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Newsletter for Parents of SAMA Member Schools

Dear Parents

Already the first term is behind us! For most, it has been a busy one – settling in new children, settling in new parents and getting down to work!

Many Montessori parents question the advantage to the vertical grouping found in Montessori schools. It is a foreign concept to most of us that were brought up in a grade system, where we were put into a class according to our age. Along with the questions on mixed age groups, come the concerns about children's developmental; stages, and whether or not certain behaviours are 'just a phase'.

Montessori classes are separated into three year cycles so that the child is placed with others in a classroom of peers that are in the same developmental stage as they are. The children benefit from this arrangement in many ways:

- Younger children learn from older children through observation.
- Older children can present work to younger children – this benefits the younger child and the older child's sense of self esteem and competence is enhanced.
- The daily interaction between the older and younger children gives them the advantage of observing conflict resolution and other social skills at their level of understanding and stage of development. Older children learn tolerance, and patience with the younger children and begin to see themselves as role models. The younger children in turn look up to older children and turn to them for guidance and help.
- Because we encourage children to work at their own pace, they are not pressured to achieve what others in their age group are achieving. This not only benefits the child who needs more time to consolidate information and skills, but gives the child who is ready to move onto more advanced work the opportunity to do so.
- A sense of community is enhanced, where everyone plays a role in the smooth running of the class.
- The behaviours that frustrate us as parents (like children refusing to put things away), often don't present themselves in the classroom where the peer group quickly step in and correct the issue. This is done in such a way that the child doesn't feel like s/he is being reprimanded, and easily complies.

From Souzanne Zink on the 'montessoriforeveryone' website, "The dramatic change is the leadership role they take. Some take younger children under their wing a lot and some just help out here and there, but they all seem to make huge leaps in their empathy and oral language skills."

This phenomenon is at work not only at the 3-6 years level, but also all the way through 6-9, 9-12 and as I have experienced in the last few years in our middle school, between 12 and 15 years as well. At all ages the favourite quote of Dr, Montessori is appropriate: ***Please help me to do it myself.***

Until next month, have a safe and enjoyable holiday with your children.

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