

MONTESSORI MATTERS

MONTESSORI ACADEMY OF LONDON

EXPECT MORE FROM EDUCATION

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Transition Matters

A message from Margaret Whitley

A couple of years ago we published an edition of *Montessori Matters* with the theme of "Change Matters," which focused on the change in the life of a school that faced new government regulations and had little time for the transition. But change is the norm today, and we recognize that change is best managed when transition is purposeful.

Montessori education embraces the notion of the constantly changing child. By always anticipating what's to come, our approach is instrumental in preparing the child for change by supporting transitions through a focus on independence. Education is a lifelong journey of acquiring new skills and experiences and preparing to move on to new realities. It is a journey of transitions.

In the classroom the teachers and guides are like the general contractors of a project, and the students do the work of building up knowledge. The teachers are always careful to present the students with new concepts that build on previous ones; to use concrete material and experiences that give context and meaning; and to allow the

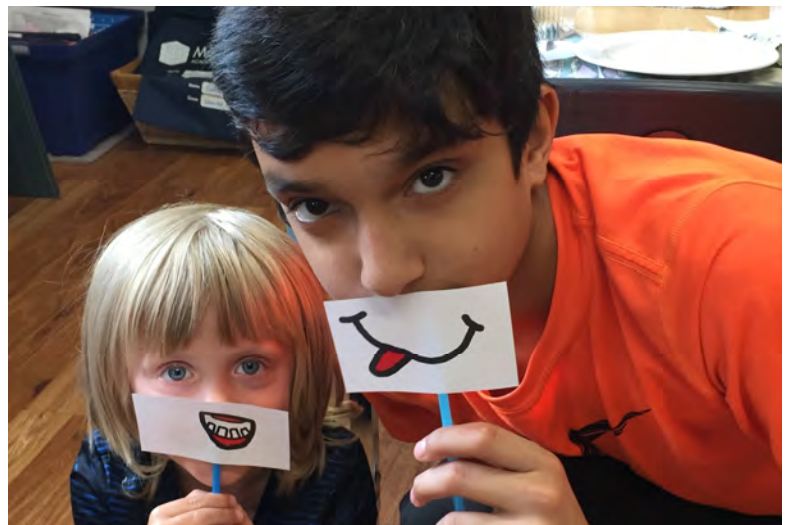
child to move through the learning at a reasonable pace. These are the ideal ways to work through transition and, if at all possible, it is the same thinking that guides us through other transitions like "phasing-in,"

which is when the students prepare to move up to the next level.

Phasing in allows the students to work with familiar materials in their new classrooms, and build on what they already know and have experienced.

The thoughtful process of phasing the students into their next level not only allows their new teachers to observe them now, but dramatically diminishes back-to-school anxiousness that can happen in September.

Everything we do in Montessori considers the need for thoughtful transition. This also includes how we



As our Year 8 students prepare to graduate, they visit their former classrooms to reflect on how far they've come in their time at MA.

work as a school. Whether that's physical spaces or staffing, we try to involve those affected by the transitions to allow time for the changes to take shape and time to adjust to the changes.

This is a seminal year of the history of MA. For the first time the leadership of the school will be independent of the Harding/Whitley family. Much planning has gone into preparing the school for this evolution for many years. This transition has also been thoughtful and carefully planned. It is one

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Transition Matters continued...

of the primary responsibilities of our Board of Governors, and they have looked at every aspect of successfully transitioning the School through the change and will continue to do so. Tina Sartori, the new Executive Director, has been working hard



Tina Sartori with our students celebrating the opening of the Elementary courtyard in September and with Margaret Whitley.

previous to this year and throughout the year to prepare her for a successful transition.

Like a 5-year-old moving up to Elementary or a Year 8 moving on to high school, she is so ready! She has already had one foot into the role, taking on a lot of responsibility this school year. I am sure her leadership will be different than mine. And this is what excites me for the School and all members of our community. This is an opportunity for the strong foundation that exists to stay vibrant with new ideas and enthusiasm.

Transitions also entail a few bumps in the road, it is part of the process. But through

planning and being open to new possibilities, transitions can also rejuvenate us as humans. Think of the many times this may have occurred in our lives. Simply changing schools, starting a new job or having a child has both the bumps and the

rewards that ensue, including grit and resilience. So, not only does change matter, the transition that leads to change matters greatly!

Like any parent, I will watch lovingly and with patience as the School transitions to its



own new stage of development. But I have the confidence that the foundations have been laid, and I will proudly observe the many more exciting years to come for the Montessori Academy of London community. •

By Tina Sartori

I remember almost 8 years ago when Margaret asked me where I saw myself in the future of our organization. After taking a short pause, she confidently said, "I see you running the school one day." Fast forward and here we are making this moment a reality together.

I feel as though there have been many transitions through my career at MA that have led me to the role of Executive Director. Spending 12 years as a Casa teacher, five years on the Admin team in both Admissions and Fundraising, two years as an Ex-officio Board Member — and, of course, seven years as a parent in the school, have all provided me a great foundation and expansive scope of the inner workings of our school.

That being said, it is this past school year — a year of transitional work with Margaret and the support of our Board of Governors — that has made the most impact on me. I am truly grateful for having this dedicated time to see the many sides of the Executive Director role throughout the cycle of one school year.

It has been a year rooted in experiential learning from many resources and materials, just like Montessori, to prepare me for launching MA into the next 50 years and I can't wait! •

Butterflies matter

By Montessori Academy of London Faculty

Transition is purposeful in Montessori. From Toddler through Junior High, we support the children through their journeys in many different ways that make the approach unique! Mixed age classrooms allow the older students to serve as peer teachers and mentors to the younger students, which can smooth the transition from one level to the next.

Yet despite best efforts, there are bound to be obstacles on the road. As much as we adults want to help the child navigate those bumps for a smoother journey, those bumps serve a purpose! As the saying goes: "There are no challenges — just opportunities."

Even the self-correcting Montessori material in the classroom is a concrete example of that same idea because they allow the students to make mistakes — and in turn stop, identify the error, think through the problem, and then try again until they get the right answer.



Toddler students inspecting a butterfly.

The nervousness and anxiousness the child feels when trying something new — those butterflies in the stomach — are expected and valuable. They're signs that the child is preparing for — and anticipating — a challenge.

As parents, we're tempted to leap in to save the child from any hardships. After all, no one wants to see their child suffer. But by bailing them out every time they experience fear, we're denying the child that opportunity to rise to the occasion and get through the emotions that accompany stress and uncertainty — two facts of life!

When we let go of the back of the bicycle for the first time, we feel a flutter in the stomach as we watch our child wobble and (very often) tumble onto the ground. There may be tears. There might be a bruised knee — or bruised ego — and that's OK. Our role is not to hold onto the back of the bike forever, but to let

go, revel in the progress we see, and if the child falls, encourage him to get up and try again!

Consider the story in which a man watches a butterfly begin the immense — yet important — struggle to free itself from its cocoon. The man's intentions are pure but his act of helping the chrysalis emerge from its confines early actually hinders the butterfly's development:

"What the man, in his kindness and haste, did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were Life's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon." (Source: www.greatest-inspirational-quotes.com/butterfly-story.html)

Instead of rescuing a child from a struggle, we need to talk to him before the stressful event, observe and support from a distance, and then celebrate with them when they have their "aha" moments. Because, oh what a feeling of accomplishment they have when they dust themselves off and forge on!

Independence and resiliency are developed through transitions and the challenges that come with them if the child is allowed to "do it themselves." We offer plenty of opportunities in Montessori, starting in Toddler, that allow children to "go it alone" in a safe, supportive environment.

- For toddlers, it's putting on and taking off shoes and jackets themselves.
- In Casa, the children help clean up their messes and carry their own blue bags to and from class.
- In Lower Elementary, children gain independence as they walk themselves from the car to the courtyard each morning.
- For Upper Elementary students, peer peacekeepers help to resolve conflict in the playground and in the classroom, because as they get older, the bumps children encounter take the shape of conflicts that need resolution and compromise.
- The transition from Year 6 to Junior High anticipates some fumbling at the beginning of Year 7 until the students adjust to the new expectations of a challenging program.

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Celebration Matters!

The 2017-2018 school year is going to be an exciting one for our school. Not only are we starting the next chapter of our Montessori story under Tina Sartori's leadership, but we are celebrating a milestone for the school — our 50th anniversary!

Planning is underway for our big Anniversary Celebration Weekend on Friday, June 1, and Saturday June 2, 2018. Please save the date and let your classmates and families know about it.

If you wish to get involved with our planning, please visit our 50th Anniversary Microsite — sites.google.com/montessori.on.ca/mhcma50 — where you'll find two links to sign-up sheets on the home page:

1. Volunteer to help with 50th Celebration activities. If you sign up for one of the committees, the committee leader will be in contact with you.
2. Update my contact information — including email address.

Please keep checking the site for more updates and content as we draw closer to the Anniversary Weekend next June. •



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These activities at all ages and stages support the confidence that lead to greater independence and resilience.

What does it mean for parents? Let the child struggle! Those butterflies in the stomach before trying something new are a good sign that the child is gearing up for a challenge.

It may mean failure at first, but if they're given the chance to try and try again, they will succeed!

Whether it's the butterflies a child feels before doing something new or the struggle for the chrysalis to emerge from its protective cocoon, butterflies matter because they teach us to trust in the process — and celebrate the success of finally taking flight! •

Photos from 'Finn's Montessori Journey'

Thank you to all the families, friends and alumni who came out to see "Finn's Montessori Journey" at The Palace Theatre in April.

It was a truly special performance based on an original script written by our Upper Elementary teacher Meghan O'Brien. It truly captured the spirit, energy and humour of our school community.

The students, teachers involved with the musical gave it their all, and it showed!

Bravo, everyone!

