In Mimi’s Voice

Using Art to Learn to Think: The 2011-12 Visiting Scholar Program

Math Sense: How WSMS Instills a Lifelong Love of Math

Play Is a Child’s Work: A Conversation with Mimi Basso

Alumni Feature: Where We Learn to Read and Write...

Have Paints Will Travel: Margot Mack’s Roving Art Class
Walk into any classroom at West Side Montessori School and you will find children engaged in a wide variety of learning activities, all of which are referred to by faculty and children as work. Some children are busy working on their pre-math skills: two three-year-olds are using the number rods to visualize quantities from one to ten, while Dara and Asher, who are four and a half, are using number cards and bead materials to understand that multiplication means combining several equal quantities to create one large quantity. Theo and Marissa are collaborating on drawing a continent using the Montessori puzzle map of North America that they have just constructed as their model. Another child is in the kitchen area, working on his fine motor skills—and his independence—while preparing a snack of cucumber slices. The four children in the dramatic play area, dressed in doctor costumes and absorbed in a game of “emergency room,” are working too. They are mastering language and social skills, learning how to consider perspectives other than their own, and discovering how to be creative problem solvers.

The approach of WSMS’s 50th anniversary next year offers the opportunity not only to reflect on our wonderful past, but to envision a brilliant future. How fitting, then, that this issue of Great Beginnings should explore some of the ways in which we continually seek to improve what we know and what we do for our students—in this case, in terms of developing their math, art, language, and thinking skills. Many thanks to Natalia Fisher and Yayoi Kobayashi for their contribution to “Math Sense,” and to Margot Mack, both for giving us a window into her own creative expression and for telling us how she helps children express themselves artistically. I am deeply appreciative of this year’s visiting scholars, the team from Visual Thinking Strategies (www.vtshome.org), for providing us a new way to work with children to help them develop language and critical thinking skills. And, finally, the reflections of the Doctoroff family in our Alumni News section underscore our ongoing commitment to social, economic, and cultural diversity while illustrating the warmth and vibrancy of our community.

As I often say to our teachers: “We must make absolutely sure that every day counts for every child.” The years between ages three and six are so very precious. There are tremendous developmental milestones—intellectual, physical, and social—to be achieved, and the time frame is very short. My heartfelt thanks to our teachers and staff and to our families, all of whom share this imperative and work together so diligently to heed it.

MIMI BASSO
HEAD OF SCHOOL

We must make absolutely sure that every day counts for every child. The years between ages three and six are so very precious.
The silence in the classroom was remarkable. Half the children of 3Wpm were up in the gym. The rest of the children sat quietly in the classroom, intensely focused on a reproduction of “Bathing at Asnières” by Georges Seurat. Their teacher, Melanie Hernandez, smiled, watching their eyes move over the picture, seeing them concentrate. After a long minute she asked, “What do you see in this picture?”
The children began to respond enthusiastically. Melanie acknowledged each response by paraphrasing the answer, “You saw a mother and her baby,” while pointing to the woman and child in the picture, and then probing a little more in a non-specific way: “What do you see that makes you say that?” Again the children pondered this silently, gazing intently at the picture and giving the student the opportunity to think independently about his answer.

As the discussion continued, Melanie made sure to acknowledge the input from every child, using open-ended questions and asking for the reasoning behind the responses. Some children sat quietly, observing the discussion but rarely contributing, while others excitedly waited their turns to comment.

Amy and Jasie conducted a workshop for WSMS faculty in the fall, and have visited several times since to observe in classrooms and provide feedback. The WSMS teachers adapted to the program easily: “As Dr. Montessori observed more than a century ago, children show us what they need. Our task as educators (teachers as well as parents) is to observe carefully, provide support in the form of appropriate environments in which to explore, experiment, and refine ever-developing skills and understandings.”*

This approach helps children hone their critical thinking skills. According to WSMS teacher Margot Mack, “Children are keen observers of their world. Just as the Montessori approach involves breaking a task into pieces, VTS requires them to do this and to provide evidence for what they see and think.”

* Keith Whitescarver and Jacqueline Cossentino, Montessori International, April-June 2011
When Mimi attended that initial workshop on VTS last year, the name Abigail Housen struck a chord. Imagine her surprise when Abigail Housen turned out to be the grandmother of WSMS alum Noa Karchmer and current student Isaac Karchmer!

The origins of VTS lie in a collaboration beginning in 1988 between Abigail, a psychologist in Boston whose seminal research explored how viewers, experienced and novice, think when looking at art objects, and Philip Yenawine, then Director of Education at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. Philip realized that museum-goers rarely retained much understanding of the art that they saw and reached out to Abigail to evaluate his programs. Together they developed a program that would focus on the developmental needs and interests of students, rather than the particular concepts of the artwork.

From birth children use their eyes to understand the world, and long before they begin to read and write they describe to us what they see. In the Montessori classroom, the sensorial materials help children develop their abilities to perceive and understand three-dimensional objects, to concentrate and to organize. As children mature, the sensorial skills provide the basis for analytical and creative thinking.

A work of art is the perfect basis for developing these skills, because there is no right answer. As Abigail says, “the more you look, the more you see; the more you see, the more you look.” Children can and do have different points of view, and the VTS approach allows them to reconsider their opinion when hearing someone else’s and to change their minds—or not.

Abigail described “children thinking at deeper and deeper levels. You can show the same image over time, and they will see different things. This is the richness of the program. ... They learn to have a conversation about their disagreements, and can discuss different points of view.”

The long-range importance of developing these skills in children cannot be overstated. As Philip asserts, “To build a society that is innovative, prosperous, and truly democratic we need to teach next generations not just facts and skills, but how to learn, how to communicate, and how to think creatively, critically, independently.”

Abigail is delighted to see her three-year-old grandson enjoying the fruits of her efforts. She described a recent visit to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston: gazing at a painting, Isaac was talking about the work in great detail and at great length. Before long the family noticed a cadre of adults standing behind them, enthralled by his lecture.
Among the goals of the strategic plan approved by the board in 2011 is the enhancement of educational opportunities for our children, and of professional development opportunities for our faculty. The visiting scholar program meets both those obligations by bringing to the school experts who expand the horizons of all constituencies.

In February 2011 Mimi Basso, head of school, and faculty members including Carol Roehr and Margot Mack attended a workshop given by VTS, and were immediately taken by its potential. The VTS materials were oriented toward older children, but Amy Gulden, regional director of VTS, immediately recognized that a Montessori classroom was the perfect place to explore its application to a younger audience.

As Margot Mack commented, “The visiting scholar program is a wonderful gift to our faculty. It helps us become better educators, and keeps things ‘fresh’ for our teachers.”

For more information and a video of VTS in action, see www.vtshome.org.
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION EVENTS
TO BE ANNOUNCED...STAY TUNED
The traditional Montessori math materials neatly displayed in the classrooms at WSMS are justly renowned for the way in which they provide three-dimensional, hands-on opportunities for children to master mathematical concepts. But just as crucial to our kids’ math education, if less obvious, are the myriad ways in which math is seamlessly incorporated into just about everything the children do during their day at school.

Natalia Fisher and Yayoi Kobayashi, two teachers in 3E, share a particular passion for math. They will be the first to tell you that at WSMS the goal is not for children to be able to rattle off mathematical equations; rather, it is for children to come to truly understand, and thereby love, math—to develop their “math sense.” And at WSMS, this sense can be developed at any time during the school day, in any part of—or even outside—the classroom.

“Math is everywhere,” Yayoi asserts. “Practical life, language, culture...all the sensorial materials are pre-math materials, so it really is everywhere you look.”

“When we’re setting up lunch, that’s math,” Natalia points out. “That’s the first concept our kids need to have down: one-to-one
correspondence. Setting the table with one placemat per person, one table setting per person. A lot of the practical life work is about one-to-one correspondence."

“Another thing we do a lot is voting,” Yayoi adds. “After we vote we show the children different ways to chart the information we’ve gathered: Venn diagrams, bar graphs, pie charts.” The teachers also describe their geometric “hunts” in the park, in which children seek out geometrical shapes occurring in nature, the results of which are subsequently charted in the classroom.

Not only are these activities enjoyable for the students, they are developmentally appropriate. Natalia explains:

“We really try to address the way the child’s brain is developing. Our kids are in that period of order, and that’s why the foundations of math speak so easily to them, because that’s the way they’re trying to organize their brain. When parents come to us and say, ‘They’re not doing math,’ we say, ‘Actually, they are.’ You see it in their patterning, their sequencing, their ability to tell a story in the correct order...And then when they start actually working with numbers they enjoy it, because there’s an order to it, and a safety in that order.”

Natalia remembers loving math as a child, going so far as to scribble “I ❤️ math” all over her notebook in fourth grade. By sixth grade, however, the emphasis had shifted toward rapid rote memorization of abstract concepts, and she began to comprehend less and less of what she was doing. Consequently she began not to enjoy math class. Now, as a teacher at WSMS, she insists it’s never too late to change one’s approach to learning—and teaching—math for the better.

Some kids can count straight up to 100, but do they really understand the concept of quantity? For this age group we really want to give hands-on experiences so kids can get a sense of what 100 looks like, what it feels like. —Natalia Fisher

“You’re always going to encounter rote memorization to some extent,” Natalia concedes. “Some kids can count straight up to 100, but do they really understand the concept of quantity? For this age group we really want to give hands-on experiences so kids can get a sense of what 100 looks like, what it feels like. And just because they might get it in the first presentation doesn’t mean we stop presenting it. We repeat, repeat, repeat, and that repetition builds brain
The notion of mastering mathematical concepts through repeated hands-on experience is firmly supported by the Montessori community at large. In his book *Math Works: Montessori Math and the Developing Brain*, Michael Duffy, an elementary teacher trainer for the Center for Montessori Teacher Education/New York, refers repeatedly to the importance of learning new ideas through the handling of concrete materials: “No matter how good the teacher and how clearly she explains new concepts, your child will not really understand until he puts his hands on the materials and manipulates them himself. (This is true even for adults...)”*


strength so they can really internalize and remember it. We might dress it up to look different, but it’s the same concept over and over again!” She laughs. “The kids think it’s something new, but it’s not!”

Children aren’t the only ones to benefit from WSMS's approach to math education. Yayoi’s experience at the school has given her a new understanding of the math she uses on a daily basis in her own life. “Even as an adult, having worked with these materials, I can now visualize what the math looks like rather than just reciting it by rote, without any real comprehension,” she marvels. “Now, when I’m cooking or baking, or measuring something, I have a clear picture of what I’m doing. I can understand the math.”

As far as advice for parents, Natalia and Yayoi beseech us not to rush our children. They ask that we try to recognize the value of what our kids are doing now and to acknowledge that they’re developing their math skills even if it doesn’t always look as though they are. Instead of worrying about when our kids will get to addition and subtraction, we would do better to focus on what needs to come first so that they really understand what they’re doing.

At WSMS, the dual approach of offering hands-on work with traditional Montessori math materials and incorporating math into everyday activities has a wonderful effect on our children. Math comes to feel like second nature to them; it is both fun and easy to grasp. In keeping with the school’s mission to help our kids become flexible thinkers and creative problem solvers, the math program at WSMS gives our kids the tools to approach math with confidence, enthusiasm, and a genuine desire to figure things out for the rest of their lives.

I ❤️ math indeed.
Play Is a Child’s Work
...A conversation with Mimi Basso

I’ve been working with parents of young children for over thirty years, and one topic that comes up repeatedly in our conversations is the role of play in the classroom. At West Side Montessori School we work hard to create opportunities for spontaneous play throughout the school day. Parents’ questions vary, but they all boil down to this fundamental (and entirely understandable) concern: “Wouldn’t my child be better prepared to succeed academically if her experience at WSMS were more focused on reading and writing and numeracy?” My short answer is a resounding “No!” My longer answer begins with a close look at our definition of “play” and at the enormous impact this activity has—not only on early childhood development, but on lifelong learning. I believe that play complements the traditional Montessori curriculum as a vital component of a child’s academic and social development.
What is play?
Researchers have described play in a number of different ways. One of the most useful definitions I’ve come across is from psychology professor Catherine Garvey, who describes play as an activity that:

- is pleasurable, enjoyable, positively valued by the player
- is self-motivated and has no extrinsic goals
- is freely chosen
- is actively engaging
- has certain systematic relations to what is not play*

As educators we are very aware of the need to facilitate and gently direct children’s play. We must be keen observers, good listeners, and skillful models in order to further our students’ motivation, experience, pleasure, engagement, and free choice as they play in the block area, in the dramatic play area, in the gym, on the roof, and outdoors.

Why do you value children’s play?
Albert Einstein once said, “Play is the best form of research.” I like to add that it’s research, initiated by the child, that helps him/her learn about how the world works—a lifelong condition for achievement if ever there was one. When you watch children play “house,” for example, you will notice that they use language, plan the rules of the game, define relationships, and look at things differently. They talk about what is for dinner; they describe what the parent(s) should be doing; they react to what they consider to be good or unacceptable behaviors. Perhaps most importantly, children learn to create and play by their own rules, and to respect the rules made by their peers. For example: “Dana will be the mommy first, and then Dana picks who will be the mommy next.” “All the children in the family need to listen, and try everything on their plate, and take turns talking.” Children feel in control and learn how to take turns; they begin to understand the world through the eyes of others.

How does play fit into the development of preschool-age kids?
Cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget (once a student of Maria Montessori) tells us that children between the ages of two and seven are in the “pre-operational” period of development. During this phase children begin to occupy themselves with mathematical concepts such as classifying, comparing, counting, measurement, and parts and wholes. They also begin to use descriptive terms such as big and small.** In addition, during the pre-operational period, children begin to use symbols to represent real things: a block represents a car, a stick represents a horse, etc. This symbolic function lays the foundation for later understanding abstract symbols such as numerals and letters. Socio-dramatic play occurs as children act out a make-believe situation or a story from a much-loved book. For example, in acting out the book “Go Away, Big Green Monster!,” one child might play the frightened child while another plays the monster or a comforting parent. In so doing the children help each other learn strategies to deal with fears by confronting frightening situations with...A conversation with Mimi Basso

Play Is a Child’s Work

The role-playing helps him/her to better understand human relationships, caring, and cause and effect.

*Garvey, Catherine, Play (Harvard University Press, 1977)

**Amazingly, Maria Montessori developed the numerous sensorial and math materials that we use in all of our classrooms to help children master these essential concepts in the early 1900’s, long before this stage of child development was scientifically defined by Piaget and others—another example of the prescience and genius of the Montessori approach.
How does play influence cognitive development?

Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are the go-to theorists when it comes to the relationship between play and cognitive development. Piaget asserts that play provides a child with an opportunity to practice skills they have already mastered. In contrast, Vygotsky argues that play facilitates the acquisition of new skills and/or knowledge. Through play children develop an understanding of who they are, learn to interact with others, and discover how to make friends. In a nutshell, Piaget says that play reflects thought, while Vygotsky says that it creates thought.

I think they are both right. When a child plays “firefighter” and runs to save a “crying baby,” that child is probably practicing what he/she has already experienced. The role-playing helps him/her to better understand human relationships, caring, and cause and effect. When a child puts four triangle blocks together in the block area and says to the teacher: “Look, I’ve made a square!,” that is the child acquiring new knowledge. In both cases, play helps the child build lasting concepts and skills.

How does play develop in children?

In the late 1920s, at the Institute of Child Development in Minnesota, theorist Mildred Parten conducted the now famous study of how play develops in children. Parten, like Vygotsky, emphasized the idea that learning to play is learning how to relate to others, and categorized children’s play in stages. The earliest stage is “solitary” play, in which the infant is totally engrossed in exploring an object or a toy by him/herself. The toddler moves on to “onlooker” play, in which he/she is carefully observing what others are doing. As the child matures, the phenomenon of “parallel” play emerges. In this stage, the child copies what he/she sees other children doing, typically with the same toy, but doesn’t actively engage with others. Next is “associative” play, in which children first begin relating more to other children than to the toys they are using. And, finally, “cooperative” play emerges, in which play has rules and goals, and children play-act a variety of roles.

What is the role of the teacher during a child’s play?

Teachers carefully prepare our classrooms with Montessori materials designed to meet children’s pre-operational developmental needs. They provide constructive and engaging opportunities for play throughout the school day, often joining in to “extend” the activity. This happens through the use of rich vocabulary: “If you put this rectangular block at an angle, and then rest it on the two square blocks at the entrance, you will create a ramp for your castle.” Or, when the children are playing “restaurant,” a teacher might suggest that the waiters write down the orders for the chef, and that the hostess explain the menu to the children who can’t read it. There are endless ways in which teachers can help children get more out of their play.

Most parents new to WSMS eventually adopt a few “Montessori-isms” into their everyday speech. The most common of these is to refer to their child’s interactions with traditional Montessori materials as “work” instead of “play.” As dictionary.com says, work is “productive or operative activity.” I encourage families to begin to think of everything that occurs during their child’s school day as work, for in the context of their lifelong education, work is truly what it is.
Children learn to create and play by their own rules, and to respect the rules made by their peers.
Ask any of the Doctoroff children what they remember of their days at WSMS, and sooner or later each will mention singing...and the song they remember best is a classic:

Where we learn to read and write: West Side
Where little kids learn not to bite: West Side
West Side Montessori School...

Jacob, the oldest of the Doctoroff siblings, is now a consultant with BCG and a Yale alum. He remembers singing that song with teacher Windy Wellington, and did, in fact, learn to read at WSMS. He loved the rope ladder in the gym, but hated having to sit patiently in front of the blue wall while the teachers reminded the class of the gym rules.

As his mom, Alisa, says, “WSMS was always great at identifying where our children are strong or weak.” Recognizing Jacob’s fascination with things mechanical, his teachers provided the opportunity for him to spend countless hours in the classroom wielding a screwdriver, taking apart and putting together a phone.

Jacob remembers the classroom with the elevated stage, and regrets that naptime is no longer an option in his busy day. But he is enjoying a coincidental link to his WSMS days: turns out his girlfriend, Isobel Rosenthal, was at WSMS when he was!

Ariel Doctoroff, now a junior at Yale, remembers the gym best: “a million kids running around and the climbing rope in the middle, so high that climbing to the top would be impossible.” She is still in touch with friends from a playgroup formed at WSMS, and Alisa sees their mothers as well. Ariel loved imaginary play at WSMS, and has turned into a talented and successful writer: publishing opinion pieces in a weekly newspaper; creating fiction, plays, and autobiographical pieces; working last summer for a news web site. Majoring in American Studies, she envisions a career in the media.

By the time Jenna, now a sophomore at Wesleyan, got to WSMS, the “Where we learn...” song had already become ingrained. Her mom, Alisa, had been singing the tune with Jacob and Ariel for years. Jenna remembers with fondness the shelves of “little projects”—some to be worked on individually and some in partnership with
others. She credits WSMS with “instilling the value of sharing in children. You learn to work with others, and you make friends that way.”

She remembers with amusement winning an electronic planner of some sort (very high tech 15 years ago) as a Spring Fair raffle prize, only to have her mother take it away and use it herself. While calling herself a “musical person,” Jenna is enjoying exploring a range of interests in college.

Alisa and Dan Doctoroff, parents of Jacob, Ariel, and Jenna, are longtime enthusiastic supporters of WSMS. When first looking at schools for three-year-old Jacob, Alisa liked that “WSMS reflected the neighborhood” and that “kids at WSMS were masters of their own time. I found it amazing that kids could be so capable at such an early age. WSMS empowers them.”

Everyone in the Doctoroff family identifies the diverse environment of WSMS as key. To Alisa and Dan, the fact that their children began their academic careers alongside children from a broad range of ethnic, religious, professional, and economic backgrounds provided an underlying perspective and awareness through their elementary and high school years at a much more homogenous school, which helped them make a comfortable transition to the diversity they met again in college.

Another thing that impressed Alisa and Dan early in their relationship with WSMS was that the school had a clear idea of what it is. As Alisa says, “This may be the first place where I became aware of the importance of an institution having a clear sense of its mission. We felt good about WSMS as an institution, and were happy to help the school find the resources it needed to do the job, to satisfy the mission.”

Alisa began her school volunteer activities at WSMS: she served as PA president and then as a board member. Her children moved on to the Abraham Joshua Heschel School and she did too, eventually serving as board chair and spearheading the school’s expansion through high school and its creation of state-of-the-art facilities in midtown. She now serves as board chair of the UJA-Federation of New York.

Dan, president of Bloomberg L.P. and former Deputy Mayor under Michael Bloomberg, was a cheerful volunteer at the WSMS Spring Fair and a regular presence in his children’s classrooms. He was especially fond of the “Little kids learn not to bite ...” section of the song. And the good news is that it turned out to be true!
Margot Mack is making a collage today. The longtime WSMS teacher and WSMS-TEP art instructor made a New Year’s resolution to create one new collage every day in 2012, and so far she has kept her promise. (Coincidentally, WSMS teacher Cristina Moreno is doing the same thing, just with photos.) No two of Margot’s collages are alike; all of them are beautiful. Not only is the project enjoyable, it serves as a daily reminder to her of the importance of keeping art in one’s life as an adult.

COLLAGES BY MARGOT MACK AND PHOTOS BY CRISTINA MORENO ON DISPLAY IN THE TEACHERS ROOM AT WEST SIDE MONTESSORI SCHOOL
HAVE PAINTS WILL TRAVEL

MARGOT MACK’S ROAMING ART CLASS
Margot brings the same joy and creativity to her “roaming” art program at WSMS. Now in its second year, the program was conceived by Head of School Mimi Basso as a way to build on the school’s already robust art curriculum. Margot visits each classroom twice a month for one hour, and spends that time helping students develop basic and advanced skills (holding a brush, mixing paints, working with clay) as well as their grasp of artistic concepts and vocabulary. Much has been written about the positive impact of art education on early childhood development; what is more immediately apparent at WSMS is how much the children enjoy Margot’s visits.

Over the past two years Margot has brought in a variety of art materials for her students. Finger paints offer a richly tactile way for children to explore pigment. Watercolor paints require more control and an internalization of the sequence of steps required to realize one’s vision. Tempera paints present an interesting challenge: unlike watercolors, they obscure what’s painted underneath. Margot has found clay to be a particularly magical medium in which to work: she has her students take off their shoes and socks and discover the properties of clay with their toes and the soles of their feet.

In keeping with Montessori practice, Margot offers presentations of how to use these media before she invites the children to begin. She hastens to clarify, however, that the program is not about teaching students how to do something versus how not to do it. Rather, she helps her students discover the properties of various media, and she models techniques that the kids can use to achieve the effects they are envisioning in their mind’s eye. Much of her discussion with them focuses on cause and effect.

“Students start to see that they’re working differently from one another, but what’s great is that there’s an adult there who helps to shape that, so that when someone mixes all the colors together and everything turns brown I can say, ‘That’s so interesting. How did that happen?’” Margot explains. “When the kids see my reaction, they learn that that’s an okay thing. I never say, ‘Oh! You forgot to wash your brush!’ but I might say, ‘I notice your water is still clear. Have you tried washing your brush yet?’”

To encourage her students’ spirit of exploration, Margot makes sure to engage multiple senses when presenting the materials. She uses clear, colorless containers for the paint water so that the children can observe what happens when they swirl a paint-covered brush in it, or when they dip in another color afterwards. She runs a paint brush over the backs of the children’s hands before they begin painting so they get a sense of the brush’s texture, how it will move across the paper. She invites students to squish finger paint between their fingers, or to try using it with their knuckles, or even their elbows.
Although Margot has spent most of her life making art, in the classroom she lets the children take the lead: “It’s not about thinking of ideas for the kids to do; it’s about getting them to work in the medium and get comfortable so they can express their own thoughts and feelings with those materials you’ve provided for them. The motivation comes from the children, not from the adults.”

The Montessori approach applies to all learning disciplines at WSMS, and Margot’s art program is no exception. Before any actual drawing is done, for example, she leads a discussion about line and accompanies the students on a “hunt” for different types of lines in the classroom and in nature. Before any attempt to draw a flower, Margot has the children take apart real flowers and examine all their different parts. Prior to painting, she gives each child his/her own individual set-up: a cup of water, a fresh palette. Once a child receives a set-up, it belongs to that child for the remainder of the period. Margot allows each child to work for as long as he/she wishes within the allotted hour.

The end of the hour always comes too soon for both teacher and students, and Margot often ends up staying a couple of minutes longer before having to gallop straight to her next class. Many of the rewards of the work are clearly instantaneous, but when asked about the bigger picture—the role that art plays in a child’s development—she replies without hesitation.

“Art is one of the most amazing gifts that you can give to children,” Margot declares. “It’s innate in all of us. They’re doing it naturally, with us or without us. There are so many things that can be expressed just in the process of doing it. The way children interact with it, it can be a release of emotions; it can be an expression of what they’re feeling; it can relax them. There are a lot of correlations between art and children’s developing language. Art is one of the best storytelling mediums out there: making something and then telling the story of the process of what you made.”

Although WSMS has long been praised for its commitment to art education, Margot regards this new program as an important step forward and is honored to be entrusted with its administration. She explains, “What’s wonderful about WSMS is that we’re constantly reviewing our practices with children: How can we better support children’s development in this area? How can we better support teachers’ development in supporting children in this area? This program has been a real growing experience for us as a school, and most definitely for me as an individual.”

She has an ever-growing string of beautiful collages to prove it.

**There are a lot of correlations between art and children’s developing language. Art is one of the best storytelling mediums out there: making something and then telling the story of the process of what you made.**
When asked what parents can do to support their children’s artistic efforts at home, Margot offers the following advice:

• Have plenty of materials readily available. You needn’t provide anything fancy. Bring recycled paper home from work, or buy a huge ream of newsprint paper.

• Let your child start over. Sometimes children need to crumple up what they’re working on and start again. By having materials abundantly available, you and your child will be less inclined to regard them as a precious, limited resource (“You’re using too much, you’re wasting it!”)—a perspective that often hampers a child’s creativity.

• Enjoy art with your child. It’s important for children to see that art is something enjoyable to adults and children alike. Sit alongside your child and make an art project of your own, or take him/her to an art museum.

• Be keen observers of our environment, and of nature. So much of art is inspired by nature, and so many art materials are derived from nature. Anytime you are out and about with your child, take the time to notice together the sights, sounds, and smells around you.
Very special thanks to the WSMS faculty, who provided many of the photos used in this magazine, and to the WSMS administrative team -- a multi-tasking, multi-talented, always collaborative group who has helped in ways too numerous to count.

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