are things in each of our lives that we can change-up so that we all get more sleep.....it is so important for our children's brain growth and well-being as well as our own!

My daughter in law Kathy is fantastic! She and my son promised that by the time they were 30 they would have a child and right on schedule they did! It was worth the wait to see this small family take to raising their son in such a beautiful way! Kathy is a very talented artist! I know she will continue to grow her gifts as the years pass by....but Kathy made the choice to stay home with Vincent.

Kathy and Anthony let Vincent (from birth) decide his sleep schedule. Now, for those of us that have done this know there were times that this was a nightmare because the baby's sleep schedule was all over the place. Kathy lived with a lot of criticism from others who felt she should be rigid and plan his naps and nights by the clock. Many suggested that she should let Vincent cry it out for it would "exercise his lungs." It would have been a lot easier for them if they had Vincent on a rigid schedule from day one. But, as many of us know, a child will get what they need when they need it if we let them lead us. Now, I have a friend that lived a very scattered life without any routine or order. She was a single mom and had two children, ages 6 and 3. Every single day was different for those children. They were constantly running and going places and eating at odd times and the children stayed up with their mom until 10 and 11 at night.....they would fall asleep exhausted and then wake up early. No attempt at a routine at night.....the children showed it with crying and temper tantrums starting at 8 pm at night. I'm telling you it would break my heart to hear it.

When my husband and I were raising our young family with three children, it was hard to stick to any type of routine because he was in the in the Navy. He worked different shifts and he was even aboard ship for 9 months! I had to make the "un-routine" into what was considered "normal." I had to take away the chaos and the way I did this was to keep a routine and when "daddy" was home we "suspended" the routine to spend "quality time." It worked for the most part...sometimes better than others! The important fact was that our routine wasn't rigid and I did "follow the child" as much as I could under the circumstances.

Let's talk about the "extra-curricular" activities that many of us are into. I think there are several main reasons we have all "over-planned" our lives with these extra activities.

First, we want our children to sample many activities such as music, dance, sports, etc. at an early age so that they can learn what they might like best! Montessori believed in children being like little "sponges" so it follows that we should let them absorb as much as possible....right? Wrong! Montessori believed in isolating new learning skills into segments

so that a child is not “over-burdened” and so that a young child is always successful. This means.....we need to look and see if we are over-stimulating our children.

Second, the “real” world is very competitive isn’t it? We don’t want our children not to be the BEST, right? Wrong again....there is a “world” that is highly competitive and there is a “world” that believes that competition is fun and challenging but not life altering.

Third, we want our children to have friends and be accepted. We feel that if they join in group activities this will happen...right? Not necessarily....the value of learning how to make and keep a friend can happen with only 1 child at a time. Now, if you observe your child and you believe that they would love to play with a “group” then that would be for the right reason. As your children get older and their circle of friends increases...children learn to interact with many children and usually enjoy group dynamics.

Fourth, we keep our children scheduled and busy so they won’t have time to get in with the “wrong” crowd, won’t be around drugs, alcohol, sex...etc. Right? Wrong! Look at the statistics of the availability of drugs, alcohol, sex, and suicide within private schools...religious schools....even well-to-do families.

We have to stop this madness now and believe in our ability once again to give “unconditional” love to our children. This unconditional love won’t keep them away from all that is “evil” but it will help them to problem solve...it will help them know who to run to for help...it will secure in their hearts and souls that they are “GOOD” and that “LIFE IS WORTH LIVING!”

So, we need to discern which activities will really help to instill the values that each family decides are the best for them. We need to choose and not be afraid of the “down” time.

The “down” time at home with “nothing” to do can be very creative if you are not afraid to just “hang out” with your children. The only hope they have of not “becoming crazy adults who are always busy” is by setting an example now that they can “remember.”

Moment to Pause and Think! Now, do you keep your children “busy” all of the time? Do you allow for plenty of “down” time? If you are teaching in a classroom with many children, can you tell when a child is tired from having too much to do every day?

Chapter 2 – part 2 – The Lost Hour

I listed to Dr. Gupta on CNN give a special report on childhood obesity and how concerned he is and how concerned we should be....well; I want to write him a letter. I love this man, but he didn’t mention sleep as a culprit at all and I want him to read this book. So, I will write him an email and ask him to consider “sleep”.

I was so blown away when I read that children from elementary through high school get an hour less of sleep every night...compared to 30 years ago. I agree that we are more concerned about babies getting enough sleep and then as the child gets older we don’t really think about how much sleep children are getting every night.

Awhile back, oldest daughter Heather called me. My granddaughter was in the first grade and she was taking swimming and volleyball. It just so happens that both are on the same

night every week (a school night). So, on the first day of both “extra” curricular activities, Halle was picked up from school and taken home where she quickly changed into her swim suit and grabbed a bag with soccer clothes, etc. Heather gave her a juice box and a granola bar. Halle went swimming for an hour and then she changed clothes. In the car on the way to volleyball they grabbed a happy meal at McDonald’s. Halle played volleyball for an hour and then went home in the dark. Halle did homework, took a bath and fell into bed.....she woke up the next morning after having only 8 hours of sleep and came to her mom’s bedroom crying...she had an accident during the night and wet the bed.

She was soooooo tired, she wet her bed. I asked Heather what she said and after feeling reassured that Heather told her accidents happened...she was very tired and drank 2 glasses of water within 3 hours of bed, etc. Heather asked me what I thought she should do...so, I said.....maybe, you should re-think this..., “Well, she loves to swim with her friends and do volleyball.” I said...., “Maybe you need to rethink this through Heather. Find a way she can be with her group of friends and not...suffer with less sleep and be so exhausted she wets the bed.” Heather, being the great mom that she is, was able to sit down with Halle and figure out how Halle could do what she would like to do...not just all at the same time.

Now, I am sure, that if Halle had continued to do both activities on the same night...she would adjust and drink less and sleep less. But...would this have been the best thing for a growing child?

Page 31 – half way down the page

“...isolate and measure the impact of this single lost hour.”

We need to isolate and measure the impact of each activity our child participates in ... especially when it affects their sleep.

Page 31 – third paragraph

“...sleep matters...academic performance and emotional stability. A few scientists theorize that sleep problems during formative years can cause permanent changes in a child’s brain structure – damage that one can’t sleep off like a hangover. It’s even possible that many of the hallmark characteristics of being a tweener and teen – moodiness, depression, and even binge eating – are actually just symptoms of chronic sleep deprivation.”

Moment to Pause and Think! On the nights that your children don’t get enough sleep, can you tell the difference the next day?

I think that each person and child needs a certain amount of sleep to function the next day. I don’t believe that there is a “magic number” of hours that you should sleep at night. Some of us need more sleep and some less. I know that I need less sleep than my husband does. If he doesn’t get 9 hours of sleep it really shows. I can get away with 6 to 8 hours of sleep per night.

My children were all different. My oldest daughter needed 9 to 10 hours of sleep per night and still does as an adult. My son Anthony, would like more sleep now as an adult and dad, but he can get away with less sleep and still be “over the top” in being creative the next day. My youngest daughter Becca needed 8 to 9 hours of sleep and still does.

I think we need to honor our bodies and sleep the number of hours that we each need. I believe that we should observe and figure out what each of our children need, in terms of time to sleep, and make sure that they are given those hours (whenever possible).

Chapter 3 - part 1 - Why White Parents Don't Talk About Race

I decided to start out my comments today with sharing about how I was raised...next, I will blog on about the way my husband and I raised our children.....then I will address my reaction to the material presented in the chapter.

I realize that as students of my training course you follow the rules I set forth in the classroom which states that we will not talk about matters of faith or religion, etc. I also thank each of you for that have taken the time to share in your comments about your journey on bringing up young children. I want to keep our classroom free of "personal" comments that don't have anything to do with the class. I have always enjoyed and welcomed personal emails from my students.....however....

In this KHT classroom....I have had many comments on my "sharing" of so many personal experiences. I have set up this group so that we could come together as a "people" wanting more knowledge about ourselves and our children. I feel that our Forum is where I can share "Karen" the person....the person that is just like you. I have made many mistakes and I still do...but I strive to grow and learn and to above all respect everyone. I also love people and collect friends from everywhere. I love to laugh at myself and I love to giggle with others. I know you are a lot like me. For the most part, I don't even know what you look like. I have come to know each student by their emails....their trials and their joys.

I believe I can share my life with you in a way that isn't personally detailed in a way that would embarrass me or you. I hope you all feel free to join me in this pursuit to continue to grow as a person together.

Wow! This is another chapter that was a surprise for me....because I thought I had this "race card" down pat (so to speak)! Having grown our children up for many years in the San Francisco Bay area....liberal California...well, I have learned quite a few things reading this chapter!

I grew up in the United States in Utah. I was raised in a small community and an almost completely "white" world. However, I was the minority. I was Greek. My family did not belong to the local "religion." My family spoke 2 languages. I was always looking for other's like me...but I didn't find them...there were too few of us.

I grew up where the huge high school I went to didn't have even one dark-skinned person. There was one person from Mexico and one was part Native American and that was it.

I remember when I got married and moved away from home for the first time. My husband was a Marine Corp Officer and we were to live in Quantico Virginia. After the wedding and brief 3 day honeymoon....my husband left for Virginia by himself to finish some training. I left soon and took a plane back East. My mom told me not to leave the plane when it stopped in Chicago and to just sit there until the plane continued on to Washington DC. Well, we had to change planes at the last minute and so we had to disembark and I

remember calling my mom from a payphone at the airport and saying, "Mom...there are so many black people here. You know what? There are many colors of "black"!"

Needless to say my mom was "crazy" with worry over me alone in an airport. Not because of the "black" skinned people...but because I had lived such a sheltered life...how would I find the right plane to continue my trip! LOL!

Well, I did make it to my husband. Now, my dear husband grew up in a country where he was in the "minority." My husband's father was in the "oil" business and his family lived in a compound in Saudi Arabia. So, Ross lived in the Middle East until he was 14 years old. He had many friends from all over the world....and yes; they came from many different countries.

My husband tells a story about one of his trips back to the states when he was little. He remembers holding his mother's hand and pointing to a black-skinned man and saying, "Look mom! There is an American!"

Color blind! As a child was I color blind? Was my husband?

I wasn't because I never saw anyone that was not "white". I was kept busy trying to find others like myself...Greek, living in Utah.

My husband....he wasn't "color blind", he was raised where he knew all the colors! He knew all about the names for "white" and "black" and everything in-between! He knew about the different countries and he knew about all the things that made us alike.

My mom and dad did talk at home about other people's skin color...they also used "terms" that were not nice when they saw different races on television. Usually these words and comments were said quietly, but as children, my brother, sister and I heard them. We never talked about others...my world was what I saw and where I lived.

Ross' mom and dad talked openly about others and used only positive terms. A person was applauded for their efforts and accomplishments and not for the color of their skin.

After we were married, Ross and I were very comfortable around "international" people. Ross, because he spent his youth over-seas and I did because I missed my Greek family.....we even had friends that were then called "inter-racial" couples. Back in the 1970's this was very unusual. The topic of "mixed-race" children was a "hot button."

So....after two years of marriage, we decided to have children and wait until I tell you how we approached "race" with our children on Thursday!

Moment to Pause and Think! Stop and think about how you were raised and if you think that you were "colorblind" or if your family talked at home one way and they behaved differently in public. You don't need to share on the Forum, but if you do, please be sure to be general about your comments so that we don't use any disrespectful terms.

The world is a very diverse place and we need to "celebrate" this! We may have been raised differently but we are all adults now and we can make a different choice about the way we

will think of others and ourselves. It's not only important for us...but for those little eyes that watch us day after day.

Chapter 3 - part 2 - Why White Parents Don't Talk About Race

The statistics in this chapter are astounding and surprising to me. My husband and I lived in California for a good part of the time we were raising our three children. I don't think we lived in a place where we were all "color-blind" but we lived in a place where color of skin was not as noticeable. What I mean by that is that Los Angeles and San Francisco were cities where there were so many people of all different races living closely by each other that "skin color" wasn't as noticeable as it was when I was living in Utah.

Our children were friends with children from many cultures. When I look back at the birthday party photos, I see all skin colors!

Before I even knew what the "Montessori Method" was...I helped to run an international parent co-op in Berkeley California. So, my first child grew up speaking a little bit of Spanish, French, Greek and Japanese.

I had my second child when we moved from Berkeley to San Mateo.....my daughter went to Kindergarten in a school where "Caucasian" children were the minority. Most of the children were from Mexico.

By the time Heather was almost 7 years old and Anthony was 2 years old we moved to another location in the Bay Area where I fell in love with Montessori and took my training course.

The BIG UPSET was when my husband and I decided that living in California was having us "on the freeway" going all over the place more than we were at home. So, we picked up our lives and moved.....clear to Kansas. Now, we had lived in California for so long that moving to Kansas was a shock to all of us. The town we moved to said they were diverse in culture and they were lying! Everyone talked about how everyone got along and that our children all went to school together....but the children heard what parents said behind closed doors and they went to school and formed gangs and hated the color of each other's skin. My children were confused because they grew up with children of all skin colors and now if they even smiled at a child that was not like them....

Well, in our case, our children had two worlds to compare. This was a good thing. We were able to talk to them about what they felt and saw and what they thought they should or should not do about it.

The good news was that I have always been involved with community theater and so have the children...and in the theater...everyone is family! So, at least we had one group that we could talk with honestly about what was going on in town.

I wouldn't say my grown children are tolerant of other people with different colors of skin than their own...."tolerant" is offensive to me. My grown children try to instill in their children how the world "should" be and not how it usually ends up "being." We have given them the knowledge deep in their souls that we are all brothers and sisters. Now, if we can

only continue to bring up our children from birth on to seek “peace”...in doing so maybe they will “see” the different colors of skin and be dazzled by the beauty of the rainbow!

Moment to Pause and Think! I know that this classroom is filled with students living in many different parts of the world. I would love to think that this is basically a problem in the United States, but I have heard that this is an “old” problem. So, we need to remember that to change the world is to change ourselves. Our example will bring others to a different awareness.

Chapter 3 – part 3 – Why White Parents Don’t Talk About Race

Page 53

Rebecca Bigler tested children and their parents with a Racial Attitude Measure. Her work was eye-opening and she says that children are “*developmentally prone to in-group favoritism...*” Bigler also contends that, “*...a child identifies someone as most closely resembling himself; the child likes that person the most.*” Farther down that paragraph it says, “*Kids never think groups are random.*”

So....in a Montessori environment children’s first experiences do not include children being divided by colors of shirts or skin because we help the children to find they enjoy being with other children that understand respect, peace and freedom. By teaching these concepts first, a child learns to see the differences each child has and to celebrate them. Now, we can control the classroom and the home, and we pray that by the time the child is in a situation where others say things they should not even be thinking...they will be able to fall back on what they have learned in their early years.

It’s kind of like this: I believe we should pick our children’s friends for as long as we can get away with it. Why? Because how is a child to know what a good “friend” is if they have not experienced it? I wanted my children to have many “good” friends before they were out in the world away from me. My hope was they would have something to judge by....a past full of the “right” types of friends...loving, kind, etc. So, when the “wrong” type of friend came along...hopefully, my child would know the difference. Of course, our children will make mistakes ... like we continue to do...but hopefully; they will seek out peace and love. I also want to make sure that the “right” type of friend does not mean that “right” equals “the same color of skin.”

Page 55 – in the middle of the page

Researchers found that, “*It’s possible that by third grade, when parents usually recognize it’s safe to start talking a little about race, the developmental window has already closed.*” This is a sad thought, isn’t it?

I don’t believe racism is necessarily taught anymore. I think, as human beings, we are always seeking to fit in and to find our place in this world. If we are unconsciously seeking to be around those that are like us...then no wonder the world is in the place it is today! We have to talk and talk and talk about this to ourselves, each other and to our children! We need to work and promote all that is unifying and yet we need to celebrate the differences. How do we do both? I think that is the question in my mind. I am left with walking the talk

and talking as I walk. We need to first look to ourselves and root out all that is not peaceful and kind...then those that know us will know the peace and love in our souls.

Moment to Pause and Think! Stop and think about what you are doing and saying. Do you “walk the talk?” Are doing everything you can to help your children and the children that you work with to have “rainbow vision?”

The important thing is the process...we need to try don't we? I go to bed tonight with hope in my heart and not despair...this chapter was difficult to take...but that which challenges the most helps us to grow the most. So, here is to getting a little “taller.” LOL!

Chapter 4 -Why Kids Lie

Page 74

I have always believed that children should never testify in court in custody and abuse cases. I had no idea that there were over 100,000 children in American courts every year doing just that! Children are coached in how they are to respond and children are manipulated by their lawyers and parents as well as their own feelings which are usually “mixed.”

I grew up with an older brother that always lied to our parents about everything. The worst part was that they believed him. He was two years older than me and he always wiggled out of trouble and whenever he had to (or chose to) he would lie about me. I was constantly in trouble for doing things that I didn't do. My brother also scared me with threats about telling mom and/or dad about something he did or did to me....he was a mean brother.

You have to understand that I was a gentle and peace loving child from the start. I was artistic by nature...I loved everything that had to do with art and music. I was very skinny and my brother was always very BIG. I'm sure you all get the picture.

My brother is a grown man now with 6 children of his own. Whenever I go visit “home” I am always surprised at how easy my brother still “lies.” He lies so well now that most of the time he believes his own lies.

Page 77

I was surprised about the data on children cheating and lying to their own advantage and not seeming to care a lot about it.

Page 80-81

The truth that “kids grow into lying” really upset me. I have often let small lies go by with young children because I know they don't know the difference. That still stands, but to let it go by might not be the right choice.

Page 84

I was very relieved when I read about the “fear factor” with children getting punished so they not only lie...they do everything to cover up the lie. I think this brings me to the understanding that we should allow the child to see what the truth is without fear. So, then, I come to what about children that you bring to the truth without fear and they just go onto the next lie hoping not to be caught?

This is what I feel is a “Montessori Perspective” about truth telling:

I believe that young children (pre-school) are in a process of discernment. They are learning what the “truth” is....this is difficult when a young child’s world is in the “concrete” and trying to teach a value which is “abstract” is so hard. I think we should develop some lessons on “values” using the Montessori Method. A lesson on telling the truth could go something like this:

Sit down with a child and cut an apple in half. Place both halves in front of yourself and the child. Say this is an apple. I cut the apple in half. Take a scarf and put it over the apples, take one half of the apple away with the scarf and put it behind you. Say, to the child while pointing to the apple, “Where is the other half of the apple?” When the child says (because he watched you), “You took it.” Say, “Yes, I took it. I am telling the truth.”

I wouldn’t even do the opposite about what lying is...until the child has been given the same lesson above using other items/things. Then, one day do this:

Sit down with a child with the apple halves again...repeat taking away one half and ask the question, “Where is the other half of the apple?” When the child says, “You took it.” Say, No I did not. (Pause for a moment and keep eye contact if possible with the child). I am not telling the truth. I am lying. Lying is not good it makes people sad because it is not right.”

I don’t know, but I think maybe this is important to think about.....

It’s like other values and morals we choose to teach our children. One day my grandson who was six at the time, came up to me and said, “Yia, Yia, a friend at school told me what “Goth” means.” I said, “What is Goth, Zane?” Zane continued with, “Goth is cool. You look cool. You worship a guy called the Devil and sometimes people are killed!” I just about fainted! I’m sure you can just imagine me sitting on the couch with this sweet little boy sitting next to me saying this with a smile on his face.

Well, my husband was on the other couch and Zane’s mom was in the kitchen behind me listening to this so she came out and stood by the couch. Everyone just froze in time and space.

I said, “Zane come here and let me hold you so that I can look in your eyes. Some people like to dress in a fashion called Goth. Sometimes they wear clothes that are all black and they paint their nails black and they wear pale face makeup and line their eyes with black makeup. They like to listen to certain music. All people that like to dress in a style called **Goth** don’t necessarily worship the devil. They just like to dress in a special way that makes them happy.

Zane, doing bad things to yourself or other people or worshiping the negative people in this world and the next is not good. It is bad to worship evil things....to do evil things. It is wrong to kill others. It is never right to do this. Sometimes, friends will tell you things, or television will show you things that are not right or not real. It is very important that you do the right thing. You did the right thing today coming to tell me about this new thing your friend at school said. You did the right thing to see if what he says is right or the truth. Always, ask your mom, papapa or me to see if what others tell you is true or not. There are times that I ask your papapa if something sounds right to him. It is always best to ask an adult that you love." I kissed him and then turned to his mom and said, "Zane told us today about something a friend said to him. He did the right thing." His mom said, "Zane you did the right thing today." I turned to my husband (papapa) and said the same thing and he responded the same way.

If I had not read this chapter before this incident occurred, I'm not sure that I would have been able to address this in a way that I believe would foster "truth telling" in my grandchild. My hair is getting grayer by the moment!

Moment to Pause and Think! I am interested to know if any of you have had similar situations this past week. Have you found yourself changing the way you are approaching your children at home or in the classroom?

NOTE: I have decided not to cover Chapter 5 because it is about Kindergarten and the scope of the material is more specific to public and private school settings.

Chapter 6 - part 1 -The Sibling Effect

I enjoyed reading this chapter and for me it caused me to first think about my relationship with my brother. As I was growing up my brother would try to fight with me all of the time. I would say that by the time I was 7 or 8 years old the pecking order was established. My mom's label for my brother was "a leader" and for me "a peacemaker." I now believe that the label for my brother should have been "bully" and for me "scared silly!"

I'm sure you are like me and have heard over and over again that, "An only child is self-centered and doesn't know how to live with others." Or maybe you have heard, "I don't want only one child...I want at least two so that my children learn to get along with each other. That way they will know how to get along with others."

According to our book.....what I and others have believed is not necessarily true. In fact, to begin with, I know a lot of people that grew up in families that had many children and each one is very self-centered...and...they don't know the first thing about how to get along with others!

So, the question for me that seems to stand out in this chapter was, "Is leaving children alone to figure out how to get along necessarily the right thing to do?" My mom believed in, "Letting them fight it out!"

I have always said that I picked my children's friends until they caught on to what I was doing and refused my interference. The reason was because if my children didn't know what a good "hook-up (great friend)" was then when the time came for them to pick out their own friends they wouldn't know what to look for! I made "play dates" Now; I'm

talking about children under the age of 6 here. I don't think children this young need to have "social dramas" within their play groups. **They need to know how to grow a friendship.**

While I was picking out their friends so that they would know what having a "good" friend was like...I also taught my children values and morals. So, when they were 5-6 and had opinions about which friends they wanted to spend time with, they had "experiences and examples" to help them figure out how to be "social."

Now, you ask, "Did this work??" Well, I think it did. My children still had their share of friends that treated them poorly and soon they tired of them and went for others that they could depend on for honesty, loyalty, etc.

Moment to Pause and Think! What do you think about choosing your children's best friends while they are very young? Have you ever found yourself encouraging certain friendships and discouraging "getting together" with others?

Chapter 6 - part 2 -The Sibling Effect

Page 122

I think the program "More Fun with Sisters and Brothers," was a great idea! It goes along with my idea on children learning from experience what to do with others and how to deal with conflict. The Montessori Method goes hand in hand with this idea.

Page 123

On this page I found this quote, "conflict prevention and not conflict resolution is the right approach). Parents and/or teachers should be facilitators and help reinforce fair rules that adults and children draw up as a **"Code of Conduct."**

Page 127

Now, what about all those books that are written on a child's level to try and help them understand how to get along well with others? I always thought that these books would always help young children learn "positive" ways to conduct themselves. I never thought about the examples actually can be used as a "how to be mean." For me, it is like finding a show on television that says, "Don't try this at home." I guess we need to check out those cartoons again and books for sure! I know my brother used many "Tom and Jerry" cartoon pranks on me! This is why I wouldn't let my children watch "Bart Simpson" when the hit television show came out! Crazy as I was.....we may laugh at the antics...but, all the children on the block were imitating all the gross language and actions.

Page 128

I wonder if most of the trouble our children get into is because they don't have those **"examples and experiences"** in their back pocket. The book says, "Young children may fail

to develop pro-social relationships with their siblings if nobody teaches them how. Less emphasis needs to be placed on the psychology, and more needs to be on skill-building.”

In our Montessori classrooms we are very concerned and focused about “Peace.” So, everything we do is with respect. As adults we are **walking examples** for our children. Parents and teachers should have the child’s best interest at heart. Teachers...just like some parents...just don’t know how to go about teaching our children about **conflict resolution**. We need more “skill-building.”

Page 129

During the time of Maria Montessori, fantasy was never “played” it was read in fairytales or acted out in puppet shows, etc. Fantasy was used to teach lessons and was very scary for children. Today, fantasy is all around us and our children grow up almost from the beginning seeing and hearing “fantasy” stories, movies, etc. As parents and teachers, it is important that we talk about “living, non-living and once living” at an early age. As Montessori teachers we are able to do that with our Physical Science presentations and then through Botany and Zoology. Even though children “catch on” pretty soon to “fantasy” we must remember that it is an abstract idea and that young children work with “concrete” ideas. So, that is why the Montessori lessons are so very important. They help the young child come to terms with “fantasy.”

The book talks about how complex “fantasy play” is for children. I agree! All you have to do is to observe children playing a game of “super heroes” or “dancing fairies” and you will be amazed at how complicated this type of play is! They have to take into account all the children playing and they have to give and take in how the game will be played and who will do what and when. They can play for hours!

Try to watch children playing a “fantasy game” and then at a later time, pick out something in the play and talk about it. This reminds me of the day that my 4 year old daughter gave me her stick and a broken toy and said, “Fix it mommy!” I took the stick and touched the broken toy and said, “Abracadabra” and then I walked all over the room touching things and stating what I changed them into! By the time I was finished my daughter and I were both laughing and I said to her, “It would be GREAT if we had magic wands wouldn’t it?” She said, “Yes.” I said, “Magic wands are part of fantasy....we can only pretend and make believe.” Then I said, “Make believe is fun. Fantasy is fun. Sometimes it is fun to pretend!”

Observe and use the moment when it presents itself!

Page 130

The last page in this chapter talked about what the real connection was that would change a child’s behavior. **Kramer said, “It was that real connection between friends – that made a child care how his behavior impacted someone he liked – that was the catalyst for the difference.”**

In a Montessori setting, that is why when a child is hurt by another child we go and comfort the hurt child first. We don’t start out by talking with the child that did the hurting. It is important for the child that did the inappropriate thing to know that their actions caused another to “hurt.” After, we all go to the “Peace Table” and talk about it until it is resolved.

Moment to Pause and Think! As adults, we need to watch how we treat others in front of children. We are examples. Maybe we need the “Peace Table.” It’s okay to have differences in front of children when it can’t be helped...but it is even more valuable at that time to show the children how you figure out the answer to the problem.

Chapter 7 –The Science of Teen Rebellion

Well, this chapter was interesting to me...especially since I have lived through growing-up 3 teenagers! Even though this chapter talks about teens and this course is about pre-school age children, I think it is very important to understand about how the brain continues to develop as the child ages toward adulthood.

When my children were in their “teens” many books were written about how important it was for parents to keep children very busy. If we did our job, then our children would not get bored and into trouble (sex, drugs, etc.). So, parents that could pay the fees would make sure that their children took lessons in everything and joined many clubs. My children were busy with all the **FREE** types of things I could find. I wanted to make sure that they would NEVER get bored.

It was also firmly believed that in small towns, there were more incidents of teen sex, drugs and alcohol because there wasn’t a lot to do. It was also firmly believed that in large cities...evil lurked and so....my husband and I for many reasons...moved to a small town in Kansas (United States).

So, now, I was in a small town with low income and three children (2 in their teens) and I had the job of keeping them busy and out of trouble. I did it! But I was exhausted! I am thinking that some of you might be exhausted too!

A few years ago, I decided to ask my grown children if they lied to their father and me when they were growing up. Specifically I asked if they got away with doing things that they knew they were not allowed to do. I told them that I thought I knew what they were up to all the time. My oldest daughter confessed that her big “sin” was when she was 17 she had a glass of wine at a friend’s house (she was sleeping overnight). My son said he just thought arguing and stating his “case” was being “sinful” and that he never smoked, did drugs, sex, etc. He said that changing the color of his hair every week was as far as his rebellious spirit went! My youngest daughter said she tried to do everything and we caught her before she actually did anything.

Did their dad and I set rules and standards? Yes. Why? Because we believe that children need rules. They need to know there are borders to what is acceptable in behavior. I believe children feel “hugged” by reasonable rules. They know that we will keep them safe from their friends and any crazy idea they might have. All three of my children said that they were glad that they were able to blame their parents for not being able to go or do something bad with their friends. This allowed them to save “face” around their friends.

Did we ever “bend” the rules? Yes. As you already know from my previous posts, **we had not only open communications with our children, but we were engaged with our children.** So, we

listened to why they wanted to “bend a rule” and on occasion, we did just that...bend the rule! To give you an idea, on Sunday mornings we went to church as a family. The children knew that going out on Saturday night didn't mean not going to church with the family Sunday morning. We “bent the rule” when the children had friends of other faiths stay overnight on Saturday. We believed that hospitality means not making another person feel uncomfortable. This was “our” rule and this didn't mean that we passed “judgment” on others that did not do the same as we did.

Page 140

Now, I was surprised to learn that objection to parental authority peaks around age 14-15. I was most surprised at learning that it is stronger at age 11 than at 18. It seems to me that children are not having “childhoods” as we once did. I think society at large is responsible for this...many of us live in countries that promote children growing up fast. Faster is better right? NO!

Page 142

On this page you find this quote, “The more controlling the parent, the more likely a child is to experience boredom.” I feel that the quote should be instead, “Busy work for children doesn't give a child the time to think, daydream, play, consider options, be silent and comfortable with them self.” I think our children say they are bored, even though their parents keep them busy, because they find what they are doing “busy work” and it keeps them from finding the “passion” in their life. **They don't get to figure out what they might be interested in.** So, how do we fix this? I believe that we need to observe the child in the “Montessori Way”. **Watch when our children are busy doing different things and see if they enjoy it or doing it because we are making them do it.**

I did this with my son. We tried soccer...it was a NO. We tried baseball...it was a NO. We tried Community Theater and children's plays...I observed he loved the music. He loved watching guitar players. I watched him watching. We bought him a guitar at age 7. He took 3 months of lessons and the teacher in San Francisco could not teach him anything else. My son started composing music at age 10. He taught himself how to play many musical instruments. Anthony's life has been richer because he found one of his “passions” early in life and we encouraged him in every way that we could.

Page 144

Now, onto what I found fascinating... halfway down this page Galvan noted, “Response pattern of teen brains is essentially the same response curve of a seasoned drug addict. Their reward center cannot be stimulated by low doses – they need the big jolt to get pleasure.” Teen brains are different than ours in the “**pleasure response**” cortex. “At the very moment when experiencing an emotionally-charged excitement, the teens' brain is handicapped in its ability to gauge risk and foresee consequences.”

I always joked about teenagers having brains that were “checked out.” Meaning that they were changing so fast their brain couldn't keep up with everything. This is why you had to ask a hundred times a hundred for a teenager to pick up their room. LOL.

Now, it seems that it is a chemical reaction in the brain and how it functions during the teen years. I don't know about you, but this really feels like a missing piece of the puzzle has been found! If we know this now to be true....then, we can work and relate differently with our children when they are in their teens. Our teen knows the rules, but the jolt they get from doing something risky is so GREAT for them. **They really don't stop to think!** I guess we need to figure out what activities bring on "jolts" that are healthy. We need to try and build up the good "jolts" so that the child loses interest in the destructive "jolts!"

Moment to Pause and Think! I think I have a better picture as to why our children act differently at home than with their friends. Don't you?

Chapter 8 -Can Self-Control Be Taught?

Good Morning!

I was excited about reading this chapter on "self-control." As you know, The Montessori Method strives to nurture a child to develop self-control. I wanted to see if the "new thinking" would include something "new" or a twist on "The Montessori Method." I was happy to find the "back-up scientific brain data" does lend power to The Montessori Method! **Dr. Montessori was a very smart woman, wasn't she? Many years ago, she came to many of these so-called "new developments and theories.**

Page 160

Let's talk about "Tools of the Mind." I had never heard of this program before now and I wish I had because it has shed a lot of light on child development. I plan on doing a lot of research on whether or not there are many schools that are still using this program.

Page 161

I had to laugh about the **"linear calendar"**.....the same activity I have in my History book in teaching children about the calendar. The **"sound map"** was new to the teachers....how sad. Grouping sounds in clusters that have similar sounds...well, I still don't believe this would work with children under the age of 5. Now, maybe by 5 and 6 a child is developed enough not to get confused by this.

I really want to talk about the **"Play Plans"** and how this compares to the Montessori classroom experience. As I understand it:

Children get to choose what they want to do (their role)
 Children use the "sound map" (our moveable alphabet, etc.) to help write what they will do.
 Teacher facilitates (if child loses their way she re-directs to the play plan).
 Teacher uses a "clean-up song."
 Children pair up and do buddy reading (this is a great idea!)
 Etc.

The results from their program were astounding for the children placed high on the national standardized classes. The children's behavior ratings were very high. The children

could focus and had high self-control. Yes, their attention span was amazing. People that visited these classrooms were amazed at the children going about their work (sounds like Montessori).

So, why and how did this work?

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The author talks about children being able to sustain their own interest and that this is a core building block. Play is a joyful expression of randomness but it's not sustained on its own. The Play Plan gave a foundation and meaningful purpose to the play. In the Montessori classroom our children do "meaningful work" with all of the Practical Life activities. If you gave a child a bowl of water they would play and mess around with it for a few minutes, but most children would either walk away or dump it out or throw it at another child, etc. If you give a child a bowl of water and showed them how to wash a baby doll....the play would have a plan and the child would find meaning in their work and they would do it over and over again....thus learning self-control, etc.

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At the top of the page you will find this statement, "They recognize that a child can't learn unless she has the ability to avoid distractions. Tools emphasize the flip-side - kids won't be distracted because they're so consumed in the activities they've chosen....the kids are thoroughly in the moment."

Isn't this what we know and do as Montessori educators? We teach respect for others by not disturbing another's work....we give children many meaningful activities in which they choose for themselves and their attention is captivated for a long, long time!

The "Tools" program is said to develop an internal voice of contemplation and discussion. I laughed at the example of children talking and murmuring out loud as they do something. Later that becomes their inner voice. **So, no, nothing is wrong with your child if they talked to themselves.**

Several years ago, my husband and I took our 6 year old grandson to Monument Square in Indianapolis and visited the Soldiers Monument. We went to the top (over 400 stairs) and looked out at the city. We visited the Civil War Museum. And all the way home my grandson played in the backseat with his two souvenirs. He bought a ruler that had all the Presidents of the United States on it and a paperweight of a Lincoln Copper penny. My grandson was 6 years old and he chattered non-stop all the way home as he thought about his trip and the monument and the people that died and about guns and how they can kill you and you shouldn't play with them. He talked about the many names of the presidents and how he was going to learn them by heart. He read the "Lincoln Penny" and asked what "In God We Trust" meant.... Zane was doing just what the "Tools" program observed. He was working it all out in his brain. He was getting the wiring straight in his head.

In the Tools Program the child learns how to do "attention switching." **I agree with the book on children learn how to switch their attention from thinking about one side of**

a problem to another. In the Tools Program Play Plan the children had to problem solve on the spot because how one child played would affect another's. Having to learn to think and multi task in your brain helps you learn how to concentrate, etc.

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The author talks about how "motivation" is crucial to a child's ability to learn more. A child is more excited about something they choose over what we tell them to do. At the bottom of the page you find, "One reason IQ tests don't predict better is that in a child's school life, academics don't take place in a quiet, controlled room, one-on-one with a teacher – the way IQ tests are administered. Academics occur among a whirl wind of distractions and pressures.....In simpler words, being disciplined is more important than being smart." I agree with this!

Also, the talk about writing down a plan....this reminded me of the "Student Contracts" and how they work in the Montessori world.

I think that asking a child to circle the best "a" they wrote, etc., is a great idea.....it helps the child discern and pay attention and imprint the writing.

Moment to Pause and Think! Well, I think Maria Montessori really got it right with observing the child and how she interpreted the details. I also think, as a progressive and eclectic Montessorian (which I am) that she would have loved all the "new" information on child development. I know I have learned a lot in this chapter and I hope you did too!

Chapter 9 – Part 1 – Plays Well With Others

This chapter is divided up into three parts. It is amazing in moments of "Ah ha!" I think this chapter reveals and that there is a lot to learn about how we can assist children as they grow!

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The title page starts out with this statement, "**Why modern involved parenting has failed to produce a generation of angels.**" This stopped me in my tracks and I wondered, "What in the world are they talking about?"

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The author begins with talking about how to distinguish between **physical aggression**, **relational aggression** and **verbal aggression**.

- **Physical Aggression** - This is what I think of when I think of a "bully." This is where a child hits another person, takes away toys, pushes or pulls, etc.
- **Relational Aggression** - At the preschool level, this is where one child tells another child, "You can't play with us." Or, it is shunning (not playing with) or telling stories/lies about that child to others etc.

- **Verbal Aggression** - At a young age, this is where one child calls another child a name or labels them by saying things like, "You are stupid!" Often verbal aggression goes hand in hand with physical aggression.

A research team was formed to study "aggression" and how it was related to time spent "watching television." This research was conducted with pre-school children watching about 11 hours of media a week. The children watched a mix of television shows and DVDS.

The research team was very surprised by the results from the study. It was assumed that children that watched only **educational-type television** and **DVDS** would not be or act out in an aggressive way. It was assumed that children that watched shows like "Power Rangers" or "Powder Puff Girls" would be more aggressive. **The results showed that the children that watched more educational shows were more relationally aggressive. They were more bossy and manipulative.**

I must say I was very surprised and alarmed at the results. I wanted to know why this would be the case.

I continued to read about how the research team spent hours watching programs on PBS, Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel and they found that in some shows, relational aggression was evident at a high rate. **It seems that many of these shows spent most of the half-hour establishing the conflict between characters and then only spent a few minutes at the end resolving the problems.**

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Dr. Jamie Ostrov (head of research) said, **"Preschoolers have a difficult time being able to connect information at the end of the show to what happened earlier. It is likely that young children do not attend to the overall 'lesson' in the manner an older child or adult can, but instead learn from each of the behaviors shown."**

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Ostrov's team studied 4 different pre-schools in Buffalo, New York. He found that the **correlation between the educational shows and aggression was 2.5 times higher than that between violent media and aggression.**

Ostrov found that the show **Arthur is more dangerous for children than Power Rangers.**

A Data team from Ithaca College confirmed Ostrov's assessment. Dr. Cynthia Scheibe, the supervisor, had undergrads study 470 half-hour television programs that were commonly watched by children. They recorded every time a character insulted someone, called someone a mean name, or put someone down. **This analysis revealed that 96% of all children's programming included verbal insults and putdowns, averaging 7.7 put downs per half-hour show.**

Shows that were considered **"pro-social" actually contained insults at a rate of 66.7%."**

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Out of the 2,628 put-downs identified in the research, in only 50 instances was the insulter reprimanded or corrected. And there was not one case where this was done in an educational show. 84% of the time there was a response of laughter or no response at all!

Moment to Pause and Think! This week, I would like to challenge each of you to sit and watch some of the shows that your children watch and do your own research.

Look for these things:

1. Identify the conflicts (for example it might be that Arthur takes a toy from a friend and hides it).
2. Identify how much of the show is dealing with the conflict.
3. Identify the time spent in resolving the conflict (for example it might be that 2 minutes were spent with Arthur's mom talking to him about how it is not the right thing to take someone else's property).
4. Keep tally at any put-downs and insults.

Finally, ask your child the following questions and don't "coach" (keep it simple):

1. Did you like the show?
2. What happened?
3. Did anyone learn anything?

Then, take note as to if your child could **identify the conflict(s)** and if they could **correlate the over-all lesson**.

Spend some time thinking about all this and next I will take you further into this issue. We will talk about why modern parenting seems to be failing and whether the home environment has anything to do with it. Also, we will talk about what effect plain old everyday conflicts have on a child. We will discuss whether parents should disagree or argue in front of a child or if they should do it in private.

Chapter 9 – Part 2 – Plays Well With Others

I hope you have started to sit and watch some of the shows that your children view and to really think about what I wrote on Tuesday.

Years ago there was a book written that enlightened the public written by William Golding called **Lord of the Flies**. This book, though written years ago, is worth the "read." In today's world children are still in diapers when parents start to teach them about how to be kind and to share their toys. So, you would think that by the time our children are out on the "playground" bullying would not "occur." However, **it seems that bullying is not only alive and well, but it is much worse than it was years ago.**

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The author of this book says that the easy explanation is that aggression in children should be blamed on a bad home environment. Aggression is considered a "red flag" in a

child...indicating that the child is going to have future problems that are going to "alarm both parents and others."

When I was a child, people believed that parents should never argue or fight in front of their children. If there was a conflict, it was quickly put behind the bedroom door. I knew that my parents had disagreements and it scared me. Why? Because I couldn't hear what was going on so I was afraid that they would get a divorce.

When my husband and I were raising our small children we would have simple disagreements in front of our children on purpose. They would listen to us disagree in a respectful way with each other. They heard us figure out solutions for differences and for problems. They also heard us "agree" to "disagree" with each other. Today, my adult children say that...they treat their spouses the same way as they were shown as a child.

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Plain ordinary conflict should not be hidden away. Cummings said that children were "emotional Geiger-counters." How the parents got along with each other, influenced how the children reacted emotionally. So, parents that have disputes in front of a child don't necessarily cause the child to be upset and to become aggressive. But the key is that the child has to see the parents find solutions, kiss and make up (that sort of thing).

In one study cited, a third of the children studied reacted aggressively after witnessing a staged (pretend) conflict. Only 4% of another group of children reacted aggressively after witnessing a staged conflict where the parents worked it out in front of the children. So the key, is "finding a resolution for the argument."

Of course, it goes without saying, very serious discussions and very adult conversations need to not start in front of a child but to be kept outside the child's world. There is a very fine line here so you need to be in agreement with your spouse as to how to handle conflict.

Moment to Pause and Think! Take some time to think about how you are teaching children to survive in this world. Are you showing them with your actions and words how to manage conflicts?

Chapter 9 – Part 3 – Plays Well With Others

This continues to prove to be such an interesting chapter. There is a lot to think about!

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Now, I would like to talk about Dr. Kenneth Dodge, a professor at Duke University and his research. At least 90% of American parents use physical punishment on their children at least once during their childhood. For years, it has been believed that children that were spanked were more aggressive. As a teacher, this is what we all thought was true. It wasn't until years later that we find that most of these studies that supported this conclusion were with predominately Caucasian families.

Dr. Dodge found that Caucasian children that were spanked a lot were more aggressive than Caucasian children that weren't. But, here is the kicker, when Dr. Dodge studied Black families he found an amazing discovery. Black children that were spanked did not turn out to be aggressive children and adults. These Black children, that were spanked, were the ones that weren't getting into trouble. So, he wondered why and how this could be. This is what he found:

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In the **Black community** which was studied, a **spanking is something that each and every child saw as something that every kid went through**. In a **White community**, it is something that you only do when you can't think of any other way to discipline the child. So, children that are spanked know that spanking is saved only for the worst offenses. **So, if you are spanked you are not a good kid.**

As Dr. Dodge said, "Physical discipline was a mostly-unspoken taboo. It was saved only for the worst offenses. The parent was usually very angry at the child and had lost his or her temper. The implicit message was: "What you have done is so deviant that you deserve a special punishment, which is spanking." It marked the child as someone who has lost his place within traditional society.

Dr. Dodge also pointed out that it **isn't only a Black-White thing**...for instance very conservative protestants (about a third of them) spanked their kids three or more times a week, largely encouraged by Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family. The study found no negative effects from this corporal punishment - **precisely because it was conveyed as normal.**

So, this section ends with this quote, "**Children key off their parents' reaction more than the argument or physical discipline itself.**"

Now, should we or should we not spank? In the Montessori world, I would be right in saying that you might find a few that believe in spanking...but it is **not linked to The Montessori Method**. If you decide to spank it should not be because you have saved it for the time that you can't think of anything else to do.

Many of my students live all over the world. They live in many different societies and cultures where the "normal" is different from what I do and where I live. So, you often send me emails about how to stop spanking and how to change the culture in which you live in. I can't answer that. I think about a child that is growing up in a village where all children get spanked....and I think about what that child might think if he doesn't get spanked. Would he understand why you have decided not to or would he feel that he doesn't fit in or that you don't care about him like his friend's mother cares about him.

This issue is not solved with just one answer. As in many things all over the world...there are many things to take into consideration and then...then...it is up to what you decide to do.

I do believe that "spanking" isn't necessary to raise a GREAT child. In this day and age there are so many books...so many mentors, so many ways to communicate with a child. I choose to not spank because I don't believe it is necessary in any way for me to in order to bring up a child that is loving and kind.

Having said this....you might disagree with me or believe that what I have decided is right for me and that another truth is right for you. This is okay.

Moment to Pause and Think! I want each of you to think about this and to decide to raise your child in a deliberate way. Whatever way that is right for you and your family. I don't want any of you to continue to go from one day to the next doing different things and not being consistent. Not knowing what to do from one issue to the next. Think...Decide...and only then will you be comfortable with disciplining your child.

Chapter 9 – Part 4 – Plays Well With Others

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Last time we talked about how children should be exposed to some parental conflict as long as the child witnesses both the conflict and the resolution. Today, we will look into whether children should learn to handle a certain amount of conflict with their peers without their parent's help.

"The Nurture Paradox" is what Dr. Joseph Allen, a professor from the University of Virginia says is a condition that many modern parents are trapped in today. Dr. Allen brings to our attention that parents have a great desire to protect their children and to help "solve" for problems.

Parents in the past and in the present have always had this "protect and defend" desire, but in today's world we are spending a lot of time trying to figure out when we should interfere and when it is in the best interest of the child to let them try and figure out what to do. This is evident with the number of online communities where you will find parent boards full of moms and dads trying to decide when they should jump in and "fix" things on the playground.

The Nurture Paradox has many parents demanding "zero tolerance" policies in schools. It has gone beyond bullying...now any sort of aggression or harassment is considered a "no-no!" Many parents have chosen to homeschool for many reasons...some to avoid "the bully." Bullying is not really on the increase...instead there is an increase on the concern about the effects it has on others. Many educated scholars have agreed that bullying can have serious effects and needs to be stopped. However, they stop short on the "zero tolerance."

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The author has this to say, and I quote:

A task force of the American Psychological Association warned that many incidents involve poor judgment, and lapses in judgment are developmentally normative - the result of neurological immaturity. All of which was a fancy way of saying that kids make mistakes because they're still young. They noted that inflicting automatic severe punishments was causing an erosion of trust in authority figures. As the chair of the task force later explained, "The kids become fearful - not of other kids, but of the rules - because they think they'll break them by accident." During the new era of zero tolerance, levels of anxiety in

students at school had gone up, not down. In Indiana 95% of the suspensions weren't for bullying per se - they were for "school disruption" and "other." The APA task force warned especially against over-applying zero tolerance to any sort of harassment.

So, children are "scared" of making a mistake and being thrown out of school. This is upsetting because children make mistakes.

Did you know that 68% of American parents support zero tolerance? Schools are expanding their list for what is included in their zero tolerance policies. There are serious consequences now for children that are caught teasing, being cruel, name-calling, social exclusion, and anything that causes psychological distress. In one small town in Canada they even passed a new law making these behaviors expressly illegal, punishable by fine.

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Now, here is the amazing thing that I read:

"According to the science of peer relations, there's one big problem with lumping all childhood aggression under the rubric of bullying. It's that most of the meanness, cruelty, and torment that go on at schools aren't inflicted by those we commonly think of as bullies, or "bad" kids. Instead, most of it is meted out by children who are popular, well-liked, and admired."

I was shocked and didn't expect to read that most of the bullying wasn't done by "bad" kids but by the children that are well-liked and popular. WOW!

Moment to Pause and Think! I invite you to think about your experiences with bullying. Think about what you think about "zero tolerance." Spend some time thinking about the so called "popular" children that you grew up with in school. This has given all of us, "Food for Thought!"

Chapter 9 - Part 5 - Plays Well With Others

Good Morning!

Last time, we talked about whether children should learn to handle a certain amount of conflict with their peers without their parent's help. Today, we will talk about popularity and aggression. Then, we will finish up with asking why modern parenting has failed to result in a generation of kinder, gentler kids.

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We open with Dr. Joseph Allen (introduced last week) stating that up until recently social scientists have only been looking at **bad behavior causing bad outcomes**. The grant money that is often used to fund a "study" has been given to programs that study "bad children" doing "bad things." There have been very few grants given to study the connection between **"popular children" doing "bad things."** In the past we have assumed that popular kids are good kids. One such study opened many eyes into "popularity" and

that study showed the connection between popular kids and the use of alcohol and drugs. I remember when this "fact" was reported on every news station. We were all "shocked."

After the above study came out, a lot of money became available to fund new studies that were concerned about children that were "doing well." The "science of popularity" became of interest to many.

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Dr. Nikki Crick, University of Minnesota, proved that girls could be just as aggressive as boys...only, they used **relational aggression**.

Dr. Debra Pepler showed that elementary school age children that were "nonaggressive" were far from saintly. These children were often found to be lacking the savvy and confidence to assert themselves as often. They would still threaten to "not be your friend," push, shove, etc.

Dr. Antonius Cillessen, University of Connecticut explains that, "Aggression is not simply a breakdown or lapse of social skills. Rather, many acts of aggression require highly attuned social skills to pull off, and even physical aggression is often the mark of a child who is "socially savvy," not socially deviant. Aggressive kids aren't just being insensitive. On the contrary, the relationally aggressive kid needs to be extremely sensitive. He needs to attack in a subtle and strategic way. He has to be socially intelligent, mastering his social network, so that he knows just the right buttons to push to drive his opponent crazy. **Aggression comes as "early adolescents are discovering themselves. They're learning about coolness - how to be attractive to other people."**

So, this means that when we tell our children that it isn't okay to hit or push or to spread rumors we are taking away tools that your child needs for social dominance on the playground. The negative behavior that we tell our children "Good children don't do," actually is rewarded immediately by their peers and it gives the child an "emotional rush." It seems that as long as having "status" with "peers" is a strong pull for a child...they will act in ways that have negative results in the lives of other children.

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So, the question is really "why?" Why do our children hold aggressive peers in high esteem?

One of the reasons highlighted by this chapter is that children disobey parents (especially in front of peers), in order to look more grown-up and independent. Children that do what their parents want are often looked at as "wimps" by their peers.

A long held belief in the world of child development has been that socially competent children are nonaggressive. This is not necessarily true anymore, is it?

Now, onto the last point we will cover today. Why has modern parenting failed to result in kinder and gentler kids? It seems that many of our innovations which we have thought up have had unintended consequences.

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We thought that keeping disagreements with our spouse behind closed doors would be better for our children. Instead we have deprived them of seeing how to work out disagreements with love and respect.

We came up with the "play-date." Then we went on to segregating children by ages to make sure that the playground was safe from any negative experience. Have we robbed our children from learning how to work out peer interactions that are not necessarily perfect? I have to speak to the "Montessori" viewpoint here. One of the reasons that Maria Montessori believed in mixed aged groupings of children were so that children that are younger could learn from the older child and that the older child could learn to love and care and teach the younger child. Life is messy. We are living among people of all ages, political and religious persuasions. Maybe if we raise our children in a non-segregating way our children at a younger age would learn important skills before they are old enough to be exposed to aggressive behaviors. This is something to think about don't you think?

The author leaves this section by pointing out that we wonder why it takes twenty years to teach a child how to conduct himself in polite society - overlooking the fact that we've essentially left our children to socialize themselves."

Moment to Pause and Think! I leave you with thinking about "balance." How do we balance the "life" our children have at home and at school and around their peers? Also, I think we often feel we are safe with what we "believe" is right and wrong in raising up our children. Now, we realize that everything is really not black and white ...there is a lot of "gray" in there. We are left knowing that we must not be afraid to think about these things....we need to realize that parenting is a process!

Chapter 9 - Part 6 - Plays Well With Others

Good Morning!

Last time, we talked about popularity and aggression. We asked ourselves why modern parenting has failed to result in a generation of kinder, gentler kids. Today, we will end this chapter with talking about parenting styles, specifically the three camps of fathers....the Progressive Dads, the Traditional Dads, and the Disengaged Dads.

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When the three types of fathers were scientifically studied...Progressive Dads were shown to be universally good. Children of "progressive dads" had better relationships with their brothers and sisters. They also felt better about themselves and did better in school. Progressive dads not only had better relationships with their children, but they had better relationships with their spouses.

Traditional Dads were still involved with their children, but they leaned on their wives direction. These dads could figure out what the children should wear in the morning and they just as often stayed at home when a child was sick.

The interesting information that I found about Progressive and Traditional Dads were that the Progressive Dads rated their marriage and family lower than the fathers that were traditional.

Maybe one of the reasons was that the Progressive Dads had increased marital conflict where the Traditional Dads didn't is because the Progressive Dad was inconsistent in what forms of discipline he used. He was found to be not as strong at establishing rules or enforcing them. These dads would get the job done, but they were not as sure of themselves and the methods they chose to use.

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Research showed that the Progressive Dad felt that punishing his kids was acutely embarrassing. So, the final outcome was that the inconsistency and permissiveness led to children that were just as aggressive as children with fathers who were distant and disengaged.

Moment to Pause and Think! When I read this last part to this chapter, I realized that everything is definitely not "black or white." Every parenting style has its pros and cons...I think we need to develop a new "style." Something to think about!

Chapter 10 - Part 1 - Why Hannah Talks and Alyssa Doesn't

This week we will start to talk about why parents are spending billions every year on all types of gimmicks and videos in order to "jump-start" their infants' language skills. I realize this is a "hot" button issue for a lot of us. Try to understand how the scientific information has been interpreted and then, of course, make your own decision.

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Years ago, an Officer of Disney, Robert Iger, launched **Baby Einstein**. It wasn't much later (2007) that a study estimated that baby videos were as high as \$4.8 billion annually. **The medical journal, Pediatrics, published a report saying that the children which had watched these videos had a "quantifiably" smaller vocabulary.** As you can imagine this really upset the "Baby Einstein" people. Parents couldn't understand how these findings could be true because infants and parents around the world "loved" these videos! Many parents attributed their baby's early language skills to watching hours of these programs.

Earlier studies had shown that parents did confirm that they did use television such as **Baby Einstein and Brainy Baby**, to help babysit their children...but they believed that these programs were giving their children a cognitive advantage. Yes, the parents felt that they were doing a "good" thing having their babies view these programs on a regular basis.

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Another study, following on the tail end of the one above, was to quantify the actual impact of such television/video exposure. Parents in the states of Washington and Minnesota were asked to report the amount of television their children were watching and the type of programs. The parents were then asked to complete the CDI which is a list of 89 common

words infants may know, and, if they are old enough to say themselves. The CDI is known all over the world for their measuring of early language.

The data from the CDI was amazing because they found that the more the children watched the worse their vocabulary. So, these findings were not the same as the first press releases from Baby Einstein in March 1997. As a matter of fact, I will quote what the Einstein people said at that time:

"Studies show that if these neurons are not used, they may die. Through exposure to phonemes in seven languages, Baby Einstein contributes to increased brain capacity."

Whoops!

The research was very complex but the main thing that I took from this chapter was **that babies brains do not learn from watching "language"...but they do learn from a live, human teacher.** Babies that watched television for exposure to "language" did not absorb any of it. It was heard as meaningless noise. The babies might look like they were engaged with "language, but they were only excited about the "action."

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A baby needs to see a person's face while they are talking. This is because babies learn to decipher speech partly by lip-reading. So, when a child hears a word and watches the person that is speaking...the child gets the message to pay attention to the single object of interest. Human interaction is the key.

This brings one to think that maybe if the television/videos were to show the person speaking it would be wonderful for the child would see and hear language. But this is not the case because the television/video cannot interact with the baby by responding to the sounds that the baby makes after hearing a "word."

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Now, the next section of this chapter talks about the **use of a verbal pedometer.** I didn't even know about this gadget that is the size of a cell phone. This pedometer measures the "words" that a baby hears all day long. After gathering data it's not scientifically clear that just hearing a lot of language results in a child having a larger vocabulary after they are three years of age.

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The author of this book says:

"The central role of the parent is not to push massive amounts of language into the baby's ears; rather, the central role of the parent is to notice what's coming from the baby, and respond accordingly - coming from his mouth, his eyes, and his fingers."

Also...

"In fact, one of the mechanisms helping a baby to talk isn't a parent's speech at all - it's not what a child hears from a parent, but what a parent accomplishes with a well-timed loving caress."

Moment to Pause and Think! Please think about the show your child is watching on television or videos....do you need to change what they are watching? If you are working with a baby and young toddler do you make eye contact when you are speaking with them?

Chapter 10 - Part 2 - Why Hannah Talks and Alyssa Doesn't

Last time, we talked about why parents are spending billions every year on all types of gimmicks and videos in order to "jump-start" their infants' language skills. Today, we will talk more about how important parent responsiveness to a baby is in relation to "language."

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This part of the chapter opens with detailed information on a research study that a Dr. Catherine Tamis-LeMonda, of New York University did specifically on parent-responsiveness to infants, and the impact on language development. Her research revolved around teams of researchers that she sent into the homes of families which had 9 month old babies. The research had each mother and her baby come to a room which had age appropriate toys and discrete cameras. **The mothers were asked to play with their baby for 10 minutes.** Every time the baby responded in any way (looked at mom, babbled, reached or played with a toy) meticulous records were kept. The average times a child responded in was 65 times. The moms, it was noted, responded 60% of the time. Responses that were off-timed were also recorded.

The researchers called the moms every week to keep track of what new words the child was using every week. They used a checklist of **680 words** and phrases that a toddler might know.

The children of this study, on average, said their first words just before they turned 13 months old. By the time the children were 18 months old, the average vocabulary was up to 50 words. But, it was noted that there was a huge difference in the children and their use of language. Some used only a few words and others had a larger vocabulary.

The variable that explained this was attributed to how often a mom responded to her child's vocalizations. How quickly they responded made a big difference of putting those children six months ahead of the children that did not have immediate parental responses.

It was interesting to note that it did not matter how often a mother initiated a conversation with her child....**what mattered was that when the infant initiated a verbal response and the parent immediately responded...this is what counted towards the increase of verbalization.**

The reason this is so is because a baby's brain learns that the sounds coming out of their mouth affect the way their parents react. The sounds they make get their mother's attention. Also, the immediate response allows the baby to link a word to an object.

Now Maria Montessori based her theory on the foundation that children learn concrete first and then abstract. **So, this research supports her method.** If a child is holding a spoon in their hand and make a verbal remark (doesn't have to even sound like the word spoon) and the adult immediately says the word "spoon" then the child has a concrete to abstract experience.

During this study a comparison was made between two little girls (Hannah and Alyssa) of the same age. At nine months old both of the girls could understand about 7 words (they could not say these words). Hannah's mom responded 85% of the time whenever her child verbalized and Alyssa's mom did so about 55% of the time.

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Month by month a record was kept and the results were amazing! When the girls were 18 months old, Alyssa added 8 new words in her 18th month and Hannah added 150 words.

When the girls were 21 months old, Alyssa said sentences like "Mama bye-bye." Hannah was saying sentences like "Yoni was eating an onion bagel."

So, how a parent responds to a child's vocalizations, right in the moment, is the key. The author did caution that parents need to be careful and not overdo it. "Children need breaks for their brain to consolidate what it's learned," he (Goldstein) points out. Sometimes children just need play time, alone, where they can babble to themselves."

Goldstein also gave caution not to reward a baby for immature sounds because we will be making it too easy for the baby to get attention.

Goldstein also said, "Babies learn better from object-labeling when the parent waits for the baby's eyes to naturally be gazing at the object. The technique is especially powerful when the infant both gazes and vocalizes, or gazes and points. Ideally, the parent isn't intruding, or directing the child's attention - instead he's following the child's lead. When the parent times the label correctly, the child's brain associates the sound with the object."

This is why; Maria Montessori is always talking about **"following the child."** We observe as guides. We train to watch and at the "right" moment we give the right "tool" to the child. This is the opposite of traditional educational methods. If you find yourself talking a lot when presenting a new work to a child....or if you find yourself directing the child to do what you want them to do ... then you need to stop and back up a few steps and re-think what you are doing.

The author says that we need to let the child show some curiosity and interest first. Don't ignore the child.

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The baby, holding a spoon, might say "buh, buh," and the zealous parent thinks, "He just said 'bottle,' he wants his bottle," and echoes to the child, "Bottle? You want your bottle? I'll get you your bottle." Inadvertently, the parent just crisscrossed the baby, teaching him that a spoon is called "bottle." Some parents, in Goldstein and Schwade's research, make these mismatches of speech 30% of the time.

If you have an infant at home or that you are taking care of, take the time to check yourself to see if you are "putting words" into your baby's mouth. You might think that this will help the baby speak early...but alas, it will not. Take the time to really learn how to "observe."

Moment to Pause and Think! This week, I would like to challenge each of you to think about how you are speaking with the young children you are around. Did you learn something new about how young children learn to speak?

Chapter 10 – Part 3 – Why Hannah Talks and Alyssa Doesn't

Last time, we talked about how important parent responsiveness to a baby is in relation to "language." Today, we continue to explore ways in which adults interfere with language development with toddlers.

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"Motionese" is when you talk to a child about an object and while you are talking you are moving or shaking the object to attract the attention of the small child. This makes for a multisensory experience for the young child under the age of 15 months. After that time, the child doesn't benefit from the extra motion attached to the language.

"Hearing language from more than one person" is helpful in a young child being able to pick up on a new word or phrase. Yes, it has been proven that your child could hear you repeat the same word, time and time again...but if there are other adults using the same word...well, the child will pick it up faster. I thought that this would confuse a child since every person has a unique voice and we also say some of the words differently...but, as the author said, "By hearing what was different, they learned what was the same."

The author also brought to my attention that a typical 2 year old child hears about 7,000 utterances a day. But, these are not all unique sayings for the child. The author says, "In fact, 45% of utterances from mothers begin with one of these 17 words: **what, that, it, you are/aren't, I, do/don't, is a, would, can/can't, where, there, who, come, look and let's.**"

The author also said, "With a list of 156 two- and three-word combinations, scholars can account for the beginnings of two-thirds of the sentences mothers say to their children."

Well, I hope you all have enjoyed this journey into the book Nutureshock! I didn't touch on everything in the book, but covered items that I thought you would be interested in knowing....

Moment to Pause and Think! Always, keep an open mind...because somebody might figure out something we don't know (or we thought we knew) and by thinking about "new" and

"different" ideas we grow as people. Don't be afraid to read another person's ideas or opinions. This can only strengthen what you believe or help you make minor adjustments on your life path. You can always "agree" to "disagree." No harm done.

We owe it to our children...to know and do the best we can ... we are their advocates for many years until they are able to "stand" for themselves. We will make mistakes, but let's make these mistakes based on trying to do the "best" for them.....and.....not because we stopped searching for the "best" way to grow up a child!

I do hope you enjoyed this Book Review...stay with me we are going to start another one!

Blessings and Hugs,
Karen