Gala Madness: Let’s have a circus

Our co-chairs Madelyn Mauritz-Bossé and Denise Welling and their volunteer aides are knee-deep in bringing this delightfully-themed party to fruition on March 7.

Fabulous auction items continue to be acquired – some of them will amaze you.

How about trying your hand at winning the use of an elegant apartment in Buenos Aires for two weeks?

Update handouts and order forms are distributed regularly so be sure to do your homework and get your paperwork in pronto.

Visit schoolofthewoods.org/gala for more info.
Respect for the child is an essential principle of Montessori education. Too often other methods of education miss this point and as a result they hinder the child's ability to learn academically as well as to learn good social skills and instill a sense of self-worth.

There are various misconceptions about Montessori classrooms - total freedom, too much structure, just for preschool, or even just for some particular type of child. Montessori classrooms look and feel different from traditional classrooms, but the practices that resulted from Dr. Montessori's scientific observations are validated by current research in education and neuroscience.

For the last 40 years, Montessorian Joyce Pickering, a speech language pathologist, and learning disability specialist, has used her training to try to figure out "why the Montessori method is the one unique approach that can help all children" ("Montessori Life," pg 4). In the same way that Montessori initially took her work with children who had difficulties in learning to gain insights about the normal process of learning, Ms. Pickering has used her experience to find answers to her question.

She notes that experience with children who have challenges helps us identify the small "subskills" that lead to learning, which are not always observable in children who learn easily.

Ms. Pickering also points out that after years of experiments, Dr. Montessori "found that individual activity is the one factor that stimulates and produces development, and that this is not more true for the little ones of preschool age than it is for the junior, middle, and upper school children." Dr. Montessori states that education is not something the teacher does by expecting children to listen to words, but it is a "natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being," and it occurs when, "the child acts on his environment" (The Absorbent Mind, pg 8). The goal of Montessorians worldwide is to respect this "natural process."

Traditional schooling is based on the idea that teachers teach by talking, and children must learn by sitting still and doing what they are told. It often misses critical sensitive periods for learning and emphasizes competition over cooperation. Rewards and punishments are used to control behavior. Behavior problems are too often accepted as normal, rather than being addressed as opportunities to help children learn healthier ways of interacting with their peers. Tests are overused with the thought that they can tell us everything we need to know about whether or not a child is learning. Early childhood education is still not taken as seriously as it should be.

Respect for children means studying the natural process of learning and adapting the school environment to encourage and enhance the child's development. This is not limited to academic learning, but includes the child's need to grow in her independence, to have good relationships with peers and adults, and to gain an understanding of the wider world around her. Respect includes taking into consideration the individuality of the child and the differences in the groups to which she belongs.
As a result of the incredible explosion in knowledge relating to the intellectual and emotional development of human beings over the last 20 to 30 years, we now have a better idea of what we should be doing with children in school. It turns out the principles Montessori learned from her observations over 100 years ago were incredibly prophetic. We have confirmation that it is experience that teaches the human brain, not teachers.

In Montessori education, the teacher's role is to assist the child in making contact with the materials and to encourage the child by:

- intervening only when it is necessary
- placing materials appropriate to the child's needs in the classroom
- asking questions to encourage the child's creative abilities
- allowing the child to make choices to plan and set goals in the classroom
- maintaining routine and safety

The materials in the Montessori classroom provide opportunity for experience. They are logically sequenced and chosen to answer to the developmental needs of the age of the child. When children are most interested in learning order or are in the process of fine tuning the senses, materials that interest the child and answer these needs are in the classroom. When children are ready to begin learning to write and read, those materials are in the classroom; teacher observations determine the timing of introduction. Early math experiences with one-to-one correspondence and counting are there when the child is ready for those experiences.

Many of the materials are aesthetically pleasing, to attract the child's attention, and contain direct purposes as well as indirect, such as a practical life exercise in which the movement required in the exercise is in the same direction the child will make when she is ready to learn reading and writing.

When children reach the stage of wanting answers to the big questions about life, the classroom response is to make available a well thought-out sequence of materials and lessons in the sciences, geography, and history areas of the classroom. Group presentations are designed to last the length of time that is appropriate to the developmental stage of the students. The materials in the early childhood classroom jump-start children into reading and math; elementary materials change to match the skill and complexity levels appropriate to the growth needs of the children as they learn.

The materials are designed to give the child his first experiences in the concrete form and move through the work in steps until reaching the abstract level. Often materials are revisited at a later time with a new set of concepts to learn. The materials isolate each new difficulty the child is being asked to tackle. In every case, children learn to make choices about when they will work on the material and are given the time to manipulate and make discoveries in the contents of the curriculum. Work plans encourage the students to set goals and balance their work choices.

Mixed age groups in each classroom give children the opportunity to benefit from peer teaching and mentoring. Younger children also have the long view of their own future because they can observe the work of the older children in the classroom. Older children have the opportunity to be helpful to others and at the same time are able to gain practice in skills they recently learned themselves. Children have the option of working collaboratively in a group of two or more or they may choose to work alone, depending on their needs at the time. The Montessori classroom opens the opportunity for teachers to tailor the curriculum and the
amount of structure in the classroom to the needs of each child.

When Montessori educational settings stay true to Montessori’s principles, they are fundamentally different from traditional education. The analysis of student’s academic and social scores resulting from the work of Angeline Lillard and Nicole Else-Quest, showed that Montessori education:

"fosters social and academic skills that are equal or superior to those fostered by a pool of other types of schools...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. At the end of elementary school, Montessori children wrote more creative essays with more complex sentence structures, selected more positive responses to social dilemmas, and reported feeling more of a sense of community at their school."

Other more long reaching studies have found that Montessori education has benefits that last beyond the years in the Montessori classroom, both academically and socially. Although our world has seen many changes in the last 100 years, Montessori education has proven itself by remaining true to the precept of respecting the child’s natural process of learning.

The studies cited in this article and more can be found at:

SOME RECENT BOOKS FOR LOWER GRADE STUDENTS

The Day the Crayons Quit by Drew Daywalt. Poor Duncan just wants to color. But when he opens his box of crayons, he finds only letters, all saying the same thing: His crayons have had enough! They quit! Beige Crayon is tired of playing second fiddle to Brown Crayon. Black wants to be used for more than just outlining. Blue needs a break from coloring all that water. What can Duncan possibly do to appease all of the crayons? 40 pages, June 2013, 3-7 years.

Journey by Aaron Becker. In a tale told solely through pictures, a lonely little girl in a dull, sepia-toned city picks up a red marker and draws a door on her bedroom wall. Through it, she enters an imaginary world where, with the marker’s help, she floats and flies through a dramatic escapade and returns home with a friend. No words, just pictures. Hardback, 40 pgs, August 2013, ages 4-8.

Dragons Love Tacos by Adam Rubin and Daniel Salmieri. The only things dragons love more than parties or tacos, is taco parties. if you want to lure a bunch of dragons to your party, you should definitely serve buckets and buckets of tacos. Unfortunately, where there are tacos, there is also salsa. And if a dragon accidentally eats spicy salsa everybody is in red-hot trouble.40 pages, June 2012, ages 3-5.

Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes by Eric Litwin. Pete the Cat goes walking down the street wearing his brand new white shoes. Along the way, his shoes change from white to red to blue to brown to WET as we steps in piles of strawberries, blueberries and other big messes! But no matter what color his shoes are, Pete keeps movin’ and groovin’ and singing his song. Hardcover, ages 3 7. March 2010; 40 pages.
What a great day! Dec. 20 - the last day of school before Winter Break.

There were perpetual activities at all grades and of course, Santa Claus stopped by for a chat. The Elementary, Upper Elementary and African drum students joined forces for a group concert in the Music Room.

A big group of alumni visited the High School and shared college advice.

This was some celebration!!
Learning to Love to Learn

Trying to keep our children frustration free by controlling the consequences of movement prevents our children from getting necessary and accurate feedback for optimal learning. When we can prepare a child’s indoor and outdoor spaces with a variety of activities that match skill and will, we also create a place where a child is eager to try new pursuits, as well as repeat familiar activities in order to absorb the skill.

For example, we don't hand a 3-year-old a copy of Tom Sawyer and expect him to read it. Yes, we want the child at some point, perhaps by age 10, to have the skills to read at that level.

Spoken language is a key to being a successful reader. We keep language in the air by reading aloud every day. We involve our children in conversation, as well as limiting or eliminating television and video game time.

With the goal of literacy, we teach our four-year-old the sounds of the alphabet, and later introduce the shapes of the letters with their corresponding sounds, one by one.

Next, we show how to spell a word by sounding it out and writing the word with loose letters organized in a box (the moveable alphabet).

Slowly, the eye and the mind are trained to start at the left hand side and move to the right in order to decode the symbols.

These lessons are available in trays and baskets in the classroom so that children can do them anytime, practicing independently without adult interaction.

As the children become more familiar with the words by sounding out each sound and blending them into reading, they begin to memorize combinations of letters that make different words. Eventually, when they don’t need to decode each sound in the words to read, reading becomes more fluid, faster and effortless.

As each stage of learning to read is met with a favorable outcome the child experiences a success cycle, where learning creates a desire for more learning.

All these steps describe an indirect preparation for learning to read a book like Tom Sawyer. If we want to help a child love to learn, we prepare him indirectly for the next step of accomplishment in such a way as to assure success. We then allow the child to take the step independently.

By creating a place where children can choose activities that create the next step in a continuum of learning through indirect preparation, we help them love to learn. By making the tasks neither too easy nor too hard-by creating a Goldilock’s spot of "just the right" task, we provide the nourishment for a life-time of loving to learn.

Begin with the end in mind. Start giving lessons where the child is at the edge of his skill level by giving an adequate challenge, and prepare for the next step as the young child repeats various activities to gain competency.

Using indirect preparation is a key teaching skill to help children love to learn. It makes learning, as Goldilocks would say, "Just right!"

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Adapted from
Maren E. Schmidt, M.Ed.

www.kidstalk.com
**IN THE WORDS OF MARIA MONTESSORI**

*From The Secret of Childhood*

"Movement, or physical activity, is thus an essential factor in intellectual growth, which depends upon the impressions received from outside. Through movement we come in contact with external reality, and it is through these contacts that we eventually acquire even abstract ideas.

"The children were truly converted. They passed from a state of grief to happiness. They were freed from numerous, deep-seated defects. But there was also something more. Certain traits which are commonly esteemed also disappeared. In dazzling fashion these children showed that men have erred and must be completely renewed.

"Within the child lies the fate of the future. Whoever wishes to confer some benefit on society must preserve him from deviations and observe his natural ways of acting. A child is mysterious and powerful and contains within himself the secret of human nature."

*From The Montessori Method*

"Instead of all this, we must know how to call the man which lies dormant within the soul of the child. I felt this, intuitively, and believed that not the didactic material, but my voice which called to them, awakened the children, and encouraged them to use the didactic material, and through it, to educate themselves."

"To stimulate life, - leaving it then free to develop, to unfold, - herein lies the first task to the educator. In such a delicate task, a great art must suggest the moment, and limit the intervention, in order that we shall arouse no perturbation, cause no deviation, but rather that we shall help the soul which is coming into the fulness of life, and which shall live from its own forces. This art must accompany the scientific method."

*From Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*

"The child must possess within himself, from birth, a capacity - only a potential at first - of abstracting or taking off from particular things their essential qualities. If you watch carefully any small child, of one to two years old, you will see that he is not only interested in objects as a whole, but also in their qualities, such as roughness, smoothness, hardness, softness, colour, taste, texture, weight, pliability, and so on."

*From The Absorbent Mind*

"This is education, understood as a help to life; an education from birth, which feeds a peaceful revolution and unites all in a common aim, attracting them to a single centre. Mothers, fathers, politicians: all must combine in their respect and help for this delicate work of formation, which the little child carries on in the depth of a profound mystery, under the tutelage of an inner guide.

"When mental development is under discussion, there are many who say, 'How does movement come into it? We are talking about the mind.' And when we think of intellectual activity, we always imagine people sitting still, motionless. But mental development must be connected with movement and be dependent on it. It is vital that educational theory and practice should be informed by that idea."

*From The Advanced Montessori Method*

"I would therefore initiate teachers into the observation of the most simple forms of living things, which all those aids which science gives; I would make them microscopists; I would give them a knowledge of the cultivation of plants and train them to observe their physiology; I would direct their observation to insects, and would make them study the general laws of biology. And I would not have them concerned with theory alone, but would encourage them to work independently in laboratories and in the bosom of free Nature."