

From the President

Recently, the sports section of The Spokesman-Review had an article about Gonzaga basketball recruits. I know little about basketball and I'm not a Gonzaga alum, but it's hard not to get caught up in the excitement of this fine team. Turns out teenagers, boys as well as girls, are recruited for college teams, and sign letters of intent to attend and play for a given school as early as their junior year of high school. Coaches are eager to fill the pipeline, as it were, with quality players to keep a winning trend going.

The same could be said for SCAMC. We have had a winning trend of quality Montessori education for twenty years now, and to keep that going, we have to actively fill the pipeline with new teachers. These teachers could help expand the Montessori program, but fundamentally they ready us to replace any of our present teachers should we need to. Please note that to my knowledge, none of our teachers has announced a retirement date. But, as in basketball, it is merely prudent planning to consider future needs and to prepare for them.

We now have two teachers-in-training. April Cathcart (a Jefferson parent and SCAMC board member) heads up our recruitment committee to help us identify more. Paula Gibson-Smith, a Jefferson teacher, hosts an open house in her classroom each month to introduce teachers and interested parents to Montessori in the hope of sparking interest. Do you know anyone who might be interested in becoming a Montessori teacher?

To become a Montessori teacher, training beyond a bachelor's degree in education is required, and that takes time and costs money. And....you can see where this is going: another focus of the SCAMC board is fund-raising to provide sponsorship for teachers to help defray the costs of that training. An appeals letter was mailed to all SCAMC families recently. All of us on the board hope all parents will consider giving to support our students in the pres-

ent and to ensure the continuity of the program in the coming years. Dollars given now help keep that teacher pipeline filled.

-Chris Coppen, SCAMC President

IQ: continued

•[MONTESSORI The Science Behind the Genius](#) by Angeline Stoll Lillard

•[Montessori Today](#) by Paula Polk Lillard

•www.montessori-ami.org

•www.kidstalknews.com

•[Parenting for a New World](#) (AMI/USA publication available in school library)

Attend Parent Information Nights

They can be a great learning opportunity. Having studied engineering in college, I have always loved math. Yet I have been fascinated seeing Montessori teachers using Montessori materials to turn an abstract concept into a concrete one. It's magical. My favorites are square roots, the Pythagorean theorem, and the area of a circle. If you think that you don't have a math mind, you'll be surprised at what you understand after a Montessori math lesson.

Primary Montessori Programs

If you have preschool age children, consider local primary Montessori programs. Unfortunately, in Spokane the only choice is private school. Hopefully, we can change this in the future.

THE MONTESSORI ADVOCATE

Newsletter of the Spokane Community Advocates for Montessori Curriculum

DECEMBER 2007



What in the World is Pedagogy?

By Amalie Day
SCAMC President-elect

In early November I attended the Public Montessori School Conference in Hartford, Conn. The conference, sponsored by the USA office of AMI (Association Montessori Internationale), gathered representatives from public school Montessori programs throughout the country to discuss issues facing public programs.

On the plane to and from Hartford, I read the book [MONTESSORI The Science Behind the Genius](#) by Angeline Stoll Lillard. My older child is a fifth grader and my younger child is a third grader in the Jefferson Montessori program. Between the book and the conference, I think I finally get Montessori. And frankly, I am in awe of Maria Montessori. I know many of you entered your child's name in the lottery because you wanted a Montessori education for your child and you understood the Montessori concepts all along. I can only attribute my previous ignorance to years of rigid Catholic education despite the best efforts of Paula and Linda (my children's teachers) to educate me.

Don't get me wrong, it's not that I was clueless about Montessori. From time spent in my children's classrooms and lessons received at Parent Information Nights I had bits and pieces of Montessori. But now I think I see the whole picture. This revelation brought out some conflicting emotions in me. I feel incredibly fortunate that my children have this wonderful opportunity, yet I feel like a bad parent for not knowing about and not enrolling them in a primary (preschool) Montessori program.

IMPROVING YOUR MONTESSORI IQ

For those of you who, like me, entered your child's name in the lottery because you were looking for an alternative to your neighborhood school, here are some ways for you to learn more about the Montessori method of education.

Read

•[To Educate the Human Potential](#) by Dr. Maria Montessori

continued on back

Before the conference began, we toured the host school, the Hartford Montessori Magnet School. This public school, which includes a primary program (3-6 years old) and an elementary program (6-9 and 9-12 years old), has an enrollment of 330 students, and draws from 27 school districts in the greater Hartford area.

The new building we toured was designed with input from Montessori teachers and administrators. In a word, it is spectacular! Everything in the building, classrooms, and outdoor spaces was designed with the Montessori pedagogy in mind.

We heard from Tim Nee, the principal of the school, who spoke of the hard work and persistence it took from administrators and program supporters

continued inside

Pedagogy: continued

to move the program from a cooperative town program to a public magnet school.

In addition to the building itself, countless hours were (and still are) spent educating school district officials and lawmakers about the Montessori pedagogy and convincing them that a one-size-fits-all approach to applying district standards, hiring teachers, and structuring a school day is not the best approach for their Montessori program. The goal is to keep the Montessori classrooms authentic, and they've succeeded in making some big changes which help them get closer to that goal.

Some methods they use include:

- Facilitating state teaching certification for AMI-trained teachers.
- Scheduling district-mandated classes adjacent to the lunch period allowing for uninterrupted work periods.
- Developing Outcome Level and Assessment Programs designed to be non-intrusive to the classroom, yet satisfy district officials.

Nee's mantra is "work the system." When told of a new district policy, he doesn't say, "This won't work for Montessori." He says, "How can I make this work for Montessori?"

On the second day of the conference we heard from Virginia McHugh Goodwin, Executive Director of AMI/USA. She highlighted six cities throughout the United States where she feels exciting things are happening in public school Montessori programs. Much to my surprise, one of the six was Spokane. She said Spokane has a "dynamite parent organization." She talked of setting up an AMI Consultant visit to Spokane. AMI had to contact the parent group not the school district. She marveled at how involved the parents are in Spokane. At first I was thrilled by this mention. Then I started really thinking about it. Do you know why AMI must contact the parent group (SCAMC) instead of the school district? Because

we don't have a Montessori program coordinator in Spokane! Yes, each school has a principal who is dedicated to the Montessori program, but the Montessori program represents only a fraction of their responsibilities. In accordance with the initial agreement between the parent group and the school district, the administrative aspects of keeping our AMI-Associated status and funding our public school Montessori program are the responsibility of the parents, not the school district. When I shared this with others at the conference they were flabbergasted. I could not find another public school Montessori program that operates this way. Our program's success is well-established, so I think it's time to ask the school district to pay the administrative costs.

At other schools, parents provide money for extras, not essentials. I heard about parent groups buying a van for "Going Out" trips. I heard about Parent Information Nights at which the parent groups provide money for a sit down dinner for the parents and students, and entertainment and supervision for the students while the parents attend the information sessions. Hopefully, SCAMC can work with our school district so that the money our parent group raises can be used to supplement our program, not cover the administrative costs needed to maintain an authentic Montessori program.

A break-out session called "Parent Involvement" was intended to help attendees "learn successful strategies to involve more parents in meaningful information nights and school activities." I attended this session because SCAMC is always trying to find ways to get more parents involved in the pro-



The Hartford school looks like Casa dei Bambini.

gram. My experience at Jefferson has been that the same core group of parents volunteer in the classroom, run pet patrol, chaperone field trips, and sit on SCAMC boards and committees. To me, it seems that some parents feel that their involvement ends when their child's name is selected in the lottery. I wanted to learn some new strategies for getting more parents involved. I definitely learned some new strategies, but I learned something even more important. I learned that

there are many levels of parent involvement, and that I shouldn't judge parent involvement just by a parent's attendance at school functions. Parent involvement means getting your child to school on time each day. Parent involvement also means reading to your child at home. I learned that just because parents aren't participating at school doesn't mean they're not involved.

Of course, I want all parents to be involved at home. But from a SCAMC point of view, I urge you to also get involved at school and on committees. Contact your child's teacher, your classroom liaison, your school's volunteer coordinator, a SCAMC board member, or an involved parent you know to learn how you can help. There are ongoing needs and short term projects.

At the conference I came up with my personal wish list for our Montessori program:

- Program Coordinator
- New Family Orientation
- Jefferson and Balboa programs under one roof
- Program Expansion/Primary Program
- More parents involved at school and on committees

•School district pays administrative costs
We are fortunate to have a public school Montessori program in Spokane, with outstanding teachers and supportive principals. Hopefully with the continued support of Montessori parents we can one day host the Public Montessori School Conference in our brand new Spokane Montessori Magnet School.

Over the course of the three days I heard the word pedagogy or the phrase Montessori pedagogy at least 40 times. As an engineer, I think I have a decent vocabulary, but I had no idea what pedagogy meant. When I got home I consulted my dictionary and the internet. Pedagogy is defined as the function or work of a teacher, teaching; the art or science of teaching; education; instructional meetings. According to AMI's website: "Montessori pedagogy is a comprehensive and continuous response to the vital exigencies of the total human being, adapted to each stage of development." For more information, visit montessori-ami.org/montessori/pedagogy.

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**RAISE THE MERCURY:
BUY COFFEE**

We need to raise \$21,000 for our 2007-2008 SCAMC budget. You can help, and get some holiday shopping done at the same time. Order forms for Montessori coffee were in your child's packet last Monday. Coffee makes a great stocking stuffer or gift basket goodie.

