

Montessori's Success in Central Kentucky... And Beyond

With the start of the 2011-2012 school year it is wonderful to see the growth of Montessori programs in the central Kentucky region. In 1965, I attended the first Montessori school in Kentucky. It was a primary program for children age three to six, located in Lexington. In 1987, after taking our primary Montessori training in Italy, my wife and I started Woodford County's first Montessori primary program, Versailles Montessori School, (VMS). At that time there was a Montessori school in Frankfort and several in Lexington. Those schools served children from age three through the sixth grade.

In the fall of 1994, VMS expanded its services and also offered programs for toddler and elementary. It was the first Montessori toddler program in the bluegrass region. Also in 1994, VMS, along with three Lexington Montessori schools, collaborated and formed the first Montessori middle school in Kentucky. Now, in 2011, the first Kentucky Montessori high school will begin with former students from VMS and other Lexington Montessori schools making up the inaugural class.

The high school is in a working partnership with the University of Kentucky. UK's College of Education offered the students the use of the library, computer labs, and science labs. Many other university departments have shown an interest in working with these high school students in mentoring programs and various learning experiences. The Montessori high school is located at 472 Rose Street (St. Augustine's Chapel) and is excited to be in the heart of the UK campus.

Part of the reason for Montessori's success in central Kentucky is that it works with students as individuals instead of as a "one size fits all" classroom of students, allowing for each student to excel at their pace and to delve deeper in areas they have particular interest. Montessori places emphasis on understanding concepts and creating opportunities for the students to apply them in their daily lives.

The concepts students learn begin in the toddler program and although they aren't directly of an academic nature, they support academic development in the future. Concepts such as independence (e.g. fixing a bowl of cereal, putting on shoes, hanging up a coat), concentration (e.g. focusing on a material and repeating the exercise for 20, 30 or even 40 minutes), social skills (e.g. learning to be patient, asking for things instead of grabbing, saying please and thank you).

In primary, (3-6 years) the children begin to learn additional concepts, but now along with further development of what they learned as a toddler, the educational concepts are directly tied to academics. Addition is putting items together and counting them for a total. Multiplication is putting the identical number of items together and counting for a total. A verb is an action, a noun is a person, place or thing. An adjective describes a noun. Writing is another way to communicate your thoughts and ideas. Reading is a way to understand someone's ideas with out having to speak directly to the person. Research allows you to delve deeper into a topic. Montessori Kindergarten students regularly perform voluntary research on topics they are interested in, further strengthening their academic skills.

In elementary, students expand their understanding on how to conduct research and also delve deeper into the world of mathematics, language, oration, historic cultures, local culture, science, art and music. Montessori elementary students learn how to be an effective mentor to younger students.

The Montessori elementary curriculum also supports character development and work ethic on a daily basis. The students develop a sense of what is fair and just by having regular agenda meetings to discuss various community issues that arise throughout the week. Often times, they can be found standing up for those who need support from their peers.

Montessori students develop a work ethic by having daily class chores they are responsible for which is supported at home too. They are responsible for keeping their classroom clean. They do their laundry (table clothes, napkins and rags), vacuum, wipe their tables and chairs, set their table for lunch and clean up after it is over. They feed the barn animals and gather eggs.

Montessori elementary students learn about being an entrepreneur and money. They apply that knowledge to a business they run and profit from. They learn about the value of a dollar and experience the warm feeling of being philanthropic. VMS elementary students help in the community.

All of these experiences support them when they go to middle school, high school and college. Montessori students learn to question, to solve problems and to think outside the box. Just look at what some of these famous Montessori students have accomplished.

Sergey Brin and Larry Page, founders of Google
Katharine Graham (deceased), owner/editor of the Washington Post
Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis (deceased), editor, former first lady
Sean 'P.Diddy' Combs, musician, producer and businessman
Anne Frank, famous diarist from world war II
Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Nobel Prize winner for Literature
Jeff Bezos, financial analyst, founder, AMAZON.COM
Prince William and Prince Harry, English royal family
T. Berry Brazelton, noted pediatrician and author
Julia Child, famous chef and author
William Wright, creator of the Sims computer games
Dakota Fanning, actress
Melissa and Sarah Gilbert, actress

For further reading on the benefits of a Montessori experience visit
www.montessorianswers.com/after-montessori.html

Have a wonderful, productive school year.

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