

"How Do Children Learn?" Our Montessori School - Since 1972 - Northern Westchester



Now that I have made the final payment on my son's college tuition I have discovered - perhaps - the way I should have started this journey...

OK - let's start on a more inspiring note! What do Jeff Bezos of Amazon.com, Larry Page and Sergie Brin - the self made billionaires of Google and Steven Case - founder of America Online have in common? They all had a Montessori Education. Plus Katherine Graham, Owner and Editor of The Washington Post, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, Ann Frank, Princes William & Harry, Chefs Julia Child and Alice Waters and even rap star Sean (P. Diddy) Combs had Montessori Educations. Speaking of thinking out of the box!



I had a phone call from the very engaging Betty Hengst, Founder of "Our Montessori School" in Northern Westchester, a few weeks ago. She told me that she loved reading my local articles and that I should know about her school for my real estate clients moving into the area. She was very compelling so although I told her that I was very busy with

my real estate clients I would come up for a tour. Students come from over 40 Westchester and Ct. Towns to her five schools.



I met with Betty Hengst at one of her Yorktown "Our Montessori Schools." I was escorted through the orderly calm environment by Betty and her Executive Director, Elizabeth Silverman, who has been there for 30 years. What I discovered - perhaps even in the Montessori Method - was a bright and sunny school filled with calm and engaged students working

independently under the eye of serene teachers. There is a very low teacher/student ratio. There are no rows of desks. The teachers do not teach by rote but encourage discovery. They are there to assist but will stand back in order to allow the child to make the discovery on their own. Each class has children with a three year age span. As a family would work - under idyllic situations - the younger ones learn from the older children

and the older children gently guide their younger class mates. Therefore a child spends three years with the same teacher. Another remarkable fact - I read about the staff and they have all been there for an average of 20 years. They teach with respect and partnership with the child. The children also learn to self correct (rather than be WRONG) and see this as a natural step in the learning process. They learn to be responsible and self efficient. There is then a sense of Progress and not shame. In Montessori, children progress at their own pace.



Italian Educator, Maria Montessori, studied children. Where people would ask "How should we teach," Montessori replied, "How do children learn?" She wanted to develop life long learners. She discovered that between birth and age six there is a fleeting window of time during which children have a remarkable ability to learn. Montessori also saw that children "develop concentration by fixing attention on some task they are performing with their hands." For example, with the use of remarkable manipulatives they learn first hand what things such as fractions are - parts of a whole that must combine to equal one unit - through the use of simple puzzles. The handles on the puzzle pieces, as Elizabeth pointed out, also develop the muscles in the hand to prepare them for writing with a pencil or pen. Plus, there is a very successful picture/word reading system that Betty Hengst developed that enables children to read at their own pace at a very young age and they ascend quickly in ability. Since children learn at their own pace, children joining a class at mid year or any time after the traditional start time of a semester fit right in.



There is a lot of freedom in a Montessori Classroom. There are no set bathroom, nap or snack times. I told Betty and Elizabeth that when my daughter was in pre-school I used to get an urgent call from the nursery school while I was at work that she was to be picked up immediately! Why? She had fallen asleep. "So wake her up!" They said that it was a signal that something was WRONG. After this happened a second or probably a third time, I asked my daughter why she fell asleep.

"Mommy, that bean bag chair is so soft!" Well THAT would never happen in a Montessori Class!



"Foreign" Language instruction is not treated as foreign at all but as a natural organic discovery which they learn via the oral method. There is conversation, games and tasks where they learn the word in their new language. There is French instruction at three. The study of Latin comes later with incorporation of common phrases to their vocabulary- Tempus Fugit, Habeas Corpus, Caveat Emptor - all leading to an international understanding. If a teacher has a second language such as the teacher from Slovakia that would be able to teach Russian - it is incorporated. There are Music and Dance Programs and additional Ballet Classes can be arranged.



The Montessori Method can be used from the start. There is a Parent/Infant program available which enables the parent to understand Montessori strategies in order to respond to their child's needs and development. There are infant programs available for all day care from the age of six weeks to 15 months. They are allowed to have their own schedule for feeding and sleeping. There are all day and half day Toddler Programs. Elementary School extends through the 6th grade. Extended day programs are available - from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Programs: Infants, Nursery/Kindergarten, Toddler, Elementary, plus a Summer Camp. They also have unique policies

such as "No Fundraising" to take the time and energy of parents and teachers. There is also another policy - that should you want to take your child out of the school they have very generous terms.



Contact them for a tour and a wealth of amazing materials on the benefits of a Montessori Education. There is an Open House Tuesday, March 6, 2012 from 8-9 p.m. at all schools.

When readying myself to leave I asked "Why "Our Montessori School?" To which Betty Hengst said with that twinkle in her eye "It is Our Home."



Our Montessori School

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