

From the President

This past week SCAMC hosted a splendid evening. We had a pizza dinner, a movie for the kids, and Paula Gibson-Smith, one of our Jefferson teachers, moderated a video-viewing and discussion for the parents on Maria Montessori's principles of education. (See Mindi Finch's article inside this newsletter.) One of the principles has intrigued me - that the best learning occurs in contexts of interest. As I think about this, I first have to get past that groaner of my own education (from elementary school all the way through two graduate degrees) that sometimes we have to learn things we're not interested in because, well, it's part of getting a well-rounded education! (I recall with joy the day that I learned that my high school geometry teacher Mrs. Hurwitz was right: it makes sense and has application.) Then I am educated about what had been an erroneous thought: that starting with what interests the child doesn't mean the child stops with what holds his/her interest but, rather, that's a starting point for an incredible journey of discovery.

It's sort of like a nicely meandering hike on a spring afternoon, Montessori's concept of interest starts where the child starts, then takes off and grows and builds from there, moving from step to step. I think of my son Andrew, a first grader. He accompanied my wife Mary and me to a political caucus back in February. His curiosity about what we were doing and why led him next to a general interest in presidential history and then to who was the "best" president and why, and then to various issues presidents must grapple with, peace, war, and the like. Oh yes, then to some reflecting on social issues, as he learned that if one of the present candidates is elected, he'd be the first African-American president and if another, she'd be the first woman president. A somewhat tedious Saturday afternoon at a caucus turned into a process of discovery and learning!

The point for us all, perhaps, is to honor the passion and curiosity children have about their world, and to nurture that passion and curiosity. That gives us, as parents, a huge responsibility - something we share with our teachers - we become partners in educating our children. Thanks to our teachers for sharing that journey with us, and thanks to our children for being our guides on where to walk with them.

-Chris Coppen, SCAMC President

Dear Reader,

My name is Sydney. I am a 5th grader at Jefferson Elementary. One of the reasons I enjoy Montessori is that we have so much interactive work. With special materials, we are able to do things like fractions, division and multiplication as early as first grade. We also start studying language in first grade, including parts of a sentence, verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc...

Another reason I enjoy Montessori is that we have really fun writing projects. Last year, we got to write our own creation myths and tall tales! Our weekly spelling project always involves a fun writing project. We also get to choose our own spelling words.

My last written reason for liking Montessori is that we have at least one field trip per month. A couple times each year we go to the Herzog Family Center to read to the pre-schoolers. We have gone to the MAC, Ice Palace and many other field trips this year. We have a garden to care for at Manito Park. We also go on a three day campout every Spring.

Thanks. Follow the child.

-Sydney Cathcart, age 10

Newsletter of the Spokane Community Advocates for Montessori Curriculum

THE MONTESSORI ADVOCATE



MARCH 2008

“I Get To Be Your Teacher!”

By Erin Schmidt (AKA Ms. Tuesday)
Montessori Teacher-in-Training

This month, I had the great pleasure of observing in Sharon Bowman's classroom at Jefferson Elementary for two consecutive weeks as part of my Montessori training. I took leave from my “undercover job” as a kindergarten teacher at Regal, and what a luxurious experience it was. I got to act invisibly, my job being simply to see. It was a struggle not to interact with children, but I was able to notice such variety and depth and wonder going on in the classroom. At any given moment, there were at least seven different types of work being done. I even watched as students mounted bees on sticks as part of a pollination experiment, and I was there the day the brine shrimp hatched. I took copious notes from a tides lesson.

A part of me wished I could be 11 and join in this learning.

At one point, I left the room to observe Jefferson's literacy fair. A young Montessori child came to me, wrapped her arms around me, exclaimed, “Ms. Tuesday! You are a legend in our class! You are the best teacher! We love you so much!”

Is this real? Did this happen? What do I say? I tell her she is lovely and hug her tightly and ask all about her life. How can she possibly know that she and all of her classmates today, right now, and in my memories of when I got to be the teacher in their Montessori environments (led by their fantastic Montessori teachers), helped me see my life.

They gave me the hope that I could teach this way forever. I sense that the other teachers here had a moment similar to this one, when they realized their worlds could be opened up this wide.

Throughout my time at Jefferson, there are many others whom I love and see. When I think of some of them and the possibility that I may be able to actually be their real teacher someday, I am giddy with anticipation. I get to be your teacher?! I get to be a Montessori teacher? Oh boy! It is decided: I've made the right choice. I feel so fortunate to be

These are my people,
I think to myself,
and I miss them.

involved in this larger Montessori community of parents/teachers/kids/school. Conversations within the parts of this collective whole remind me what Montessori truly looks like, and I can feel it in

my blood. It's as if simply being here has made me become more alive and aware, thus waking up my brain and making it interested. These are my people, I think to myself, and I miss them. This is what real teaching feels like. I love this.

Because of the generosity of SCAMC, I am in the process of my three-summer Montessori training. I am months away from my second summer at the Montessori Training Center of Minneapolis, which conveniently happens to be near my hometown, and am immersed in coursework throughout the school year as well. There are days when I spend all night coloring a timeline, totally absorbed, and realize that it is the next day and I had better get to kindergarten. Because of my crafty nature, this is an

continued inside: Teacher

Teacher: continued



Erin Schmidt

activity that I enjoy. Phyllis Pottish-Lewis, a well-known and inspiring teacher based in the San Francisco area, is my trainer. Although I do have both a teaching degree and a M.Ed. in literacy, so much of the training I experienced this last summer was made of stuff I've never seen before in education. When we were learning some bits on math, my brain was positively blown open. I took to the bead frame like a kindergartner just beginning to read. And the botany! I cannot walk by a house plant these days without noticing its leaf pattern or pondering the root structure.

To be honest, I have been overwhelmed at times -with learning the entire universe and all. The intensity of training is very rigorous, but I'm glad for it. I consider myself lucky to be a part of all this. In two weeks, I will complete my second observation, this time in St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands: yet another perk in this Montessori life.

Two Thumbs Up!

Thank you to each and every one of our families that were able to make it to our Parent Info night on Tuesday, the 11th. It was also such a great experience to see families from across town and get to know each other a little better. What a fantastic community we have. We learned a lot, had some great conversation, several "aha moments" and the kids were so great during the movie.

Here is one of my "aha moments." Montessori is preparing our children for today's work force. Historically, public education systems have been based on a factory model. We have fewer employers in our country who hire based on such a model. They are looking for independent, problem solving, reasoning, collaborative employees. The Montessori model fits today's work force to a T.

Special thanks to Rebecca Lee and her staff for providing childcare so parents could participate knowing their kids were safe.

Below you will find links to Angeline Lillard's *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*. If any of you feel compelled to make a purchase to donate to your classrooms' lending libraries, I know there are an awful lot of us who would really appreciate it. Or if you simply want one for yourself, the resource is here for you.

For those that could not make it, we will see you next time.

-Mindi Finch
SCAMC South President

DVD: http://www.montessori-science.org/montessori_science_dvd.htm

Book: [http://www.montessori-science_genius.htm](http://www.montessori-science.org/montessori_science_genius.htm)

Boost the Budget

We're over halfway through the school year, but just over one-third of the way to our fundraising goal. We still need to raise more than \$13,000! Thank you to all the families who have donated to SCAMC this year. If you have not yet donated, please send your tax-deductible contribution today. Why, you ask? Because:

- District 81 does not pay for all the enrichment materials in a Montessori classroom.
- District 81 does not pay for our Montessori teachers to attend Montessori continuing education and professional development courses.
- District 81 does not pay for non-Montessori teachers to become Montessori trained and certified.

Who pays? SCAMC does. Sustaining the Montessori program at Balboa and Jefferson is SCAMC's responsibility, so SCAMC will keep asking for all parents to contribute.

If we stop asking for contributions we'll have to start asking even tougher questions: Which materials (math, science, reading, grammar, etc.) can our children do without? Which teachers don't need to stay connected to the Montessori teaching method? How many children will be denied access to the Montessori program because we don't have enough trained teachers?

The Spokane Public Schools Montessori Program offers a specialized education alternative for children in our community with the additional benefits that come from being part of the public school system. (Did you know that a private Montessori education in Spokane can cost \$5000 per year?) Show your commitment to your child and the program by sending your tax-deductible contribution today. It is important that each of us gives generously to keep the program strong.

-Amalie Day
SCAMC President-Elect

WE'RE GETTING WARMER

We need your help to raise \$21,000 for our 2007-2008 SCAMC budget. Please send your checks to:
SCAMC
P.O. Box 1181
Spokane, WA 99210

Payable to SCAMC,
Thanks.



Goal:
\$21,000

\$7,455
so far

checkitout.org

Our new web site is up and running. Although adjustments to the content and layout are still in progress, it's available now for you to check out at the address below.

Thanks to web designer Daryl Burch, and SCAMC parents Jan Karel and Scott Jamison for getting this off the ground. The web site was made possible by dedicated donations from anonymous SCAMC parents and the continuing cost for maintaining the site is being donated by a SCAMC parent.

If you have any comments or suggestions, please feel free to contact Sandra Billings at sandrabilings@comcast.net.

www.spokanepublicmontessori.org