

# MONTESSORI MATTERS

MONTESSORI ACADEMY OF LONDON

EXPECT MORE FROM EDUCATION

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## Life after Montessori

### A message from Tina Sartori

*"The education of even a small child, does not aim at preparing him for school, but for life."*

- Maria Montessori

This is truly the essence of a high fidelity Montessori education. When prospective parents come for tours at our school, one of the most common questions is; "How do they do in high school, once they leave Montessori?" The truth is, choosing Montessori for your child's preschool and elementary education, goes far beyond a solid academic foundation in preparing them for high school. It really is about preparing them for life.

Think about a Montessori classroom; it truly reflects a community in which they live and will always be a part of. No matter what stage of life you are at, chances are you will be surrounded by people, of different ages, learning how to either work or live in a shared community space or neighbourhood. Building the foundations of respect; functioning in a social community; being kind and caring for others; having a sense of belonging — these are not only the hallmarks of our classroom communities, but perhaps should be the kind of atmosphere we all aspire to experience throughout our entire lives.

If a child starts in a Montessori program during the preschool years, the collaborative, compassionate community of their environment becomes the norm, and in traditional Montessori, this "norm" stays consistent throughout their educational journey. When they leave our school, they continue to function within these expectations, creating ripples of positive impact and interactions wherever they go.

Tim Seldin recently wrote in "Tomorrow's Child" magazine about the importance of children "being in a social-emotional environment where they have been respected and empowered as individuals." This not only sounds like a fantastic place to learn, but also has a big impact on who they become and the kind of life they create once they leave us. It is common to see the outcomes of being in a Montessori school present themselves in a student even years after they have left.

Lessons like learning how to function in and contribute to a community remain relevant year after year, regardless of what changes around us. When we ask Alumni what strengths they have due to their Montessori experience, they always highlight the soft skills they acquired: strong communication, self-advocacy, time management, confidence, independence and social awareness...skills for a successful life.

Now, more than ever, children need to feel connected to people, understand how to make those connections and foster them. This is vital to their well-being as they move through life ... and thank goodness they have the opportunity to cultivate it here in a Montessori setting.

(See our **Portrait of a Grad** on page 4 for more on this.)

It's true what Dr. Maria Montessori said: "In the child lies the fate of the future." I think life after Montessori offers great opportunity. I would eagerly employ a person with these kinds of skills, befriend them, or be excited to learn they live in my neighbourhood. Wouldn't you? ●



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## Confidence matters

Again and again, the Admin staff and Faculty hear the question: How do Montessori graduates fare outside of the school? The answer rarely changes – they do quite well, thank you very much. Yet, while smooth sailing through life cannot be guaranteed, many alumni will tell you that what Montessori does so well is to prepare them to navigate choppy waters.

For a number of years, the school held annual Life After Montessori panel discussions at the school for current parents and students, during which we invited alumni (and their parents) to talk about their experiences after they graduated from our school.



Brendan Riggan was one of those alumni panel members about six years ago. He attended Montessori Academy of London when it was still called Montessori House of Children, joining the school in Year 3. After graduation, he went to Central Secondary School, continuing his studies at Western University and earning his BA and MA degrees in Kinesiology; he is currently a postdoctoral associate at Western in the Kinesiology – Sports Management program, and is the Assistant Coach of the Western Mustangs Men's Hockey team. His research looks at how sport organizations can play a positive role in their community by "giving back" — a subject inspired by his time in Montessori and the values it stressed.

Regarding the life that happens right after Montessori, Brendan says, "I think every student is anxious leaving Grade 8 and the familiarity of their former school, but I felt like Montessori teaches students the importance of confidence, which is often years ahead of their peers. The impact that this had when transitioning to Grade 9 was that, although everything will not go smoothly at school (as it never does for a Grade 9), I was confident enough to speak with my teachers when I did not succeed. This wasn't to complain about a grade, but to ensure I knew exactly where I went wrong and what I would have to do differently to be

successful on the next assignment, presentation, exam, etc."

Self-advocating is a skill that many employers and post-secondary teachers will tell you is hard to come by in adults, let alone adolescents. It's a skill fostered in our Upper Elementary and Junior High program, and is something Brendan recalls watching his peers in high school struggle with when interacting with their teachers.

"I was surprised that some students were "afraid" to speak to their teacher. My experience had always been that my teachers are supportive and willing to help their students to succeed. Because of this, there seemed to be very little accountability among other students and most attributed a poor grade to the teacher 'just not liking' them. Within 'real life,' I've always sought and appreciated feedback from those I interact with and use that to try and improve myself. (For more thoughts on our teachers, see the sidebar **Teachers matter** on page 3.)

### **Montessori prepares students for life**

Ultimately, Montessori prepares students for life – whether that's adjusting to Grade 9 and the faster pace of high school; preparing for an important presentation 10 years into one's career; or overcoming the challenges of family life with compassion and resilience.

Brendan's experience was unusual in that he had been in the public system until Grade 2. After Grade 8 graduation he returned to the public system, which gives him an interesting perspective: "I believe that, at the public school, the emphasis is on teaching curriculum content and preparing the class as a collective for the next grade. Although Montessori also covered the curriculum content, the 'life skills' (e.g., organization, autonomy, confidence) that are taught are so much more valuable because they are necessary to succeed as a student and because of their practicality outside of the classroom," he explains. "The organizational skills that were instilled at Montessori have allowed me to pursue a career in coaching hockey as the former Head Coach of the Strathroy Rockets and current Assistant Coach of the Men's Hockey program at Western University, while also completing my PhD in Sport Management would not have been possible without appropriate time management and organizational skills." ●

# Opportunity matters

Alumna Maya Kelly is always game for an opportunity. She attended MHC from Years 1-8, and was a participant in the school's Life After Montessori panels. Her life after Montessori has included many successes already, including graduating from Central Secondary School and earning the Western University Richard & Jean Ivey President's Entrance Scholarship. She is now in her third year of an Honours Specialization in Media and the Public Interest at Western and is a member of the school's Women's Volleyball Team.

As a member of past Life After Montessori panels, she recalls parents being very interested in how Montessori's students fare academically and socially after leaving our Junior High program. Her own experience transitioning to high school was quite easy because Montessori provided such a solid foundation of academics that help students succeed in school. "Even at Central Secondary School, which typically ranks as one of the province's top three schools for academic excellence, Montessori graduates were clearly advantaged when it came to academic preparedness; (we) were ahead in many subjects and very well prepared when it came to writing essays and managing workloads."

## Opportunity to succeed

Maya also adds that she saw advantages for Montessori students in high school athletics too because of opportunities to develop at Montessori. The school's "everyone plays" policy in Phys Ed likely contributed to that, she says. "I saw many classmates who had played competitive sports at Montessori and

vastly improved their skills make high school teams; that, in my opinion, was a direct result of having had the



opportunity to play competitively for years in Elementary."

She recalls how the demanding expectations and variety of activities in Junior High prepared her for life in post-secondary. She saw her Montessori classmates eagerly take on leadership roles and enjoy being engaged students in high school. She also says she benefited from the challenging workload of Junior High: "The volume of writing, research assignments, leadership opportunities, and the empowering environments and curriculum definitely prepared me for high school life and beyond."

She continues, "The study planners we utilized set me on an organizational path that continues to influence the way in which I plan school and life. I believe I wrote more papers in my final year of Junior High than all of high school. This prepared me to manage the two-day cycle that Central S.S. had, whereby students take eight courses at once all

*Continued on page 4*

# Teachers matter

It should go without saying that teachers matter in education. However, in the case of authentic Montessori the teacher-student relationship is so very different from the conventional system – all the way through the program. The role of the Montessori teacher is often described as "guide on the side" versus the "sage on the stage." These teachers are committed to supporting our students throughout their Montessori journey.

While most adults would probably name one or two teachers in their school careers that had a huge, positive influence on them. With our graduates, they rarely name names but rather group their teachers together as part of the overall positive aspect of their Montessori experience.

Alumnus Brendan Riggan, who joined the school in Year 3, says he believes Montessori fostered respect and compassion in him – thanks to the teachers in Upper Elementary in Junior High. "Montessori taught me to be an empathetic person and to treat others with respect. While this may sound like an obvious lesson, there are very few individuals that truly put

*Continued on page 4*

## Opportunity matters (continued)

year around. I still love essay courses and writing and take a heavy writing course load in university.”

Among her fondest memories of school are the opportunities to travel on educational trips, especially the Montessori Model United Nations (MMUN) trip to New York City in Upper Elementary.

Life after Montessori provides all of our graduates a plethora of opportunities to thrive — and because of their solid Montessori education, our grads are ready for all of it! ●



### Our Values

Community • Compassion  
Creativity • Critical Thinking  
Global Citizenship

## Portrait of a Graduate

Montessori Academy of London's Vision is “a community of confident, compassionate, and engaged citizens who think globally, act responsibly and collaborate successfully to create a humane world.”

Graduates of Montessori Academy of London will continue to develop this vision throughout their lifetimes.



### SELF-AWARE & MOTIVATED

- They are **curious** about the world and have discovered the **joy of learning** through this curiosity.
- They use **analytical** thinking to question and examine pertinent ideas.
- They **adapt well** and are **eager** for a challenge.
- They **push their personal boundaries** and **grow** with each step.

### ENGAGED & COMMUNITY-MINDED

- They are **compassionate** and gracious about **community service**.
- They **give back** to their school and community.
- They understand the role they have in **helping the world**.
- They appreciate the importance of **community** and stay **connected** to their peers, teachers and school.

### INNOVATIVE & COLLABORATIVE

- They **defy mediocrity**.
- They are **lifelong learners**.
- They are **innovative** and know the value of perseverance.
- They value **creativity, ingenuity** and **diligence**.
- They discover through project-based **collaborative** learning.

**Our graduates are ready to shape the future!**

## Teachers matter (continued)

this into practice quite like my Montessori teachers. I've found my former teachers to be a source of inspiration and, as I get older, I aspire to have this positive influence on my students, players, and colleagues.”

He continues, adding, “When I think back to my time at Montessori I remember the thoughtful and caring teachers that would go out of their way to help their students in any possible way. I can remember having days that I struggled, but what I remember most vividly from those times are the teachers, who seemed to be caring people first and my teacher second. While I may not remember individual lesson plans, I remember my teachers having an understanding about day-to-day struggles or challenges, and encouraging me to trust in myself that (the challenges) can be overcome.”

Like Brendan, Alumna Maya Kelly also recalls the support of her teachers as being incredibly important in her development as a student and a person. “I think the relationships that I had with my teachers – including not being graded until Junior High – laid the foundation for students at Montessori to see and utilize our teachers as true teachers and mentors. This made my friends and me from Montessori comfortable approaching teachers for help, and coaching, and building relationships with teachers in high school.”

Our incredible teachers have a lasting impact on the lives of our students long after the students leave our school. ●

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