

The Power of Choice

by Marilyn Long Webster

The most powerful thing in the universe, after God, is our ability to think and choose. When you think, you build a thought, and these thoughts become physical substances in your brain. You think all day long, and you think even when you are asleep. Daytime thinking is a building process. Nighttime thinking is a sorting process. Humans think approximately 30,000 thoughts per day.

Choice creates a signal in your mind when you are thinking. As you think, you contemplate a decision of some kind. As you think, you choose, and as you choose, you cause genetic expression to happen in your brain. This means you form proteins, and proteins form your thoughts.

Your child is a thinking being. Begin to give your young child choices between two acceptable things. As you direct them at home, whether it is a choice between toys, about what to wear to school, or eat for breakfast, begin to stimulate their thought process for making good choices, presenting logic and reason along the way. "Since it is cold outside, which sweater would you like to wear to school? Would you like a sandwich or soup for lunch today?" Choice empowers the child to step into their decision-making process.

When children walk into a Montessori classroom, they are met with choices: what work to take from the shelf; whether to sit at a table or on a rug; what to do next? As materials are presented each day to children, they begin processing information and ordering their minds. This preparation will help them as they



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begin to independently make good choices.

As they work in the classroom, making choices from a place of order and free will, it will encourage their thinking, which produces their state of mind. Good choices enhance brain function. Negative thoughts and choices will disturb their normal brain function.

Choices are real. All thinking, which leads to choosing, is real and can be seen on various types of brain imaging. As a child moves throughout the Montessori classroom, thinking and making choices within the environment, there is a deliberate, but quiet, building of an inner foundation for learning. This foundation must be built from the concrete, which will later sustain the more abstract, setting the stage for more complex and

creative thinking to take place. When the children are presented steps to good choices within the classroom, they begin building life experiences that will improve their intellect and increase their capacity for further learning.

As children are given the freedom to choose and begin to focus their undisturbed attention for longer periods of time, this affects the chemicals, proteins and wiring of their brains as it changes and functions.

Thinking and choosing causes children to redesign the landscape of their brains. Certain areas in their brain light up when they think and choose. Their thoughts produce words and behaviors, which, in turn, stimulates more thinking and more choices that build more thoughts.

Thinking and choice go hand in hand. Maria Montessori understood this important aspect, infusing her extraordinary Method, not only with components of respect, order, control, concentration and independence, but of choice, preparing the child for a fulfilling life of learning. ■

References

Leaf, Caroline PhD (2007). *Who switched off my brain?* The Switch On Your Brain Organization: Johannesburg, South Africa.

Note: Dr. Leaf has many other books and videos that are available online for those who wish to know more.

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