



December 2010

Newsletter for Parents of SAMA Member Schools

Dear Parents

In the Secret of Childhood, Maria Montessori writes, “The children’s parents are not his makers, but his guardians. They must protect and care for him, in the deepest sense, as a sacred mission that goes far beyond the interests and ideas of external life.” She continues, “For such a mission, parents must purify the love nature has implanted in their hearts, and they must understand that such love is part of a deeper guidance which must not be contaminated by egoism or apathy. It is for parents to visualise and take up the social question facing us at the present day, the struggle to establish the rights of the child in the world.”

The work that directresses do every day with your children in the environments that they have prepared so carefully is aimed at fulfilling this role as well. Bearing in mind that children often spend more than half of their waking hours at school, it is imperative that all adults in the child’s life work together in standing up for the rights of the child.

But, what are these rights that we are speaking of from a Montessori perspective? Here are a couple of rights that may provide food for thought:

1. **The freedom of choice.** Children should be offered the freedom to choose their activities for a variety of carefully planned and prepared materials. In the school environment, we have our own set of guidelines, at home, you could ask yourself if the toy or activity you are presenting to your child has purpose. How will the child benefit from this? Will it engage their concentration, and whole personality? Perhaps, as you are gearing up for the seasonal holidays, you could put some extra effort into the gifts you buy your child over this time. Do you remember when they were somewhere between 18 months and two years? Can you remember the fascination of the Tupperware cupboard, or the empty shampoo bottles? Were the expensive toys often neglected in favour of these less assuming, yet certainly more useful objects? Choice should be based

on knowledge. A child given the freedom to choose anything may make unsafe or inappropriate choices. It is our responsibility to offer sensible, healthy choices that are aimed at the child’s best development.

2. **The freedom to work uninterrupted.** It is interesting how compelled we feel, as adults to praise a child who ‘gets it right’. The little one finding the right lid for the Tupperware bowl, through trial and error, and often uncoordinated actions, is immediately pounced with exclamations of joy and delight. While we as adults are so proud to see our little one’s accomplish great things, for them the accomplishment is more internal. It is the way that they are building their life experiences and what they will base future actions on. Consider the little 3 year old who builds the pink tower correctly for the first time. This will not be the last time they do this work. Our adult mind would say, “Well, that’s one more tick off my list! Pink tower done and dusted.” The child on the other hand will repeat this activity over and over, each time internalising and assimilating a different aspect of what the material has to offer. An example may be that in time to come, when she finds herself having to carry a couple of objects, may spontaneously put the larger object at the bottom and the smaller objects on top, as this forms the most stable stack. Had we interrupted the child with exclamations of well done and ‘clever girl’, they may too have felt, “Well, ok, I’ve obviously done all there is to do with this tower,” and never returned to it again.

Montessori often quoted Kahlil Gibran's words, 'work is love made visible.' Remember that the work of the child is to construct himself, he builds his character through his work. His work differs from the work of the adult. We work toward the end goal with the least possible effort, and the most direct route. The child however puts great effort into his work and needs to take detours of exploration along the way. Time is of no consequence to him.

As I finish off this final newsletter of the year, may I take this opportunity to thank you all for the support that I have had from you over the past year. I have 'met' so many interested parents through these newsletters, and value your input and comments. May you have a wonder-filled break with your children, a peaceful festive season, and safe travels to all who are travelling.

I leave you with two short excerpts from one of my favourite books, *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

*"Good morning," said the little prince.
"Good morning," said the merchant.
He was a merchant selling sophisticated pills intended to quench one's thirst. If a single pill was swallowed once a week, the need to drink disappeared.
"Why are you selling those?" asked the little prince.
"Because it saves a lot of time" said the merchant.
"Experts have worked it all out. You save fifty-three minutes a week."
"And what does one do with those fifty-three minutes?"
"Whatever one wishes."
"If I had fifty-three minutes to spend," said the little prince, "I would walk very slowly towards a spring of fresh water..."*

*"Good morning," said the little prince.
"Good morning," said the railway signalman.
"What do you do here?" asked the little prince.
"I sort out the travellers, in bundles of a thousand," said the signalman. "I shunt the trains carting them, now to the right, now to the left."
And a brilliantly lit-up express train, roaring like thunder, shook the signal-box as it rushed by.
"They are in a great hurry," said the little prince.
"What are they looking for?"
"The locomotive driver doesn't even know himself," said the signalman.
And a second brilliantly lit express train thundered by in the opposite direction.
"Are they already coming back?" asked the little prince.
"Those are not the same ones," said the signalman. "It is an exchange."
"They were not satisfied where they were?"
"No-one is ever satisfied where he is," said the signalman.
And they heard the roaring thunder of a third brilliantly lit express train.
"Are they pursuing the first travellers?" asked the little prince.
"They are pursuing nothing at all," said the signalman. "They sleep in there, or they yawn. Only the children press their noses against the window-panes."
"Only the children know what they are looking for," said the little prince. "They dote on a rag doll and it becomes very important to them, and if it is taken away from them, they cry..."
"They are lucky," said the signalman.*

Until 2011!
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