



WATERDOWN MONTESSORI SCHOOL

1921 SNAKE ROAD, BURLINGTON L7P 4Y2

www.waterdownmontessori.com

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2011

From the Principal's Desk

The March Break is behind us, and we are beginning to believe that spring might *finally* be on its way. The final term of school is a very busy one, packed with all kinds of activity.

Registration for September is progressing well. We are delighted that almost everyone who is eligible to do so has already re-registered, or has assured us of their intention to do so. Casa students who will have registered for the elementary class next year will soon begin their visits to Mrs. Barbara's classroom.



Our **Lil' Monkeys** get-together will take place this Saturday, April 9. Everyone is welcome; the playground opens at 9:30. Please let the office know if you are planning to attend. Prices are listed elsewhere in

the newsletter.

And...the waiting is over. The first **WMS Mabels Labels** campaign is about to start! Amanda has set up our online school account. More information is available elsewhere in this newsletter.

Our tenth annual **Easter Egg Hunt and Carnival** is scheduled for Saturday, April 23. Sign up sheets have been sent out by email, and are posted on the main bulletin board. This is our last big fundraising event of the year; one that has become a tradition in the local community. It is a lot of fun, and less preparation than our Valentines party. Its success depends on lots of volunteers to help out on the day itself.



We discussed the event at the March coffee club morning. It was decided to take a break from hot dogs and serve pizza this year instead. This will make a change, and will free up a few volunteers who would have been busy with the barbeque.

Remember to check out all our **Summer Camps**; June will be here before you know it!

I have included an article from the Toronto Star in this newsletter, called "Why Teachers Matter". It is from a series called "Saving Public Education". One might wonder why such an article would be included in a Montessori school newsletter. Once again, it seems to me that the article reinforced the fact that, for the most part at least, our school has got it right. We use a tried and true, scientifically proven method of education; teachers do not constantly have to 'jump through new hoops'. Montessori recognizes that children are 'natural learners' and that they are the ones doing the learning. Our teachers are engaged and enthusiastic, and many of our lunchtime conversations sound like the examples given among teachers in Finland. The article is quite lengthy; I have chosen to highlight certain paragraphs by placing borders around them.

Here's to new life, renewed enthusiasm, and the energy of spring. Let's enjoy!

Sue Reid-Kulpa
Principal

April Birthdays

Gabriel will be 2 on April 3.
Isla will be 8 on April 10.
Aran will be 4 on April 18.
Hannah will be 8 on April 20.
Kosi will be 3 on April 24.
Cole will be 4 on April 28.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL OF YOU!

Every child is a different kind of flower, and all together they make this world a beautiful garden.



Dates to Remember!

- April 4: Les Petites Pommes
- April 6: Pottery begins
- April 7: Creative Works Art begins
- April 9: Lil' Monkeys Get Together
- April 12: Coffee Club morning
- April 19: Mad Science begins
- April 20 – May 2: Scholastic Book Fair
- April 23: Eater Egg Hunt
- May 4: Mountsberg Field Trip

New Students

We had two more students join us last month. **Erik** and **Martin** are our newest toddlers. We welcome them and their families to the school.

Looking Ahead: May Field Trip

On Wednesday, May 4, the casa and elementary classes will be going to Mountsberg for an "Owl Prowl" field trip. The bus will leave at 9:00 and will return by lunch time. We are allowed taking two additional adults for each casa class. Please let the *office* know if you would like to join us. Remember that a police check is mandatory to volunteer.

Come "nose to beak" with live owls native to Ontario. Learn about their fascinating adaptations, their habitats and homes, hear their calls, and feel their soft feathers and sharp talons. Activities include: A puppet show, interaction with live owls, and a guided tour of the wildlife walkway trail.



Lil' Monkeys Get Together

Mark your calendar for this Saturday, **APRIL 9th**. That is the date of our fun family get-together at

Lil' Monkeys Indoor Playground in Burlington. We are inviting all our WMS families: past, present, and future (those registered for September 2011).

This is not a fundraiser! (Though if we sell enough tickets to be eligible for the group rate we will make a very small profit.) Let the office know if you will be attending (or tell Lil' Monkeys that you are from WMS when you get there).

Prices are as follows (Plus HST):

<u>Children Age</u>	<u>Regular Rate</u>
under 2	5.99
2-3-4	9.99
5-12	11.99
13-17	6.99
Adults (2 per child)	Free

Pizza, drinks etc. are available for those who wish to purchase them.

SCHOOL BOUNDARIES AND SAFETY REMINDER

We are privileged to be able to have our school in such a beautiful location. Please note that the land immediately adjacent to the school (playground area), is ours to enjoy. Classes are welcome to visit other designated areas of the grounds *when supervised by a staff member*.

The Sisters are gracious landlords, and the maintenance crew has been consistently friendly and agreeable, often going out of their way to help out. We certainly want to maintain our positive relationship with Notre Dame. Please remember, then, that the grounds surrounding the school ***do not belong to us***, and that we are allowed to use them only at the discretion of Notre Dame. The cemetery is out of bounds, as is the gazebo near our playground. We ask that you supervise your children carefully, and be respectful at all times.

With the warmer weather, (*surely* it will be here soon!) it is tempting to enjoy a visit with friends after school. ***Please do NOT allow your children to climb trees or to run unsupervised down the path towards the large shed.*** There is open water by the treatment plant, (across from the shed), and unused, rusting farm machinery behind the shed. On the nearby picnic table there are often various objects including old boards with nails. The Sisters want your children to be safe, and so do we! ***We do not want any complaints.***

If you do wish to stay after school, and let your children play for a bit, ***you are welcome to take them to the playground area.*** Thank you for your consideration and compliance.

Don't Miss Out!



There are openings left in ***all*** our summer camps. If you are interested, let us know! Camps need a minimum of 5 campers to run.

Remember that summer camps are also open to friends from outside the school.

Information and Registration forms are available in the office, and on our website.



“Support Our Fundraiser!”

As a way to target the problem of lost belongings and a large lost and found closet, Waterdown Montessori School is fundraising with **Mabel's Labels**, a company with all types of labels that are colourful, indestructible, easy-to-use and fun!

Iron-Ons, Stickies, Bag Tags, Allergy Alert labels & more! Personalize your labels with names, nicknames, initials - whatever you choose. Cool icons help even little ones identify their own belongings. Dishwasher, microwave, laundry & kid tested! Dispatched within 24 hours!

Visit www.waterdown.mabel.ca to place your order while helping our fundraiser!” **Remember to use this link or WMS won't get the commission from your order!**

About Mabel's Labels!

We are moms who were frustrated by the amount of stuff that left our houses, never to return. After lots of research and testing we created the perfect fun, durable labels for the stuff kids lose!

Our sticky labels and clothing labels, which are dishwasher, microwave and laundry safe, are not only practical, but also designed to be very special to each child. The labels are customized with a child's name, favourite mix of colours and an icon (animal, symbol, etc.). We have also expanded our product line to include personalized stationery products, ID wristbands and household labels.”

We strive to continuously design innovative labels for babies, kids and grown-ups alike. You'll be amazed at what you can label!”

Mabel's Labels

Who needs Mabel's Labels?

Everyone! Labels for crafters, campers, students, kids, babies, people with allergies, cooks and more! Teachers and camp counselors love labels too because it allows them to easily identify who an item belongs too.

What can you label?

Everything! I label anything I think could get misplaced at school, work, summer camp, swim lessons....really anywhere my kids or family goes.



For example:

- All outdoor clothing (including umbrellas, hats, mitts, boots, coats, snow pants, etc)
- Indoor shoes
- School backpack and lunch bag
- Snack containers (I was really disappointed when one of my favourite containers never made it home after snack day...now that I label them they always find their way home!)

- Sippy cups (now we always know whose cup belong to who at play dates)
- Hot lunch bowls, plates, cups, spoons and forks

Fundraising for WMS

How does the fundraising work?

All items available on the website are eligible to count towards the WMS campaign and WMS earns 20% profit on all sales. Fundraising prices are the same as regular prices.

How are orders placed?

Orders will be placed online using a personalized web address for the WMS fundraising campaign: www.waterdown.mabel.ca. You will have the option of paying by Visa, MasterCard or by cheque (payments are made directly to Mabel's Labels). Once you place your order your order will be shipped within 24 hours to the address you specify. Shipping is free in Canada and \$3.00 to the U.S.

12 Month Campaign

If this fundraising campaign is successful then the school will be considering running a 12-month paperless campaign so WMS parents/friends/family can order all year long and have the profits go to the school.

Kid's Safety Products

My 411 Wrist Bands



"My 411 Wristbands" are durable, disposable ID bracelets perfect for theme parks and field trips. Personalize with vital information and contact details.

Allergy Alerts

Allergy Alerts are durable, waterproof labels that specify allergies on items such as food containers and travel gear. As with all our labels, they are produced in a nut-free facility.



Household labels

Mabel's Labels makes a variety of household labels to make your life easier.

Custom Neat Freak



The Custom Neat Freak Combo is a fully customizable pack of labels for use throughout your home on items such as storage bins, spice jars and food canisters.

Curbsides



Have you ever wondered how to make sure your blue recycling bin makes its way back home after it blows away on yet another windy day? Curbsides are the answer! I can't tell you how many times I have gone hunting for our missing blue boxes. Now that we use curbsides our neighbours return them to us! We have them on our garbage bins too.



Cord Control

Cord Control labels organize all your messy cords by designating which cord goes to which gadget.

Custom Canister and Spice Labels



Custom Canister and Spice Labels is a fully customizable pack of labels for use on items such as spice jars and bulk food canisters.



Personalized Stationary

Mabel's has personalized return address stickers and other fun stationary.

For a complete listing of everything that Mabel's Labels offers please visit their website at:

www.waterdown.mabel.ca

Something to Ponder...Draw your own conclusions!

A Fable

Once upon a time the animals decided they must do something decisive to meet the increasing complexity of their society. They held a meeting and finally decided to organize a school. The adopted curriculum consisted of running climbing, swimming and flying. And since these were the basic behaviours of most animals they decided that all the students should take all of the subjects.

The duck proved to be excellent at swimming, better in fact than his teacher. He also did well in flying, but he proved to be a very poor runner. Since he was poor in this subject he was made to stay after school to practise it and even had to drop swimming in order to get more time in which to practise running.

He was kept at his poorest subject until his feet were so badly damaged that he became only average at swimming. But average was acceptable in the school, so nobody worried about that except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but finally had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up time in swimming – a subject which he hated.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed psychological blocking owing to flying class where the teacher insisted he start from the ground instead of from the tree-tops. He was kept at attempting to fly until he became muscle bound and got only C in climbing and D in running.

The eagle was the school's worst discipline problem, for in climbing class he beat all of the others to the top of the tree used for examination purposes in this subject, but he insisted on using his own method in getting there.

At the end of the year, an eel who could swim well, run a little, and who had passing grades in climbing and flying received the highest average in the school and was made valedictorian.

The gophers, of course, stayed out of school and fought the tax levied for education because digging was not put on the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to the badger and later joined the ground hogs and started a private school.

Author unknown

Move Over, Einstein!

March Break Science Camp was an experiment-packed week full of discoveries and revelations for our junior scientists! In the lab we made our own balloon inflators, turned celery purple, created blue slime, tested the molecular skin of water, explored buoyancy with our own paper boats (thanks to Curious George!), sprouted seeds, and with nothing more than a mirror and water, broke sunlight into rainbows!

Highlights from the kitchen: we inflated bread with baking soda and yeast, emulsified oil and vinegar, cultured our own yogurt (for dip and smoothies), brulée-d eggless custard and caramelized potatoes. We ate sunlight nearly every day and discovered that foods closest to their natural state (unprocessed) contained the most sunlight.

We gave our mighty brains a rest as we rounded out our day with music and movement, followed by yoga with Ms Wyn.

Mrs. Julie

Casa French

What a busy season we've had in French class. The five year olds have done so well learning new vocabulary, word recognition, and repeating longer sentences. Great work on their part. They are also attempting to read in the Learning Series while facing other challenges. I feel that all of them are doing so well.

The four year olds love to show their level of success when repeating words and short sentences. They are so proud of their achievements and so am I!

Learning French for the three year olds is a labour of love. All the children are showing interest in learning a new language when repeating sounds and words in French. Their enthusiasm and interest are continuing sources of encouragement.

The French program is posted in the classroom, please feel free to pick one up at any time.

Madame Grace

Elementary French

Indigo now has a selection of French books! During the March break I bought one called "Pierre et les Pirates". The elementary students are thoroughly enjoying it, as am I. The story lets us explore many different avenues.

Following one of them, we have been learning the names of some land and water forms in French (the children already know them in English from their Montessori curriculum). This led to drawing and labeling an imaginary island (with capes and bays and rivers and lakes etc. bien sûr!) for a treasure map, and finally to creating islands from flour and salt dough.

Madame Sue

News From Mrs. Phyllis and Mrs. Judy

We have all been learning lots of interesting things about our beautiful country, Canada. The pictures below, drawn by some of the students, tell their own stories of Canada's history. We enjoyed discussing them during circle time. Hockey, which was featured in all the drawings, is no doubt the favourite sport, especially among the boys!

Mrs. Phyllis



Why Teachers Matter

From The Toronto Star



Published On Fri Mar 25 2011



DUSAN PETRICIC ILLUSTRATION FOR THE TORONTO STAR



By [Rick Salutin](#) Columnist

Last fall I attended a talky, high-powered Toronto education conference well-stocked with big international players. I took a few hours off to see a class in a nearby school. The class was already on when the vice-principal showed me in and shut the door. I looked around. The kids were rapt. That's when it hit me: You shut the door of the classroom behind you and all bets are off. The whole range of topics at the conference — curriculum, “value-added assessment,” leadership — becomes moot when that door shuts.

Improvement in achievement comes from good instruction, says former B.C. deputy education minister Charles Ungerleider, not from anything else. Kids know it — how couldn't they? They're in there with that teacher five or six hours a day every day in the early years and x number of periods later on. It's like being stuck with your family. It works or it doesn't. Teachers know it and that may be why they often react wearily to the endless trends and fads that wash over their world.

Donald Eckler at Clinton Public School would surely count as a master teacher of Grade 6, and not just based on 35 years in the classroom. "Every few years, teachers have to jump through new hoops," he says. "Like a few years ago. All classes had to do a DPA, daily physical activity. Thirty minutes uninterrupted. It was a big deal, it came from (Premier Dalton) McGuinty, there were workshops. But there was nowhere to do it. So teachers end up dragging kids up and down stairs. Do jumping jacks. Then slowly you realize no one really cares, so you stop. Literally nobody was doing it. Like there's a total disconnect from wherever they issue these edicts." It's the same when HQ announces big changes in report cards. "You do a lot of eye rolling as you hear the latest hoop to jump through." That's how it looks from the ground up, after you close that door.

I'm instantly tempted to apologize for starting this series of stories examining the public education system with anecdotes. Education is an area rife with stats and studies. But what almost anyone recalls from their school years — ask yourself — is a teacher or two. For me it might be Mrs. McQuaig, who encouraged me as a young writer and once scribbled wryly in the margin of an essay, beside a jam smudge, "Food for thought?" This isn't accidental. It's the essence of the school experience. It's a relationship. It needn't even be a teacher. Ungerleider once studied why potential dropouts didn't quit school. One kid stayed because an adult smiled and asked how he was in the hall each day. He didn't know who it was. Turned out to be a janitor. At Clinton it might be Zilda Silva in the office. To kids, she's an anchor. At

Grade 6 graduation, she got more valedictory accolades than any teacher. When the key is a living relationship, you don't quantify it. You recount it.

Now ask what you got from that teacher. Was it some info they passed on, or was it something they ignited in you? Probably the latter. Kids don't need to be taught that much; they're natural learners. They learn from birth, prodigiously. Everyone learns to walk and talk, without teachers — far harder tasks than anything to follow. The true mystery is that many kids lose their knack for learning, at least during school hours. That's why ignition is the ticket.

Since it's a relationship, teaching is a living thing that's hard to nail down. It's more a practice than a technique. And since it's a relationship, almost anything can and does work. That's its most puzzling feature. So much works — because, as a relationship, it's built on the needs of students and the strengths of teachers, which can vary as much as human nature. So the possible ways to teach are endless. It's like therapy, where distinct, even contradictory methods can all get results if there's a strong relationship. Without that, nothing gels.

So, for example, teachers try to teach kids to think. But as American philosopher of education John Dewey said, "There is no method of thinking. Thinking is the method of thinking." How do you teach that? Your way. Donald Eckler uses "mind traps" to get students thinking "laterally." It works for him, because it's how his mind gets ignited. Principal Barrie Sketchley of Rosedale Heights arts school, who has worked at all levels of the system, says if a teacher stands and talks at the front of the class and does it well, that's fine. A talking head can work.

Consider a crucial area: reading. Wars have been fought over how to teach it: phonics vs. whole word vs. just being read to, etc. It's so silly. Learning to read recapitulates the whole history of our species, in its momentous transition from the oral to the written tradition starting 6,000 years ago. Have some humility. There's no one right way to do that. You can kill the process if you insist there is, and then insist on testing for results. The search for magic teaching bullets is delusional. It includes class size, one of the

latest. Research clearly shows smaller classes produce better results. Except I'd rather have Mr. Eckler teach a class of 40 than someone else with 20. Four hundred years ago, a teaching authority, Comenius, said the ideal student-teacher ratio was 300-1. He probably had research to prove it. There is no ideal ratio. In general, smaller may be better, but don't get dogmatic, trust the teacher. What works, works.

What's striking about most current educational reforms is how they try to interfere with what teachers do when the door closes. The advocates don't often say they're interfering, they say they want to help teachers and add, "There is no one best way." Then they list dozens, or more, of specifics for teachers to do. In the U.S., there are commercially purchased scripts that aim to have all teachers in a district on the same page at the same time. There's a 357-page tome unofficially known as "Lemov's Taxonomy" (by educator Doug Lemov) loaded with specifics like, "Stand still when you're giving directions." It had "hundreds of underground fans," according to *The New York Times*, even before it was published last spring. The effect of standardized tests like EQAO in Ontario, is, says U.S. author Richard Rothstein, "to invade the classroom" and force teachers to "teach to the test" while cutting down on everything else.

I have some sympathy for the impulse to interfere. Leaving teachers on their own with your kids and their futures can be scary. It's like the trust you hand over to surgeons when they put you under. But teachers are professionals too, aren't they? That's the alternative attitude. You see it in Finland. Since the OECD began ranking countries in 2000 for student achievement on Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, it's been the star performer. It always scores at or near the top in all categories.

My biggest surprise there was the staff rooms. They took me in for coffee, a national passion. But in just about each one there was a group of teachers, often with a principal, discussing an educational issue. At my first school, in Helsinki, it was about Facebook. They send daily emails to parents about material covered in class.

But some kids got their parents' passwords and copied the emails to Facebook, with wicked comments. A day later, up north in Kokkola, it was about cattiness among 10-year old girls. Next day, elsewhere, it was teasing. There's a national policy on teasing, and they were debating how to apply it. I started wondering if these discussions were staged to impress visitors. I've seen Canadian staff rooms but don't recall such meetings, seemingly cheerful and voluntary. I think of Canadian teachers using staff rooms to chill out. Anyone who raises a classroom issue might get the evil eye. Discussions happen but elsewhere, in the hall or over in the corner. Back home, I checked with people who confirmed it. Every teacher and principal I described it to did some kind of jaw drop. I mentioned it to Toronto District School Board director Chris Spence, a pretty on-message guy not given to outbursts. "Unsolicited??!!" he blurted, as if he couldn't believe those discussions were voluntary.

How do they encourage this teacher engagement in Finland? They don't. Teaching is the incentive. It is high prestige, higher than doctors, lawyers and architects. Last year there were 10 applicants for every university position in teaching programs, which get to "cherry pick" from the top 20 per cent of high school grads. There are entrance exams and interviews, plus a "teaching-like" activity in which they're observed to see if they have the right stuff. The training averages from five to seven-and-a-half years — and is comparable to other professional degrees. All teachers must have a master's degree, and do a thesis. There are no separate teachers' colleges or certification programs. The university degree is the licence to teach. With this training, teachers can readily transfer into jobs at private firms like Nokia. When asked what might make them want to leave, teachers told me pay is not an issue — it's pretty much the national average and similar to other countries'. But a loss of autonomy would make them consider getting out. What matters is their sense of professional control and responsibility. What caused this commitment to teacher autonomy? Peter Johnson, Kokkola's

education director, says it's bred into the national character. Finns fought for autonomy within the Russian empire, fought a civil war, fought for independence, resisted the Soviet invasion and fought to get the Germans out of Lapland. Autonomy is the national cry of honour and it seeps into fields like teaching. "How else can you account for this element in our school system?" says Johnson. A sense of autonomy pervades the whole system. High school isn't compulsory, but Finland has a grad rate of 93 per cent compared with 76 and 77 per cent in Canada and the U.S. Membership in the teachers' union is voluntary, but 96-97 per cent join and pay dues directly; there's no automatic deduction as there is here. It would be surprising if this air of autonomy and self-government didn't extend to classrooms and students.

And in fact Finnish teachers spend fewer hours in class than other teachers — the equivalent of four 45-minute classes daily in the middle grades, about half as much as U.S. teachers, and well under the average in comparable (OECD) countries. Classes tend to be small — from 15 to 30 in the lower grades — but there are no minimum or maximum sizes. Teachers get roughly equal time to do other things, like lesson prep, helping design curriculum or school renovations, and for those staff-room dialogues. They're trusted to use the time well because they're dedicated professionals in a "learning community."

Social prestige and self-respect are of course hard things to nail down objectively. I recall from my own years in school a feeling that some of our teachers bore a hidden wound, as if they knew the deference they got from us would dissipate when we became adults ourselves. When I clumsily asked some Finnish teachers if they felt highly respected, they laughed and said no. But an hour later, at lunch, when I asked what they do in the case of a bad teacher, the answer was: "We have very good teachers." It sounded almost cocky, given the modest, reticent Finnish manner. I don't think you'd hear that in Canada.

At the Toronto conference I mentioned, Annie Kidder, of the grassroots group People for Education, asked Finnish educator and author Pasi Sahlberg about

"the parent piece" in Finland. He said, more or less, that it doesn't exist, and parents like him don't worry about it because they trust teachers and the system. It felt shocking, even irresponsible, in our context. But context is crucial. In the Finnish context, there's good reason to trust one's fellow citizens, based on experiences like relative economic equality and a generous safety net. Elsewhere it might be harder, like in the U.S., where the attitude to teachers, said one speaker at the conference, is "Bring it!" — meaning high test scores. In U.S. society, there's so little general trust and so much pervasive fear it's hard to picture anything remotely Finnish. Ontario, as usual, falls somewhere in between.

But public school classrooms are also places where those attitudes get formed. Donald Eckler says: "Parents forget what school was like, they think it's about learning things. But it's far more a community. I can't really define what I'm doing, but I want it to be an environment that's comfortable and respectful. What it feels like to me is a family. People get hurt, others open up space for them. Kids are so kind to the kid who has Asperger's. All that is far more important than curriculum. What they're really learning is how to coexist in that environment and what learning means."

Think again about learning to read. Teachers say when kids who've been doing something together are asked to open a book and read, they vanish into their own private worlds. Then they pull out of it again. That's the essence of being human: you're both social and individual. Fine teachers sense that this in itself is a lesson — or the lesson.

It seems to me you can basically choose to give teachers the autonomy to make such moments frequent or you can try to intervene in their classrooms (while denying it) in the hope that you can drive up test scores, or whatever obsesses you. I don't think the Finnish model is foolproof, but it seems, at the least, like a more interesting and adult way to go.