

MONTENESSORI MATTERS

MONTENESSORI ACADEMY OF LONDON

EXPECT MORE FROM EDUCATION

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Lifelong learning matters

A message from Margaret Whitley

Curiosity should be nurtured to inspire lifelong learners

We are born curious! It is the drive of curiosity that encourages the tremendous amount of natural learning in the young child. What happens when I drop something? What happens when I push something? What happens when I do something wrong?

By the time children are around 6 years of age, the curiosity turns outward for greater understanding of the world around them. The question becomes "Why?": Why is the sky blue? Why do snakes shed their skin? Etc. Sadly, in Western society many children stop asking "Why?" as they get older. It is not encouraged – and sometimes even stifled. There is often little opportunity to follow their own questions, particularly when school is geared toward the group and not the individual. But as the questioning and the curiosity diminish, so can the intrinsic learning. Curiosity is what often drives us humans to learn something new.

Curiosity is also at the heart of innovations and invention. Wanting to know how something happens or how to solve a problem comes from curiosity. As a society, we are at a bit of a crossroads; we need innovation,

creativity and invention more than ever to solve the problems of today and the future, while many of our own children and adults have lost their curious spirit.

Fortunately, Montessori is one of the approaches that often preserves that curiosity, allowing the child to follow their own path of inquisitiveness rather than one pre-determined by the adults. It is not to say that there aren't things we want children to be competent in even

"It is a great day if I learn something new and a better day if I learn many new things!"

in Montessori education, but more important than competency is curiosity. It's the curiosity that will keep them learning and desiring to create more. It is this commitment to igniting curiosity that inspires a love of learning in our students – even beyond school.



It's not only Montessori students who are encouraged to be curious and find new solutions to problems. So, too, are Montessori educators. Teachers nurture their own curiosity by observing their students and being lifelong learners themselves.

So it comes full circle: curiosity is incredibly important and needs to be nurtured as much in adults as the children they teach. To be the nurturers, they need to embrace and feed their own curiosity. This may take shape in a workshop on learning styles or discovering a new grammar lesson or even a course in cake decorating.

All of these things enrich the educators while also helping them to be more effective in inspiring curiosity in our students. •



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A passion for teaching and learning

An MA alumna and lifelong learner uses Montessori approach for her high-school students.

When asked how Montessori inspires students to become lifelong learners, high-school teacher and alumna Jillian (Cochrane) Grainger doesn't hesitate to reply. "Montessori offers students something special by encouraging them to strive for balance while exploring their passions. It offers an individualized approach in a nurturing environment that allows personal growth," she says.

"As an adult, I continue to be curious and want to try new things. I believe it's important to master a skill and then try something new to challenge your mind." This spark of curiosity and desire to keep learning are qualities that are encouraged from a very early age through Montessori.

Jillian started at the Westmount location of then-Montessori House of Children at the age of four and graduated from Junior High in 1994. "My mom found an ad for MHC in the paper, and she wanted to me have a well-rounded education and small student-teacher ratios," she explains about why her family chose Montessori.

After completing our Junior High program, Jillian went to Central Secondary School and finished her BA in Honors History at Western University and her Bachelor of Education at Althouse. Over the years she's remained connected to Montessori Academy working as a yard staff member in our Extended Hours program and as a counsellor at our summer camp. More recently, she served for one year on our Board of Governors.

Today, she teaches at Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School in London where for the last six years she's focused on Developmental Education. Prior to this, she spent four years supply teaching in elementary schools and working with at-risk students in specialized programs with the Thames Valley

District School Board.

And her connection to our school continues today. As a teacher and lifelong learner herself, Jillian has, in recent years, come back to MA to observe and borrow ideas for her own students. "Visiting Montessori was self-initiated Professional Development that I designed and had approved by my administrator."



Her goal was to view all the material available to students in the Casa classroom. "Students I teach respond to manipulative material versus traditional pen and paper. Learning that incorporates all our senses is the most beneficial. It's fascinating because Maria Montessori started her teaching with Special Needs students!"

The Montessori approach long-ago inspired her passion for learning by offering something unique, she says. "I was a quiet and shy student who tended to observe from the sidelines. The small numbers at Montessori combined with mixed-grade groupings helped with my confidence and leadership skills. I was in a comfortable and happy environment that allowed positive risk-taking and stepping out of my comfort level to try new things."

She adds, "I was never driven by grades." Instead, Montessori encourages internal motivation and choosing topics that each child is personally interested in.

"My love of learning started with Maria Montessori's educational philosophy and I hope I have returned this love back to the students I teach," she says. "Being happy and engaged at school makes us emotionally intelligent and this is a great predictor of success." •

PD helps students develop

Everything teachers do for Professional Development enhances the learning experience for students.

Professional Development is not a day off for our teachers. Far from it. PD takes all shapes. Sometimes it's a conference in Toronto, sometimes it's a webinar viewed from home. In some cases, it's a chance to read up on new approaches or clean up the prepared environment. In other instances, classroom visits and observations at other Montessori schools provide teachers insights into how other schools approach learning, collaboration and presenting lessons to students.

Lisa Eastick, one of our Upper Elementary teachers, says that PD is immensely important in delivering high-quality education to our students. "I have always felt I am a better teacher when I'm also a student," she explains, adding, "I always look for PD opportunities that meet my specific interests and needs. I have a passion for language and reading; as a teacher, I'm always looking for ways to share this passion and enable students to be better writers and readers – especially those who struggle in this area."

This commitment to the students' needs underlies all PD the teachers take. "For me, the most satisfying PD

gives me practical, accessible information and ideas that I can readily implement with my students," Lisa concludes.

Mandy Denomme, one of our Junior High teachers, agrees and adds that students benefit directly and indirectly from PD because our teachers "feel more empowered with



Upcoming PD will allow our Junior High teachers to learn more about the new Google ChromeBooks the students now use.

the current scope of knowledge – whether it be about teaching practices, how to assist with learning differences or how to support students with challenges in their home lives, socially or with their academics."

Professional Development opportunities encompass all those elements of teaching. The idea of

The value of Professional Development

By Margaret Whitley

One of the many qualities of Montessori is to provide a foundation for your child to be a lifelong learner – and our own alumni validate this: over 80% of our alumni survey respondents said they had a passion for learning as a result of their Montessori experience. They continually seize opportunities to learn new things! But one of the critical components to help your children get there is our staff's collective and individual commitment to Professional Development and growth.

Because teachers are with your child for eight hours a day, the access to PD is challenging. Attending meetings, workshops, reading articles, visiting other schools, etc., needs to happen outside the school day or they may need someone to step into their role so that they can take time off.

Like any other profession, ongoing training and experiences are critical to the strength of our Montessori educators – it is why we set aside several days in the year to come together and have schoolwide PD through facilitators and guest speakers. Other times, our staff attend workshops, webinars, conferences, visiting other schools in evenings and throughout the school year. Not to mention the mandatory training the government requires; this, is considered part

The value of Professional Development Continued from page 3

of our PD and orientation that must be completed.

The prioritizing of lifelong learning serves to balance the integrity of the Montessori approach with new understanding and innovations in how we learn, what best prepares our children for the real world, and also how we can best support you and them.

Can you put a number on the value of PD?

However, this commitment comes with a price... Professional development is one more aspect of our financial resources that is challenging. Kathy Minardi, from Aiden Montessori in Washington, DC, has school of about 250 children and a PD budget of about \$60,000/year, which is supplemented by government funds as well.

Our total operational budget for PD for 60 staff is presently about \$30,000. It is our goal in the next few years to increase this amount to \$60,000 and your contribution to this goal will have the benefit of serving many children.

Did you know...

The average cost of PD per person:

- Visiting another school in Ontario: \$50
- Visiting another school outside of Ontario: \$250
- Webinars: \$50-\$70/teacher
- All day workshops in Toronto: \$250-\$500/day
- All weekend conference in Ontario: \$1,500
- Out of Province Conference: \$2,000-\$3,000
- Teacher Training: \$10,000

None of this includes subscriptions, memberships and fees of various organizations.

There is not a profession today that isn't changing and constantly requiring a reassessment, and our ability as professionals to successfully adapt for you and your children is a lifelong journey.

Gifts made to Faculty Development support Professional Development for our teachers—and directly benefit your children. Visit www.montessori.on.ca/development to learn more. •

PD helps students develop Continued from page 3

"staying current and having more tools to use in the classroom" benefits both teachers and students, Mandy adds.

A great example of the need to "stay current" is happening in our Junior High program, with the new Google ChromeBooks. They are an amazing new tool the students are using daily for work and collaboration, but, like any new technology or tool, there is a learning curve on how to best use them as an

educational tool.

Because of that, our Junior High teachers plan to attend a "Google Classroom for Educators" workshop in November. This PD will help them to help the students use the technology more effectively and, ultimately, enhance the learning experience.

In addition to a greater understanding of the technology, Mandy explains PD

provides a chance for the teachers to collaborate and figure out how to "balance our Montessori philosophy with the idea of staying ahead of the technology that we are now using. We're determined to be tech savvy, efficient and knowledgeable while trying to meet our students' needs."

It's the students' needs that underlie everything our teachers do, including Professional Development. •



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