

MONTESSORI MATTERS

MONTESSORI ACADEMY OF LONDON

EXPECT MORE FROM EDUCATION

Issue 15 – MARCH 2017



Family Matters

A message from Margaret Whitley

The family is the first educator and often the lifetime educators for a child. Family values, traditions, and activities shape a child. So families matter. Families also have an inherent structure that prepares children for life: there are multiple people, so living as a community is important; there are many different ages (in some cases), so opportunities to compromise, communicate and take responsibility present themselves every day.

It is for this reason that Maria Montessori observed the many benefits to providing an educational model that has "family groupings" or mixed ages. This model also enriches what children will experience at home! Perhaps they don't have siblings, or they are the eldest and would benefit from experiencing life as the youngest, or perhaps they're the youngest and would benefit from practice assuming a leadership role.

The family model found within the classroom offers so many learning opportunities inside and outside of school. Take the example of watching an older student or sibling learn something or experience consequences of an action. The child observing all of this is taking it in and determining in their mind what this information means to them. This is also true of the child's observation of the adults in the family model, including parents, teachers, grandparents, and friends of the family. Children are natural observers until about age 6. At this age, they are like

sponges, absorbing information. Everything they experience is shaping the person they will become.

At MA we value tremendously the role our families have in the lives of their children. It is why we try to find the opportunities for families to visit and observe the children in the classrooms, to participate in social events, to honour grandparents and special friends, and to even share opportunities for parent education and volunteering that further connect our families to the tremendous gift they are giving their child through a Montessori education.

Montessori Academy is also guided by Maria Montessori's work *The Child in the Family* in which she asks adults to question some of the long-held assumptions made about children. This work by Montessori provides greater understanding of how children develop from all perspectives and what can be done to support and respect that development from the time they are born. The ultimate goal that Montessori implores



Three-year age groupings allow older children to take on leadership roles with their younger classmates in the classroom.

adults to pursue with children is to nurture their independence and separateness from the adult. They are their own person and "in the end possess himself (herself) and direct himself (herself)" (p. 158).

Montessori Academy not only celebrates our children and their potential but the relationships through family and school to support all children to embody their potential. We recognize all around us that Family Matters. •



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Montessori Days with the Day family

Over the years we have had families of all shapes and sizes go through the school. However, the record is still held by the Day Family, who remain neighbours of the school – living a few blocks away on Piccadilly. The Day family started out sending their first child, Melissa, to the school in 1972, and over the years all NINE of their children attended; four attended all the way from Casa to the end of Junior High. Parents Lynne and Alan would say in different ways they were all influenced positively by their Montessori experience, with Rachel, their second daughter ultimately becoming a Montessori-trained Elementary educator who continues to teach to this day in an excellent Montessori school in Canada. Their last child to attend MA was Giles who graduated in 2002. In total, the Days were part of the school community for 30 years!



The Day family cleaning up while camping: "I think this was spontaneous on their part," says Lynne. "I don't remember that we had to get them to do it!"

The family first found out about our school when Lynne was working part-time and needed care for Melissa, their eldest child.

Lynne recalls hearing about a new care provider that was in the neighbourhood using the space in Maitland Street Baptist Church. "Someone at church who heard about our childcare needs told us that a little Montessori school had scheduled an Open House for the following Saturday. We were one of the first to arrive and were the last to leave. Our daughter had so thoroughly enjoyed her time there, we signed her up to start on the Monday!

"For us, any school that encouraged little ones to put the first thing away before the second item was brought out had our support!"

In the spring that their second daughter, Rachel, turned 2 years old, the younger one suddenly announced she would go to school with Melissa the next year.

Limits lead to freedom

The relationship with families is strong in Montessori (see **Home Matters** on page 3). Lynne remembers that some families didn't always see eye-to-eye with the school and Montessori approach. In the second year that Melissa attended, some of the parents questioned the "limits" referred to when we talk about "freedom

within limits." Particularly, they were concerned about the practice of putting out a mat, taking the work off the shelf and, after the work was accomplished, having to put the work back on the shelf, roll up the mat and put it back in the correct place. "In their eyes this was limiting their child's freedom!" Lynne explains.

The rules laid out were: (1) work on a mat must not be disturbed even if there is no-one actively working on it, and (2) that when the child is finished, the work and mat are to be put in their right places.

Some of the parents thought this approach was too strict, Lynne recalls. However, what the parents didn't realize was that through these two rules, a child has the biggest freedom of all: "They can take themselves off to the bathroom, knowing that when they return their work will be as they left it," Lynne explains. It also demonstrates respect for others' work and property, and exercises patience ... and what child can't benefit from that?

Some of the parents also questioned calling teachers by their first names, thinking that it's 'disrespectful' and it would lead to discipline problems or undermine the teachers' authority. Yet, the wisdom of the Montessori philosophy prevailed. Lynne says, "By the time we had our two youngest children in the Elementary program, Sharon Keenan was the principal; everyone called her Sharon, but no one

"We not only knew they could work hard without giving up, but our children knew HOW to work. If they had problems, they found ways to solve them. They were not scared to fling themselves into the spirit of high school!" - Lynne Day

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Home Matters

The idea that preparing a child for success in life begins at a young age and is based in a solid foundation of reality is appealing to families who want the best start in life for their children. Indeed, the principles set out in the classroom have the greatest impact on children when they're integrated into the home life.

The Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) article "Montessori in the Home" states that there are three key roles within Montessori education: the Child, the Parent and the Teacher

These roles are unique and interconnected. "Like the sides of an equilateral triangle, each role is a distinct and separate part, and yet, each connects directly with every other. Teachers provide the social, public, outside-family, general education; parents provide the individual, private, intimate, specific education. Children are most fully supported when the adults in their lives communicate with each other and trust each other, therefore it is critical that both are responsive to the child.

"Parent involvement is essential throughout every child's education. According to *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*, a report from the National Committee for Citizens in Education by Henderson and Berla, 'the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student's family is able to:

- Create a home environment that encourages exploration and learning
- Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers
- Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community (p. 160)."

This partnership with parents is why Montessori Academy's faculty make such an effort to connect regularly with parents. The interaction between families and teachers is a unique element of Montessori when compared to the public school system.

Events such as classroom observations and Grandparents' & Special Friends' Day, as well as guest speakers who are experts on child development and Montessori, are offered to our families throughout the school year to support you so that you can, in turn, support your children at home.

How adults can support Montessori in the home...

However, it can still be challenging for families to instill Montessori practices in the home. Whether it's the often-hurried pace of home life or the challenge of never wanting to see your child fail,

we can all benefit from stepping back and viewing home life through a Montessori lens.

Here are some ways family members – whether that's parents, guardians, grandparents or others – can support Montessori in the home, from the American Montessori Society (AMS):

Have an ordered environment: Having a place for everything, on a child-friendly scale, encourages both independence and self-discipline. Children know where to find what they need, and where to put it when they're done. An ordered environment also has fewer distractions, allowing children to focus on the task at hand.

Teach Real-Life Skills: Montessori students are taught to take care of themselves and their classroom, and to be helpful to others. Having your children help at home can bring similar rewards. Take the time to teach each skill separately and to repeat the lesson as needed. Each task your children master adds to their confidence and self-esteem.

Promote Concentration: You can help develop your children's concentration by observing what sparks their interest. Set them up with the means and materials to explore it, and let them work without interruption.

Nurture Inner Motivation: Montessori teachers refrain from using traditional classroom rewards such as gold stars and merit-based privileges. Instead, focus on nurturing each child's personal sense of accomplishment. Even praise is given sparingly—saved to acknowledge a child's effort, rather than the outcome of his or her work. By expressing encouragement and appreciation for your children's efforts, you—like the teachers—help nurture an inner motivation that will serve them for life.

Another aspect of supporting children that can be challenging for adults is to be more "hands-off" — to let the children fail and then self-correct. It's second-nature to want to help children succeed by helping them complete a task – such as zipping up a winter coat or bailing them out when they forget to bring their homework, skates or running shoes to school. The Montessori approach asks adults to let the children resolve the issues themselves, so that they understand that actions have consequences.

This alone shows us how Montessori education is as much for parents as it is for children — valuable lessons we can all learn. •

Montessori Days ... continued from page 2

doubted her authority. The worst thing anyone could hear was: 'Sharon wants to see you in her office.' She commanded respect even though everyone called her by her first name!"

Preparing children for change - and life after Montessori

Lynne also notes that Montessori provided such independence in the children that the changes in staffing that would normally lead to chaos and meltdowns in typical daycares made little difference. It was "business as usual" for the children because the Montessori classroom truly is the child's environment; the teacher is in the background, observing and guiding when needed.

Lynne says that it is difficult to say exactly how the school influenced her family. "Except that the years in Montessori Elementary contrasted so radically from the non-Montessori schools because they were happy years," she says. "They were years when we felt that we and the teachers had the same goals in mind ... and if our goals were not the same, the teachers' goals were better!"

She adds, "The four children who graduated from Junior High were all much better prepared for life after Montessori than those who hadn't — they had sweet successes and happy memories of their Elementary years. We not only knew they could work hard without giving up, but our children knew HOW to work. If they had problems, they found ways to solve them. They were not scared to fling themselves into the spirit of high school!"



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Row: Cheryl Hambly (Directress), Natasha Roberts, Ashley VonAnrep, Brian Travers-Gillespie, Julia Heathcote, Teddy Elisevich, Cameron Hawlik, Caverly Allatt, Andrew Tillie, Aurora Bangarth, Tyler Reavell, Coulter Somerville, Caoilfhionn Casey (Directress)
 2nd Row: Carla Miller, Rowena Day, Ashley Constable, Matthew Greenaway, Becky Trovato, Katie Blokker, Peter Rodsman

Lynne adds that they had the capacity to work diligently and determinedly thanks to their Montessori education. •

What's coming up at MA...

Our Annual Appeal in April

Support traditional Montessori education in London by participating in this year's Annual Appeal.

Our focus this year will be on Elementary facility upgrades.

Watch for more details about this year's Appeal and a special Tribute Gift.

Save the Date!

**Finn's Montessori Journey - An Original Musical
 April 19-20, 2017 at The Palace Theatre**

Watch for more details on our website:
www.montessori.on.ca



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