The Lamplighter
SPEMS Monthly Parent Newsletter

January 2015

The Montessori Way

Elementary: The Next Step

As a Montessori school grows and adds on new programs it typically represents a triangular hierarchy, where the lower aged classrooms out number the higher aged ones. The drift away from Montessori begins at the kindergarten age and increases each year and can easily be explained by the increasing school options available to families including the free public school option.

However, at St. Paul’s during the last two semesters we have witnessed an influx of children into the elementary program whose families have become frustrated with other public and private school options and have found a program that works for their children at SPEMS.

Parents reported that their children transitioned easily to the other schools and loved their new friends and teachers and indeed were progressing well at their new school. However, what concerned them were that some children stopped enjoying reading; they read shorter, easier books, and did so only when it was required homework. Rather than asking for math problems and memorizing math on their own, they dreaded math homework and thought it was too confusing for parents to explain. One parent mentioned that her child noticed the materialistic clothing competition between students as well as the beginning of bullying...
Arriving by bus at the McNay Museum, I’m always immediately soothed by the beauty of the surrounding gardens.

The students and staff ate lunch in an open courtyard near a splashing fountain.

We were divided into docent-led groups to tour the museum. My group viewed some of the most famous portraits, landscapes and still-life paintings by the French Impressionists. We also visited the museum’s inner courtyard on our way to the medieval wooden sculptures, which included one of St. Paul holding a sword.

Finally we boarded our bus for the short journey back to the school, feeling contented and inspired to do more art.

- Jane Laven (Elementary Teacher-Guide)

One of my favorite things to see was the dog pictures. [I also liked] to watch the mobile move and to see the beautiful fountain. [Plus, it was fun] to look at the pond with the fish in it, especially the big fish.

It was also interesting] to see how old the artwork was, and to see the portrait of St. George with the dragon.

- Deandra Rodriguez

I enjoyed the paintings of Pablo Picasso and the medieval sculptures. There was even fish in a pool. The museum was named after a lady named “McNay.” So, the museum was her house. We ate lunch near the fountain with water. We saw sculptures of St. Paul and St. Peter. There even was a dragon. Then we saw some paintings of food and animals.

- Cris Hernandez
Preventing to “move up”

Four of our toddler students have been preparing for the move up to the Primary Program and will join these classes in January. All the students made short visits to their new classrooms in December. They were introduced to their new teacher-guides and classmates; Plus, they had opportunities try out some already familiar lesson materials found in their new classrooms.

For some children—and their parents—it is a big step to move to the new class: There are more, and bigger classmates; plus, they are leaving a guide who has carefully nurtured them for as long as eighteen months. However, we know they are well prepared for this latest transition. The Toddler Program provides a sensitive transition from home to preschool. Through hands-on activities, this program focuses on emerging each child’s language skills, separation and trust, self-help, and motor skills. Children begin their social and educational growth here in a safe, child-centered space created to resemble home.

They are moving to the next stage of independence and a widening experience of materials and interaction.

We will miss them—and they will miss us—but they are ready to fly!

News from the Toddler Room…

Start gathering up your spare change!

Again this year, instead of traditional valentine celebrations, SPEMS students will be collecting pennies to help build a freshwater well for the Taureg people of West Africa’s Azwak Valley.

The Tauregs are a nomadic people who live on the edge the Sahara Desert. In the rainy season, they drink the freshwater that gathers in the valley’s many marshes.

But in dry seasons, they often must travel 30 miles to find fresh, drinkable well water.

This year, SPEMS children will show their Valentine’s love by collecting pennies to help build a new freshwater well for Taureg children. Look for Wells of Love donation containers in your child’s classroom!

Amman Imman is a charitable organization whose Wells of Love program helps raise funds to build more water wells.

Join us Jan. 31 in the parish hall for the Annual Church and School Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser from 5 to 7:30 p.m. Proceeds will go towards the purchase of picnic tables, canopies, storage sheds, playground and gardening materials for our campus. Tickets can be purchased before and after church services, or at the SPEMS front desk.

Attend a SPEMS Parent Community event

The SPEMS Parent Community meets for coffee at 8:30 a.m. in the St. Paul Parish Hall on the first Friday of each month (Jan. 9). Families also gather for tours of the San Antonio Botanical Gardens at 3:30 p.m. on the second Friday of each month (Jan. 9). Other family outings include dinners at local restaurants. For more information, contact Christina Tinker (210-542-6518) or Dana Spotswood (210-716-7934).

Did you know Head of School Jennifer Davey is part of the “blogosphere”? To learn more about Montessori education and find links to the latest education research, follow her blog at http://jenniferdavey.blogspot.com
Elementary: The Next Step (continued from page 1)

behavior, even in first grade.
This frustration led them, like many parents, to research about children in Montessori schools.
The growing research on Montessori schools suggests that students in Montessori environments fare better than their non-Montessori counterparts in academics, social awareness, and success outside of school. Montessori-educated children generally actively seek knowledge and know where and how to look for information. They tend to approach learning by questioning, analyzing, comprehending, and discussing topics, rather than just memorizing or completing assignments.

In his 2003 paper, “A Comparison of Montessori and Traditional Middle Schools: Motivation, Quality of Experience, and Social Context”, Kevin Rathunde reported that “Montessori middle school students reported more positive motivation and experience than a matched sample of students from traditional middle schools.” In her 1987 study, researcher Marcella Dawson found that Hispanic and black Montessori students enrolled in a public magnet school have significant academic advantages over the test and district norms compared in the study. Students at Bunche Elementary School, a public pre-K to 5th grade Montessori magnet school in Indiana, are repeatedly among the top performers on the Indiana ISTEP+ test (Mary Robinson, 2006).

In 2007, Linda Jacobson reported that the third grade students at the public Robert Goddard Montessori School in Prince George’s County, MD, exceeded county and statewide averages on the Maryland School Assessment tests in math and reading. Additionally, while other children throughout Prince George’s county declined in proficiency as they reached middle grades, the children at Goddard continued to excel. A full 85.7% of Goddard's eighth graders reached proficiency levels in math, compared with 35% of children across the county.

While all this literature strongly supports the Montessori system of education, the validity of this research is often questioned. Among reasons cited are that parents are the dominant factor in childhood learning outcomes (Angeline Lillard, 2006). Thus, parents who choose to enroll their children in a Montessori school may be different than parents who do not, and that is the influencing factor of a child's

Parents Meeting on Jan. 21:
Kindergarten year is ‘time to blossom’
The kindergarten year in Montessori allows the child to complete the cycle of preschool learning. Children unfold as young leaders, confident readers and budding mathematicians.

We invite all parents to discover more about this important year by attending an informal presentation about our Primary Program on Tuesday, January 21 at 6:30 p.m.

Note: Childcare will be provided by reservation only.

Parents’ Meeting Jan. 28:
Joining the Elementary Classroom at SPEMS
As a child completes his primary cycle of learning, parents are faced with the difficult decision of deciding the next step in his education: Joining the Elementary Classroom. If your child has blossomed in the Montessori Preprimary environment, then our Elementary Program is the ideal next step.

Elementary guides will host a parent information meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 28, at 6:30 p.m. All parents are welcome to attend.

Note: Childcare will be provided by reservation only.
success. Furthermore, there are simply too many variables that are not controlled in these studies, such as socio-economic factors, teacher training, and quality of the programs being compared. Small sample sizes produce results that are not statistically significant (*Tim Seldin, 2006*).

New research by Angeline Lillard, published in 2006, is not subject to these criticisms. Published in the journal *Science*, her statistics are regarded as significant, because her study included controls for these other variables. She and her research partner compared outcomes of children at a public inner city Montessori school in Milwaukee with children who attended other types of schools within the Milwaukee school system.

This study is significant in that it controlled for parental bias by utilizing the public school system’s lottery system, comparing children who “won” the lottery into Montessori classrooms with children who “lost” and were placed into other Milwaukee system programs, including magnet, charter, and gifted programs. Because this lottery is random, the children in the experimental group (enrolled in the Montessori program) should be similar to the children in the control group (enrolled in other programs). The families of both groups had similar education levels and average incomes.

Another reason Lillard chose the Milwaukee school district was its association with the *Association Montessori Internationale (AMI)*. Because the name Montessori is in the public domain, there are no regulations or restrictions to its use. She reasoned that the school system’s association with AMI ensured they would have a more faithful interpretation of Montessori’s philosophy.

Each group was tested for cognitive/academic and social/behavioral skills selected for their importance in life outside of school. The results showed significant advantages for the Montessori group over the control group. “By the end of kindergarten, the Montessori children performed better on standardized tests of reading and math, engaged in more positive interaction on the playground, and showed more advanced social cognition and executive control. They also showed more concern for fairness and justice.” (*Lillard, 2006*).

While the vast majority of research suggests that children learn through “play,” all activities in a Montessori classroom are referred to as “work.”

To understand this, it is necessary to look at the concepts of “work” vs. “play.” Work is engrossing, natural and effortful. It is not an escape from “real life”, as fantasy play is, but a path towards fulfillment (*Jacqueline Cossentino, 2006*).

Because Montessori puts the focus on the child, let’s look at what children say about work and play; two responses by elementary-aged Montessori children recorded by Cossentino are: “Play is when we get hot and tired outside; work is when you don’t get tired;” and “When you play, you get rid of energy; When you work, you keep your energy.” The Montessori classroom fosters repetition and concentration over simple task completion.

There is no doubt in my mind that most children do just fine in most schools—public or private. But, is “just fine” what we want for our children? Montessori parents clearly want more for their children—and get it!