



WATERDOWN MONTESSORI SCHOOL  
1921 SNAKE ROAD, BURLINGTON, L7P 4Y2  
[www.waterdownmontessori.com](http://www.waterdownmontessori.com)

## NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2010

### From the Principal's Desk

The golden-rod is yellow;  
The corn is turning brown;  
The trees in apple orchards  
With fruit are bending down.

The gentian's bluest fringes  
Are curling in the sun;  
In dusty pods the milkweed  
Its hidden silk has spun.

These first two verses of a poem our class memorized in grade four, have been running through my head recently. Fall is such a wonderful season, and we are so incredibly lucky to live in an area where we are surrounded by the beauty of nature.

At our school, the children play in an area surrounded by trees and forest, with the Bruce Trail on our doorstep. Ask any child who went to summer camp at WMS and they will tell you about trying to discover where the groundhog they saw most days made its burrow. "Our" wild turkeys are a familiar sight, as are the deer who venture out at dusk. Children collect leaves and acorns, and make leaf piles to jump in.

Hardly any wonder that the students have so quickly made themselves at home in this environment. There are very few tears these days. One of the toddlers delights in announcing with enthusiasm each morning, "I'm going to my SCHOOL today!" as she shakes my hand before entering the school.

Every class has coalesced into a working unit. Even the toddlers, *all* of whom were new to school only a few short weeks ago, are forming their own group identity. Mrs. Kristy has done an amazing job with the youngest children in the school.

To help her, we welcome the newest members of our staff: "Mrs. Deb" and "Mrs. Julie." Mrs. Deb is the toddler assistant on Mondays and Fridays, and Mrs. Julie is the assistant on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

There are many families new to the school this year; already many of you have signed up to help out; some for hot lunches, others for the book fair or the upcoming Harvest Luncheon. We hope to see many new faces at our first **Coffee Club** morning of the year, scheduled for next Tuesday, October 12.

As with any school, many traditions have developed over the years at WMS. One of these is the annual Children's Harvest Luncheon, a potluck meal shared by all the children on the Friday before Thanksgiving.

Another more recent addition is the "Kilometre Club". Started the year of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Montessori Education, children who choose to do so run laps of the playground to earn "toe tokens". This year several children asked to run laps on the *very first day* of school! Ten laps of the playground is one kilometre. When a child has run 50 laps, or five kilometres, they are presented with a "toe token" at the next Tuesday morning assembly, and a chain to hang it on. Graphs of the students' progress are updated weekly and hang in the hallway outside Mrs. Barbara's classroom.

This newsletter is packed with announcements, information and articles of interest. Look for an exciting new fundraiser, news of our first field trip, a Hallowe'en pancake breakfast, last spring's survey summary, and much more. Enjoy!

*Sue Reid-Kulpaka*  
Principal

## Harvest Luncheon

Friday, October 8 is the date for this year's Children's Harvest Luncheon. *All children* are invited to stay for a special potluck lunch on that day. A sign-up sheet is posted on the community bulletin board, (the bulletin board just inside the back door of the school) asking for volunteers to help set up and serve on that day, and for contributions of food. Many thanks to all who contribute food and help out on the day.

### Please note:

1. Food can be dropped off when you bring your child in the morning. If you plan to bring it later, please ensure it is here by 10:45 at the latest – we start serving early!
2. As is the case with hot lunches, there is no Extended Care charge for half day children who are picked up by 12:15 on that day.

## Fall Field Trip!

The casa and elementary classes are going on a trip on October 27, to Battlefield House Museum in Stoney Creek:

### **APPLES AND PUMPKINS AND CORN, OH MY!**

The fall harvest ensured that early settlers were prepared for the long winter season ahead. Students will learn to identify the various ways settler met their food needs and the responsibilities of the Gage family members in making these preparations. Age-appropriate hands-on activities will provide students with an understanding of the work involved in the harvest season and what it was like to be a child in the early 1800's.

An interactive tour of the house includes hands-on activities relating to harvest season preparations. Students participate in open-hearth cooking, early 19<sup>th</sup> century craft making and an interactive demonstration of the steps involved in harvesting and preserving various vegetables.

We are looking for two parent volunteers for each casa class. Please let **the office** know if you are interested. Remember, we must have your police check on file if you wish to join us.

## Macmillan's

Please remember that your Macmillan's orders are due

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8<sup>th</sup>.**

Don't miss out!

Delivery is

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 27<sup>th</sup>.**

Orders will be ready for pickup at 11:45. Please remember to make arrangements if you cannot pick up the order yourself. *Products arrive frozen, and we are unable to store them at school.* Ask a friend to pick them up for you, or bring a cooler and freezer packs in the morning.

QSP / Magazine orders are also due on the end of October at the latest!



## Hallowee'n Hints

Hallowee'n is fast approaching, and the children will soon be buzzing with news of costumes and plans for the big night.

On October 29<sup>th</sup>, children who wish to do so are invited to wear their costume to school. In the interest of comfort and safety, we have a few requests:

1. No masks or face paint, please.
2. No weapons, and a minimum of accessories (wands may get broken, crowns misplaced, vampire teeth may vanish...)
3. Please send a change of clothes so that your child is able to remove their costume if they wish.

Please understand that though of course we will be careful, accidents can happen. There is always a slight chance that your child's costume could be torn, or an item lost.

We will be visiting Notre Dame in the morning, to show off our costumes.

## OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

Olivia turned 2 on September 30.  
Jack will be 5 on October 7.  
Ethan will be 8 on October 9.  
Edward will be 5 on October 17

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL OF YOU!



### Parent Workshop Reminder

The parent workshop evening is scheduled for **Tuesday, October 12<sup>th</sup>**, from 6:30 – 7:30pm. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn a bit about the Montessori curriculum, and about some of the materials your children use each day. Please be punctual – we will start at 6:30 sharp. We would like everyone to attend!

***Good news!***  
***Childcare will be available***  
***in the gym.***

*- courtesy of*  
*Mrs. Julie's daughter Lucy and*  
*Mrs. Barbara's son Felix.*

You will have a chance to attend two half hour sessions.

Mrs. Barbara: Elementary Math  
Mrs. Phyllis: Selections of the Casa Language and Math Materials  
Mrs. Julie: What *are* the “Metal Insects”, anyway?  
Mrs. Kristy: Toddler program overview

Anyone is welcome to attend any of these sessions! You will have a chance to try for yourself some of the materials your children use every day.

## School Closures

On occasion, schools are closed due to a heavy snowfall. In anticipation of that possibility, Ann prepares a “phone tree”. It falls to the Principal to decide whether or not the school should be closed. She then calls the staff members to let them know, and the Hamilton radio station CHML (FM 900). The Principal then phones the seven parents who have agreed to be at the “top” of the phone tree. Each one of them calls the six or seven families on their list. In this way, we are able to reach everyone in good time.

We do our best to make the decision very early; there is usually some warning of a possible storm. As parents, you can tune into CHML (900FM) on these occasions. They will include us in their list of closures once a call has been made to the station. There *should* also be a message left on the school phone. Rest assured, though, that you will be contacted personally.

This same phone tree would also be used in the event of a school closure for some other reason. If ever the school had to close part way through the school day, it becomes more of a challenge to reach parents. The seven people heading the lists have an extensive list of alternate phone numbers for this reason.

**PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU INFORM THE OFFICE OF ANY CHANGES IN PHONE NUMBERS!**

### Fire Drills

We conduct three fire drills each fall. The first is carefully staged, and a hand bell is used. The second time, some children may be in French or Music classes, but the staff are prepared. The third time no one is warned, and we use the real alarm. You should be very proud of your children. They were able to stay calm, and to follow directions. Everyone exits the school and lines up against the fence on the far side of the playground. There is a quick roll call before re-entering the school.

## Pancake Breakfasts



With Hallowe'en falling on a weekend again this year, the opportunity was too perfect to miss!

On *Sunday, October 31* we will be holding a **Halloween Pancake Breakfast**. Mrs. Julie and Mrs. Kristy's classes will host it together.

We will do some planning at next week's Coffee Club morning: **Tuesday, October 12** in the French room. Come with your ideas! Sign up sheets will be posted afterwards, and copies will be sent home to the two classes involved. If you have any ideas, please speak to Sue Reid-Kulpaka.


The second breakfast, a **Pancake Breakfast with Santa**, will take place on Saturday December 4, and will be hosted by Mrs. Phyllis and Mrs. Judy's class with Mrs. Barbara's class helping too.

## Scholastic Book Fair

Our fall book fair will be held from **October 6<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>** this year. This is a great chance to pick up some birthday or Christmas gifts for friends and family. The school also benefits, as a portion of the profit is returned to us in the form of books. Please come and browse.

We need parents to help out at this event. Please check the community bulletin board for the sign up sheet. A short orientation session will be arranged for volunteers. More information will follow.

### The Coffee Club is Back...



**Our Monthly Parent/Caregiver Coffee Club**  
**Tuesday, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010**  
**9:00 a.m.**

Please join other parents/caregivers in the French room for some fresh hot coffee and treats along with the opportunity to get to know one another, engage in some informal chat and discuss WMS current events and latest newsletter.

You are welcome to bring your small children.  
**Hope to see you there!**

## Scholastic Book Orders

It has come to our attention that some parents are unaware of how the monthly Scholastic Book Orders benefit the school, and this letter serves as an explanation.

Every month the school receives a bonus coupon for a percentage of the total order, plus an extra amount to choose free books. We can spend the percentage immediately, or "bank it" for future use. The greater the order, the greater the percentage awarded. For example, if the total amount one month is between \$60 and \$129, the school receives 25% of the amount in bonus coupons, plus \$6.99 in "free picks". Our average monthly order last year was in the \$130 - \$199 category, resulting in a bonus coupon worth 30%, and \$9.99 in free picks. (Percentages range from 20% to 40% of the total order.)

These coupons add up quickly! Staff are able to use them toward the purchase of a wide variety of Scholastic products. There are special offers for teachers each month, and we have taken advantage of this programme to purchase both fiction and non-fiction books for the classrooms, some French books, and a variety of teacher resources.

We have had great success with this programme in the past. We hope to continue to build up our library this year, in particular in the area of resource materials, for example an updated atlas series.

In addition, there are often very good prices in the flyers, so everyone benefits! There is, of course, no obligation to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to speak to either Mrs. Barbara or myself.

Sue Reid-Kulpaka

## Whose Umbrella is This?

When you are labeling your children's belongings, please remember items that are not brought to school regularly. On rainy days, for example, we often have five or six identical ladybug or monster umbrellas arrive at school. In the past, we have had umbrellas go home with the wrong child.

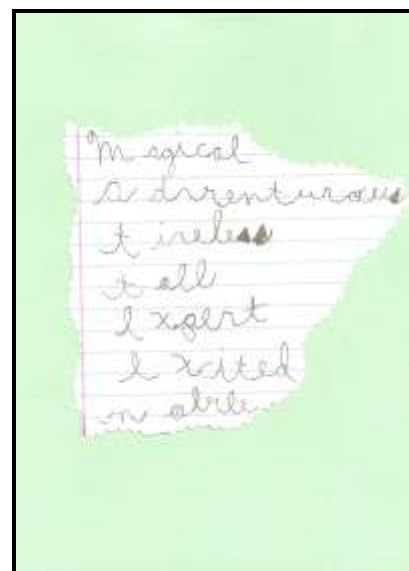
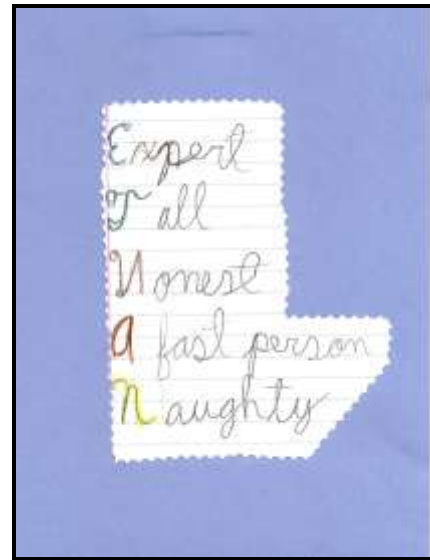
PLEASE label EVERYTHING your child brings to school. It will take you a few moments, but will make your life (and ours!) much easier in the long run. Thank you.

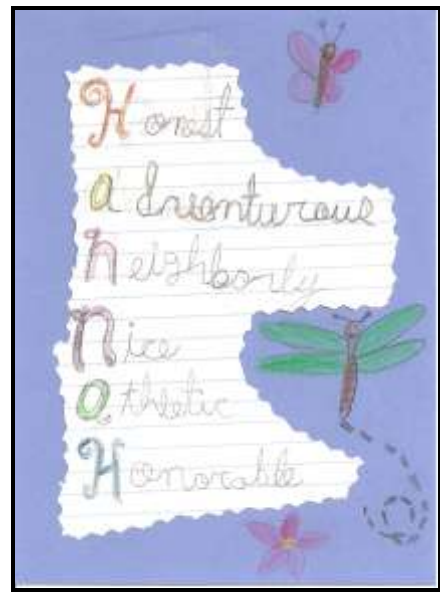
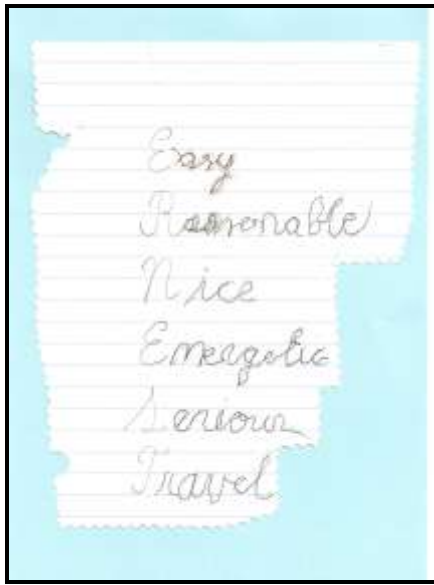
**REMEMBER TO LABEL SNACK CONTAINERS TOO!**

**And lastly...if you are missing something, remember to check the lost and found bin in the hallway by the back door.**

## From the Elementary Classroom

The following are acrostic poems written by the elementary children based on their names. (Look for the newsletter on our website; these will be in colour.)





## Casa French

The children seem to like coming to French class. It is so nice to see them show an interest in learning a new language.

The older children have done a lot of review while the younger ones are hard at work learning songs, vowel sounds and new words. The circle activities, such as calendar, weather and days of the week, are on-going. All age groups participate in these exercises. The three year olds are learning the words "Bonjour, Merci, Excusez moi, Oui, Non, On s'en va, and Au Revoir. They are also learning vowel sounds.

The four and five year olds are working on consonant sounds, reviewing vowel sounds, short sentences, card exercises and numbers 1 to 15. They are also focusing on alphabet games, number activities, picture books and many other resources that keep them interested in learning French.

The French program for September/October is available in the French room; feel free to take a copy.

Madame Grace

## Elementary French

Another new year has started. September means starting a new "cahier" with fresh new pages. The second and third years quickly begin to remember how to answer calendar questions, (month, day, year, season, date etc.) and the first years are eager to learn.

The first years have been reviewing colours, and are enjoying using objects to put "the cat in the car" or "the cow on the bed" or "the "horse on the bicycle." With some prompting they are making up their own "silly sentences".

The second and third years have been working on some challenging phonograms and are beginning some work on verbs so that they will be able to construct a greater variety of sentences.

Madame Sue

## News From the Toddler Classroom

Well September has just flown by and I cannot believe how well our toddlers are settling in to their new environment and routine. In a few short weeks we have developed a daily routine, which includes circle time, *snack*, presentations, *snack*, outdoor time, *snack*...you get the picture, a lot of their world revolves around eating!

Many of you have probably noticed there is always a "buzz" coming from the toddler room at the end of the hall, as the youngest students at our school keep very busy. The children remind us daily of the incredible addition they make to our school with their amazing abilities, affection and ever present inquisitive nature. Mrs. Julie, Mrs. Deb and I are very excited and look forward to the months ahead.

Mrs. Kristy

## Mrs. Phyllis and Mrs. Judy's Class

The beautiful colors, and the fresh, crisp, cool air are pleasant reminders that the fabulous fall season is here. At this time there are also many enjoyable activities both indoors and out to keep the boys and girls busy.

My class will be occupied with some practical indoor activities that will enhance large and fine motor skills. These will include scrubbing and polishing some of the many varieties of vegetables harvested at this time. As they engage in activities the many types of gourds, squash and pumpkins will become familiar to them.

The children also look forward to collecting leaves at this time. We will put some to good use by rubbing and pressing activities. Other seasonal exercises will involve sorting, spooning and pouring fall objects.

I would like time to thank the parents from my class who came to our meet the teacher evening. We look forward to seeing you all at the other events planned for this month and the rest of the year.

Mrs. Phyllis

## Musical Notes

*An excerpt from Mr. Matt's "Music Makers!"  
program guide*

My aim is to introduce music as an enjoyable and integral part of your child's life. A child's response to music begins at birth, and should be cultivated at an early age, when learning habits are established.

Appreciation of music, as with any art form, is developed and nurtured with understanding and knowledge. Music is a jig-saw puzzle in sound. Its parts are beat, rhythm, tempo, pitch, melody, harmony, dynamics, etc. As the children use these separate parts, they become more familiar with them, and when the parts are put together in a song, the song as a whole is better understood and appreciated in a true musical sense.

The Music Makers Method strives to stimulate observation, curiosity, and inventiveness while developing attention span, memory, sensitivity and discrimination, and improving psychomotor co-ordination.

The instruments provided are designed especially for child education by Dr. Carl Orff, world renowned educator of children's music. Xylophones, glockenspiels, timpani and hand drums, encourage the child to respond actively to rhythm and pitch.

The keyboard instruments (xylophones, etc.) have the same key system as a piano, with the letter names on the keys. On them a child can see a scale or melodic pattern. There is a visual understanding that is not available on wind or stringed instruments, but is essential to understanding the theory involved in playing any instrument, or in vocal studies.

Singing is an important part of each class, and usually the children accompany themselves on the Orff instruments. Some songs are sung to movement or action games; in others the children contribute to the words of the tune. This helps them to realize that music does not come from the push of a button or someone else's pen, but from inside themselves.

The first year elementary students read music and play songs on the recorder from their music books. The recorder provides an inexpensive introduction to the woodwind and brass instruments. It gives children an opportunity to explore their aptitude for these 'mouth instruments' and to develop small muscle control and finger independence required for any instrumental training later. Everything learned in this way is applicable to further studies on any instrument.

Choosing an instrument for later studies is a very personal choice for the child. It involves not only the child's aptitude for a certain type of instrument, but the pitch range of the instrument, and its inherent tone quality, or timber – which form an emotional bond with the child, and provide the incentive to master the instrument.

### Mrs. Julie and Ms. Wyn's Class

#### What's the Matter?

During our theme of "solid, liquid, gas and plasma", we had presented and discussed characteristics of the various phases of matter. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year caspas wanted to know what *they* were. "Solid," I answered, "but what if you were liquid?" In an instant, they all splayed themselves on the floor in human puddles.

"I guess you couldn't show me what you would be like if you were gas, could you?" I asked. The children scrambled away from circle and started to hide, acting out the invisible quality of gas. A few crouched under one of the big tables and when the others saw this, they obviously remembered another characteristic of gas because they ALL squeezed in together (gas completely fills whatever container it is in).

I thought we had played out the theme since the children couldn't possibly demonstrate plasma....or so I thought. "Too bad we can't show plasma," I began when one of the five year olds raised his arms in the air, opening and closing the fingers of alternate hands while he sang softly: "Twinkle, twinkle, little star!" My jaw dropped at how quickly he thought of a song and activity for plasma. I shook my head and exclaimed: "Of course, stars are plasma!" The rest of the class joined in and finished the song, their hands twinkling in the classroom sky.

Mrs. Julie

**That's Hilarious!!!**  
**HA.....HA.....HA.....HA!!!!**

Need a Laugh?

We've got the remedy for you. WMS has organized a live stand-up comedy night at Club 54 (3345 Harvester Rd) on **Friday November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Put the kids to bed and come on out at 8:30p.m. to Club 54 on Harvester Rd. Sit back and choke in laughter from 8:30 - 10:00p.m. with host Ben Guyatt.

"Comedy at Club 54" is broadcast nationwide on The Comedy Network twenty times per week. See [www.thecomedy.com](http://www.thecomedy.com) and click on "Program Schedule".



*Waterdown Montessori School*

**COMEDY NIGHT /  
DANCE PARTY  
FUNDRAISER**

*"An Evening of Fun and Laughter!"*



**FRI, NOV 5, 2010**

Doors Open 8:00, Showtime 8:30pm. Tickets \$15  
(Includes Admission to both the Comedy Show & Dance Party)  
At Club 54 Nightclub, 3345 Harvester Rd., Burlington, [www.club54.ca](http://www.club54.ca)

**Ticket Info:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Tickets are \$15/per person.**

Tickets include admission to the Friday Night Dance Party following the show from 10:00p.m til 2 a.m.

Wait...that's not all! This event will serve as a "Parent Get-together" " as well as a "Fundraiser". Each family will be given 6 tickets to sell (\$90). It is our goal is to sell 300 tickets.

Here's the awesome part.....WMS gets to keep \$12/ticket of the ticket price! The rest of the money goes to Club 54.

If 50 families sell 6 tickets, we can make \$3,600. Almost impossible for most fundraisers.

How about it?? Want to come for a laugh??

Tickets will be distributed later this week.

**HA**  
**.....HA.....HA.....HA!!!**

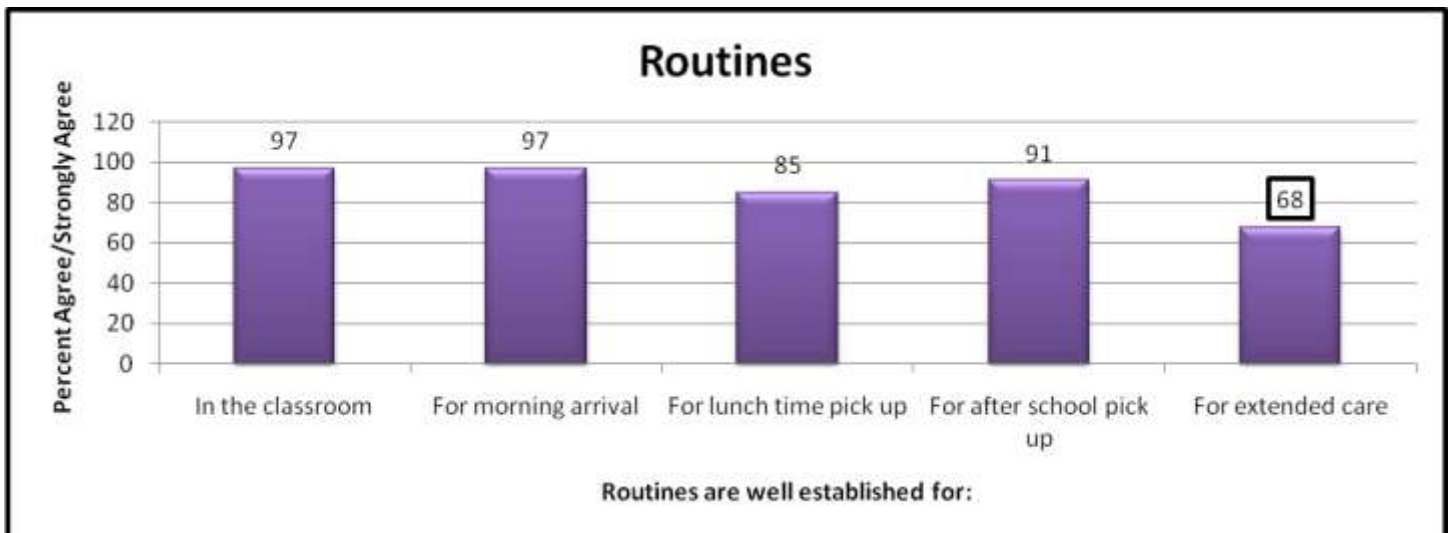
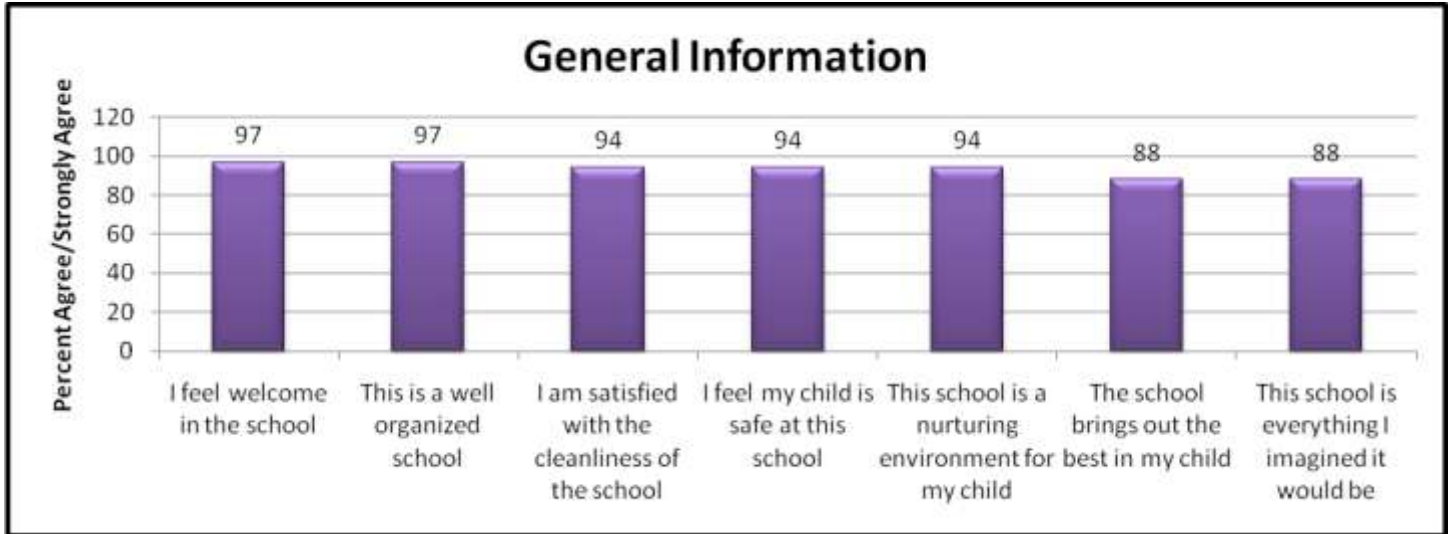
*For more information please speak to Nancy or Jen.*

## 2009/2010 Parent Satisfaction Survey – RESULTS

A total of 34 parents/caregivers completed last year's first ever on-line parent satisfaction survey for a response rate of approximately 57%. It was a good start in moving to a paperless survey system for the school. However, it also means that we need to have your up-to-date e-mail address and that you need to complete the surveys so you can have your say too!

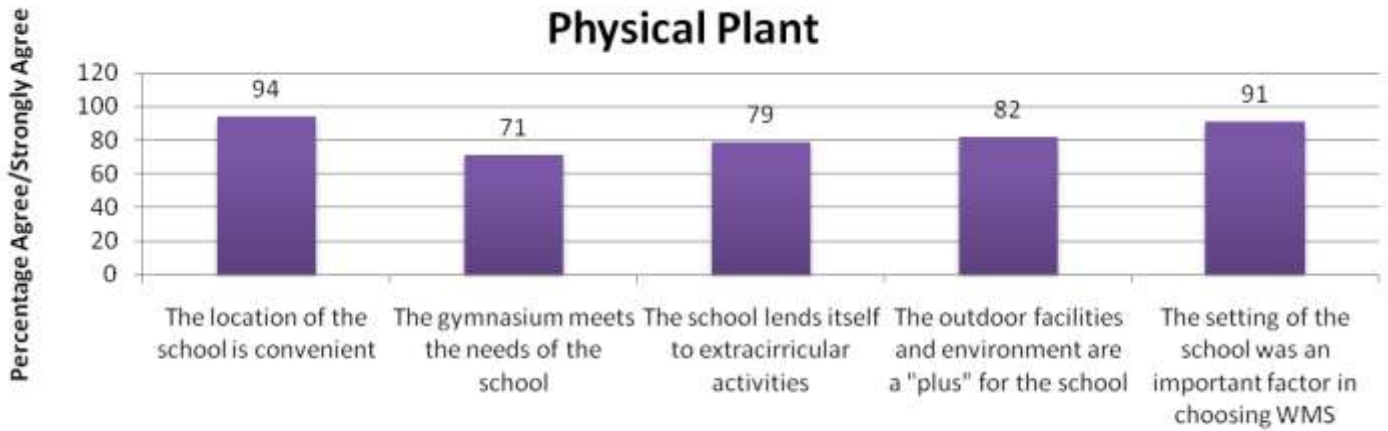
As always most families are please with the school and how their children are doing. The majority of responding families were of returning students and had one child in the school (85%). There were 3 new families that completed the survey and these families felt that they received enough information to become involved in the school.

Below you will find a summary of the results for each section of the survey.

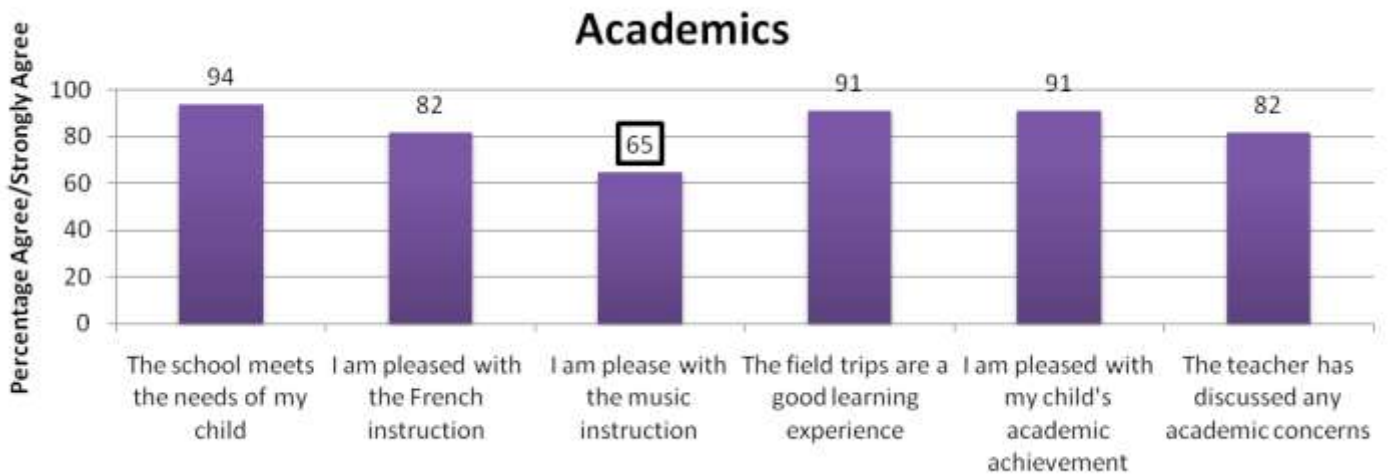


Some parents have expressed a concern around the routines for extended care pick up. As a result the staff on duty have made a point of speaking to parents at the beginning of the year to review procedures. If you have a particular question or concern, please let us know.

## Physical Plant



## Academics



Music instruction has emerged as a concern for parents. This may be due in large part to Mr. Matt's injury and subsequent illness last year. The school has acknowledged that work needs to be done in terms of communication. "Mr. Matt" is relaxed with the children, his genuine enjoyment of what he does shining through. With his gentle manner, he brings out the best in each of his students. From the very first lesson even the three year olds are using the instruments and singing songs. We will monitor the program/communication and review opinion throughout the year.

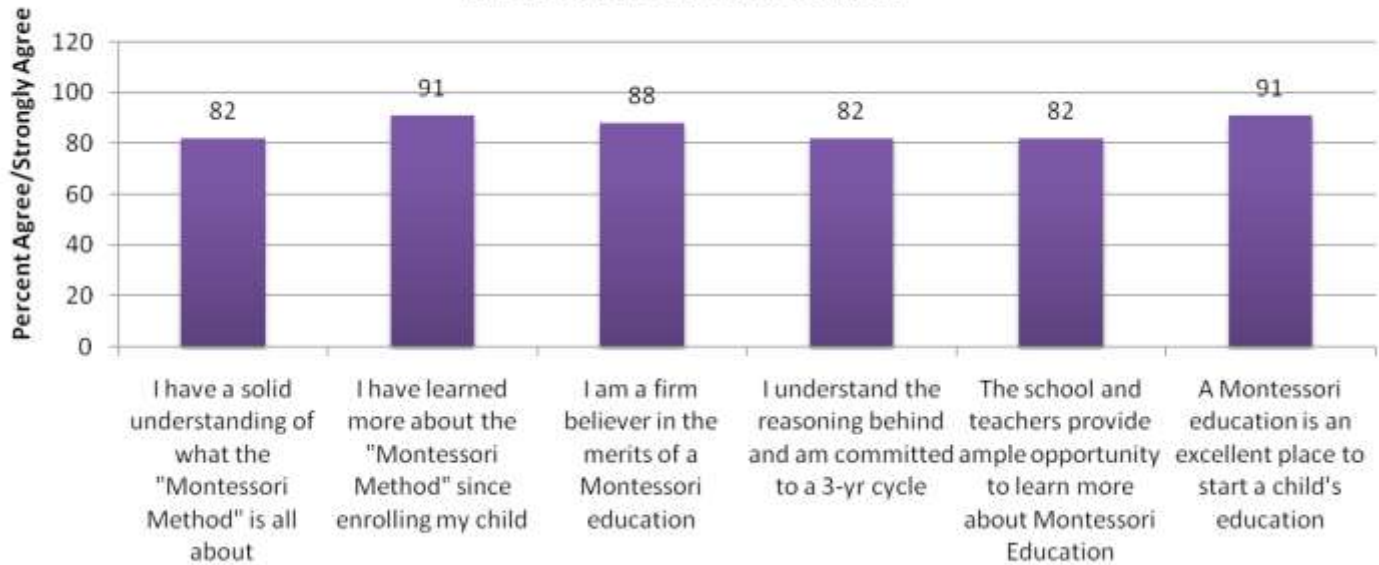
## WEBSITE

Did you know that we redesigned the WMS website last year? Have you visited the new website? 56% of you had and here is what you had to say about the NEW look!

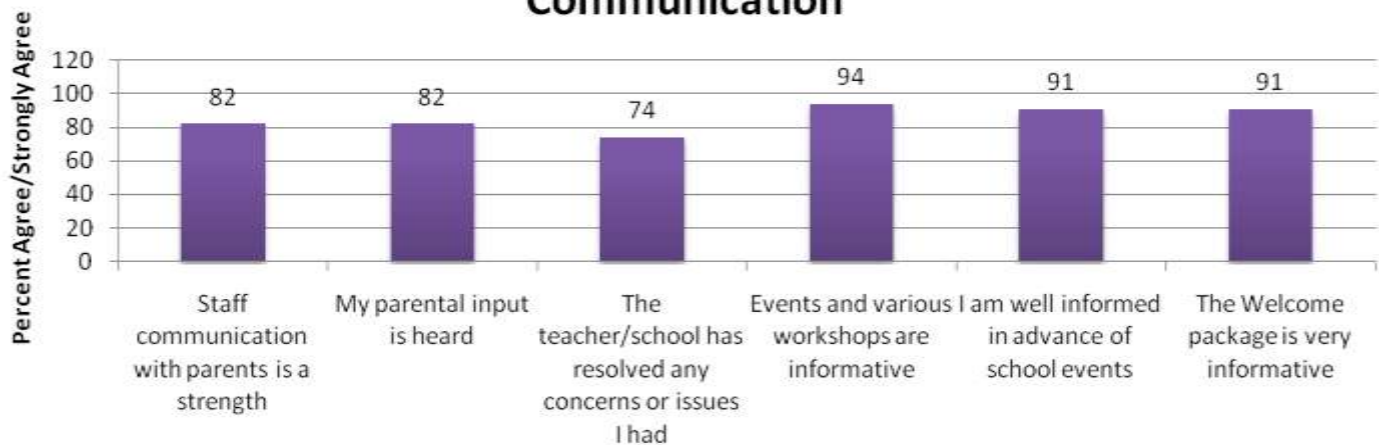
<b>The new website is:</b>	
<b>Easier to navigate</b>	95%
<b>A better way to present information to parents and the community</b>	89%
<b>Visually appealing</b>	84%
<b>An effective way to market and promote WMS</b>	78%

The website is still under construction and we would love to hear your feedback about what you would like to see on the site that isn't already there and what you would change if you could.

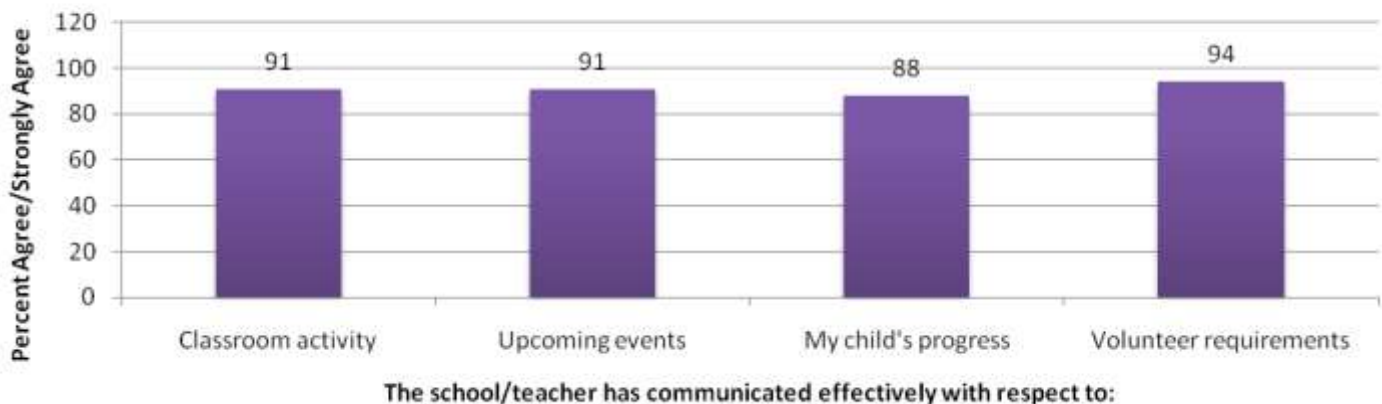
## Montessori Education



## Communication



## Communication



When parents/caregivers were asked how often they read the monthly newsletter we were very pleased to see that almost ¾ of you (74%) read it every month and 21% read it most of the time! Everyone who responded felt that the contents of the newsletter were important and the top four rated sections were:

- Upcoming event details and dates (94%)
- Monthly calendar (88%)
- Classroom news (85%)
- “From the Principal’s Desk” (82%)

## EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES/SUMMER CAMP

Summer camp last year was bustling with activity with many weeks being full to capacity! What a great way for your child to stay connected with his/her school friends and stay active over the summer months. 74% of you agreed that the camp was well organized, fun and good value. Way to go Emily and Meredith!

Some parents expressed concern about the variety of extracurricular activities offered at the school. This year we welcome CASA YOGA to the school this fall and are looking into other options to offer as the year progresses. What would you like to see? Art lessons? Sports? Mad Science? Let us know!

## FUNDRAISING

This is always a tricky area for the school and we have introduced many new events over the past few years. Some have been very successful and others have not been as well received ...what can we do to make them better? What new events would be successful? These are always the questions we are trying to answer and we need your help!

Although the majority (88%) of responding families felt that the volunteer expectations were fair, and that the number of fundraisers was just right (71%), when asked what you thought of the fundraisers we ran last year we were not surprised to see that many of you felt the events needed to be reworked/expanded or discontinued.

Some of these events are student favourites and the school would rather not discontinue them, but reworking these events is difficult as we rely on parent volunteers to organize and run them. Only 10 people indicated that they had been part of a fundraiser planning committee last year which makes reworking events challenging.

Event	Should be reworked/expanded (%)	Should be discontinued (%)
MacMillans	9	15
Bake sales	15	3
Pancake breakfasts	6	0
Mom-to-Mom sale*	24	12
Valentine’s party	24	3
Easter egg hunt	15	0
Magazine sales	9	3
Special lunch days	27	0
Shopping cards	9	21

\*New last year

**We need your help!** Some new ideas have already been put forward and are in the works (like the Comedy night detailed in this newsletter). Watch for more throughout the year and be on a planning committee if you can. The more people that volunteer the less work it is for everyone!

## MARIA MONTESSORI

**M**aria Montessori is as controversial a figure in education today as she was a half century ago. Alternately heralded as the century's leading advocate for early childhood education or dismissed as outdated and irrelevant, her research and the studies that she inspired helped change the course of education.

Those who studied under her and went on to make their own contributions to education and child psychology include Anna Freud, Jean Piaget, Alfred Adler, and Erik Erikson. Many elements of modern education have been adapted from Montessori's theories. She is credited with the development of the open classroom, individualized education, manipulative learning materials, teaching toys, and programmed instruction. In the last 35 years, educators in Europe and North America have begun to recognize the consistency between the Montessori approach with what we have learned from research into child development.

Maria Montessori was an individual ahead of her time. She was born in 1870 in Ancona, Italy, to an educated but not affluent middle-class family. She grew up in a country considered most conservative in its attitude toward women, yet even against the considerable opposition of her father and teachers, Montessori pursued a scientific education and was the first woman to become a physician in Italy.

As a practicing physician associated with the University of Rome, she was a scientist, not a teacher. It is ironic that she became famous for her contributions in a field that she had rejected as the traditional refuge for women at a time when few professions were open to them other than homemaking or the convent. The Montessori method evolved almost by accident from a small experiment that Dr. Montessori carried out on the side. Her genius stems not from her teaching ability, but from her recognition of the importance of what she stumbled upon.

As a physician, Dr. Montessori specialized in pediatrics and psychiatry. She taught at the medical school of the University of Rome, and through its free clinics, she came into frequent contact with the children of the working class and poor. These experiences convinced her that intelligence is not rare and that most newborns come into the world with a human potential that will be barely revealed.

Her work reinforced her humanistic ideals, and she made time in her busy

schedule to support various social-reform movements. Early in her career, she began to accept speaking engagements throughout Europe on behalf of the women's movement, peace efforts, and child labor-law reform. Montessori became well known and highly regarded throughout Europe, which undoubtedly contributed to the publicity that surrounded her schools.

In 1901, Montessori was appointed Director of the new Orthophrenic School attached to the University of Rome, formerly used as the asylum for the "deficient and insane" children of the city, most of whom were probably retarded or autistic. She initiated reform in a system that formerly had served merely to confine mentally handicapped youngsters in empty rooms. Recognizing her patients' need for stimulation, purposeful activity, and self-esteem, Montessori insisted that the staff speak to the inmates with the highest respect. She set up a program to teach her young charges how to care for themselves and their environment.

**Maria Montessori is as controversial a figure in education today as she was a half century ago.**

At the same time, she began a meticulous study of all research previously done on the education of the mentally handicapped. Her studies led Montessori to the work of two almost forgotten French physicians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Jean Itard and Edouard Seguin. Itard is most famous for his work with the "Wild Boy of Aveyron," a youth who had been found wandering naked in the forest, having spent ten years living alone. The boy could not speak and lacked almost all of the skills of everyday life. Here apparently was a "natural man," a human being who had developed without the benefit of culture and socialization with his own kind. Itard hoped from this study to shed some light on the age-old debate about what proportion of human intelligence and personality is hereditary and what proportion stems from learned behavior.

Itard's experiment was a limited success, for he found the "wild boy" uncooperative and unwilling or unable to learn most things. This led Itard to pos-

tulate the existence of developmental periods in normal human growth. During these "sensitive periods," a child must experience stimulation or grow up forever lacking the adult skills and intellectual concepts that he missed at the stage when they can be readily learned! Although Itard's efforts to teach the "wild boy" were barely successful, he followed a methodical approach in designing the process, arguing that all education would benefit from the use of careful observation and experimentation. This idea had tremendous appeal to the scientifically trained Montessori and later became the cornerstone of her method. From Edouard Seguin, Montessori drew further confirmation of Itard's work, along with a far more specific and organized system for applying it to the everyday education of the handicapped. Today Seguin is recognized as the father of our modern techniques of special education.

From these two predecessors, Montessori took the idea of a scientific approach to education, based on observation and experimentation. She belongs to the "child study" school of thought, and she pursued her work with the careful training and objectivity of the biologist studying the natural behavior of an animal in the forest. She studied her retarded youngsters, listening and carefully noting everything that they did and said. Slowly she began to get a sense of who they really were and what

methods worked best. Her success was given widespread notice when, two years after she began, many of Montessori's "deficient" adolescents were able to pass the standard sixth grade tests of the Italian public schools. Acclaimed for this "miracle," Montessori responded by suggesting that her results proved only that public schools should be able to get dramatically better results with normal children.

Unfortunately, the Italian Ministry of Education did not welcome this idea, and she was denied access to school-aged children. Frustrated in her efforts to carry the experiment on with public-school students, in 1907 Montessori jumped at the chance to coordinate a day-care center for working-class children who were too young to attend public school.

This first Casa dei Bambini or "Children's House" was located in the worst slum district of Rome, and the conditions Montessori faced were appalling. Her first class consisted of fifty children from two through five years of age, taught by one untrained caregiver.

The children remained at the center from dawn to dusk while their parents

worked. They had to be fed two meals a day, bathed regularly, and given a program of medical care. The children themselves were typical of extreme inner-city poverty conditions. They entered the Children's House on the first day crying and pushing, exhibiting generally aggressive and impatient behavior. Montessori, not knowing whether her experiment would work under such conditions, began by teaching the older children how to help with the everyday tasks that needed to be done. She also introduced the manipulative perceptual puzzles that she had used with the retarded.

The results surprised her, for unlike her retarded children who had to be prodded to use the materials, these little ones were drawn to the work she introduced. Children who had wandered aimlessly the week before began to settle down to long periods of constructive activity. They were fascinated with the puzzles and perceptual training devices. But, to Montessori's amazement, the young children took the greatest delight in learning practical everyday living skills reinforcing their independence.

Each day they begged her to show them more, even applauding with delight when Montessori taught them the correct use of a handkerchief. Soon the older children were taking care of the school, assisting their teacher with the preparation and serving of meals and the maintenance of a spotless environment. Their behavior as a group changed dramatically, from street urchins running wild to models of grace and courtesy. It was little wonder that the press found such a human interest story appealing and promptly broadcast it to the world.

Montessori education is sometimes criticized for being too structured and academically demanding of young children. Montessori would have laughed at this suggestion. She often said, "I studied my children, and they taught me how to teach them." Montessori made a practice of paying close attention to their spontaneous behavior, arguing that only in this way could a teacher know how to teach. Traditionally, schools pay little attention to children as individuals, other than to demand that they adapt to our standards.

Montessori argued that the educator's job is to serve the child; determining what is needed to make the greatest progress. To her, a child who fails in school should not be blamed, any more than a doctor should blame a patient who does not get well fast enough. It is the job of the physician to help us find the way to cure ourselves and the educator's job to facilitate the natural process of learning.

Montessori's children exploded into academics. "Too young to go to public school, they begged to be taught how to read and write. They learned to do so quickly and enthusiastically, using special manipulative materials Montessori designed for maximum appeal and effectiveness. The children were fascinated by numbers; to meet this interest, the mathematically inclined Montessori developed a series of concrete math learning materials that has never been surpassed. Soon her four and five year olds were performing four-digit addition and subtraction operations and in many cases pushing on even farther. Their interests blossomed in other areas as well, compelling an overworked physician to spend night after night designing new materials to keep pace with the children in geometry, geography, history, and natural science.

The final proof of the children's interest came shortly after her first school became famous, when a group of well intentioned women gave them a marvelous collection of lovely and expensive toys. The new gifts held the children's attention for a few days, but they soon returned to the more interesting learning materials. To Montessori's surprise, children who had experienced both, preferred work over play most of the time. If she were here today, Montessori would probably add: Children read and do advanced mathematics in Montessori schools not because we push them, but because this is what they do when given the correct setting and opportunity. To deny them the right to learn because we, as adults, think that they shouldn't is illogical and typical of the way schools have been run before.

Montessori evolved her method through trial and error, making educated guesses about the underlying meaning of the children's actions. She was quick to pick up on their cues, and constantly experimented with the class.

For example, Montessori tells of the morning when the teacher arrived late to find that the children had crawled through a window and gone right to work. At the beginning, the learning materials, having cost so much to make, were locked away in a tall cabinet. Only the teacher had a key and would open it and hand the materials to the children upon request. In this instance, the teacher had neglected to lock the cabinet the night before. Finding it open, the children had selected one material apiece and were working quietly. As Montessori arrived, the teacher was scolding the children for taking them out without permission. She recognized

that the children's behavior showed that they were capable of selecting their own work and removed the cabinet and replaced it with low, open shelves on which the activities were always available to the children. Today this may sound like a minor change, but it contradicted all educational practice and theory of that period.

One discovery followed another, giving Montessori an increasingly clear view of the inner mind of the child. She found that little children were capable of long periods of quiet concentration, even though they rarely showed signs of it in everyday settings. Although they were often careless and sloppy, they respond positively to an atmosphere of calm and order. Montessori noticed that the logical extension of the young child's love for a consistent and often-repeated routine is an environment in which everything has a place.

Her children took tremendous delight in carefully carrying their work to and from the shelves, taking great pains not to bump into anything or spill the smallest piece. They walked carefully through the rooms, instead of running wildly as they did on the streets. Montessori discovered that the environment itself was all important in obtaining the results that she had observed. Not wanting to use school desks, she had carpenters build child-sized tables and chairs. She was the first to do so, recognizing the frustration that a little child experiences in an adult-sized world.

Eventually she learned to design entire schools around the size of the children. She had miniature pitchers and bowls prepared and found knives that fit a child's tiny hand. The tables were light-weight, allowing two children to move them alone. The children learned to control their movements, disliking the way the calm was disturbed when they knocked into things. Montessori studied the traffic pattern of the rooms as well, arranging the furnishings and the activity area to minimize congestion and tripping. The children loved to sit on the floor, so she bought little rugs to define their work areas, and the children quickly learned to walk around them.

Through the years, Montessori schools carried this environmental engineering throughout the entire building and outside environment, designing child-sized toilets and low sinks, windows low to the ground, low shelves, and miniature hand and garden tools of all sorts. Some of these ideas were eventually adapted by the larger educational community, particularly at the nursery and kindergarten levels. Many of the puzzles and educational devices now in use at the preschool and elementary levels are direct copies of Montessori's original ideas. However, there is far more of her work that never entered the mainstream,

and educators who are searching for new, more effective answers are finding the accumulated experience of the Montessori community to be of great interest.

Maria Montessori's first "Children's House" received overnight attention, and thousands of visitors came away amazed and enthusiastic. Worldwide interest surged as she duplicated her first school in other settings with the same results. Montessori captured the interest and imagination of national leaders and scientists, mothers and teachers, labor leaders and factory owners. As an internationally respected scientist, Montessori had a rare credibility in a field where many others had promoted opinions, philosophies, and models that have not been readily duplicated. The Montessori method offered a systematic approach that translated very well to new settings. In the first 35 years of this century, the Montessori method seemed to offer something for everyone. Conservatives appreciated the calm, responsible behavior of the little

children, along with their love for work. Liberals applauded the freedom and spontaneity. Many political leaders saw it as a practical way to reform the outmoded school systems of Europe and North America, as well as an approach that they hoped would lead to a more productive and law-abiding populace. Scientists of all disciplines heralded its empirical foundation, along with the accelerated achievement of the little children. Montessori rode a wave of enthusiastic support that should have changed the face of education far more dramatically than it has.

Montessori's prime productive period lasted from the opening of the first Children's House in 1907 until the 1930s. During this time, she continued her study of children, and developed a vastly expanded curriculum and methodology for the elementary level as well. Montessori schools were set up throughout Europe and North America, and Dr. Montessori gave up her medical practice

to devote all of her energies to advocating the rights and intellectual potential of all children. During her lifetime, Dr. Montessori was acknowledged as one of the world's leading educators. Education moved beyond Maria Montessori, adapting only those elements of her work that fit into existing theories and methods. Ironically, the Montessori approach cannot be implemented as a series of piecemeal reforms. It requires a complete restructuring of the school and the teacher's role. Only recently, as our understanding of child development has grown, have we rediscovered how clear and sensible was her insight. Today there is a growing consensus among psychologists and developmental educators that many of her ideas were decades ahead of their time. As the movement gains support and begins to spread into the American public school sector, one can readily say that Montessori, begun almost 100 years ago, is a remarkably modern approach.