

## 2/27/09 *Notes from Nirvair*

“The pair were moving slowly, spending a lot of time at the surface. The mother surprised us by allowing her calf to turn toward *Pacific Storm*. A mother whale often interposes herself between her calf and potential danger, but this mother was an easygoing, Montessori sort of parent, and she let her baby explore.”

Kenneth Brower, “Still Blue”, *National Geographic*, March 2009.

There was a nod to Montessori education in an article about the magnificent blue whales in this month’s *National Geographic* magazine. Unexpected, it was fun to see Montessori becoming a recognizable part of the culture, and an acceptable adjective in the English language!

What is it about the Montessori parent that this author was trying to capture to paint a picture for us of this mama whale? Is it an accurate description? Montessori teachers are a little sensitive about being called easygoing because some people interpret this as not serious about learning or lacking structure and discipline. However, I think Montessori herself would appreciate this author’s use of the word. Here easygoing is not the same as permissive, anything goes. It is relaxed, unafraid, still present but able to step back and allow the youngster to own the moment. Although her natural instinct is to impose herself between her child and a new experience, she is able to sense that it is ok, has the courage to let go and allow her child to explore and discover for herself. I’m thinking that the photographer in the water with these enormous creatures must have had an easygoing Montessori sort of parent as well!

Montessori parents are a rare breed. It takes courage to let go, allow our children to explore and discover for themselves, and like this mama whale, trust the value of the learning that comes from their own experiences in the environment. It’s not easy to choose the road less traveled, a parenting style different from neighbors, relatives and friends, a school where learning happens in a different format. There are voices in the crowd (or in our own heads) that worry if children can really learn outside the traditional structures, without the familiar tests and measures. For a hundred years Montessori parents have trusted the method and realized its effectiveness and its value. Today’s Montessori parents have the additional benefit of published studies that provide the data to support experiential learning. The recent recommendations for 21st century education recognize the critical need for the skills that can only be acquired in an active learning community.

Collaborative learning, hands-on projects, manipulative materials may look different than typical learning activities but learning is happening nonetheless, and the learning is multidimensional. Montessori education doesn’t stop with knowledge and skills--what the learner knows and what they can do-- it extends to who the learner is, who the learner can become. Who the learner becomes is formed by the social relationships and interactions within the learning community, and through the rich exploratory learning activities that deliver the curriculum. Knowledge acquired through active learning processes such as those that happen in the Montessori classroom, becomes rooted in the whole being of the child, retained as a part of who the learner becomes. It’s different than “in one ear out the other” learning, memorizing answers, cramming for the test, being the passive receptacle.

We hope that you have found support at Khalsa Montessori School for your own adventures in learning and parenting. We all learn from each other every day. Thank you for supporting Montessori education and having the courage to trust the learning that happens from within your child. Thank you for being a Montessori sort of parent.