

## 9/5/08 *Notes From Nirvair*

Thank you for taking the time to come to our first parent night of the new school year. It was great to see so many families and I enjoyed meeting many of you for the first time. We appreciate your interest in understanding Montessori education and the way it is being presented in your child's classroom. We are fortunate to have so many involved families in the Khalsa Montessori School community.

Many parents ask us how they can support Montessori education at home. The Montessori work materials are really attractive and sometimes parents ask if they should have these kinds of activities available in the home environment. At the elementary level there is not a lot of homework and parents wonder if the child should be doing more work at home. As a holistic model of education, Montessori education appreciates the many ways that children learn and values a variety of learning activities and learning environments, including life at home.

Maria Montessori's method emerged after years of observing children. She was fascinated with the way babies learn language, the ability of young children to pick up the nuances of their culture, their desire to imitate the work of the adults, the joy of learning to use simple tools, the intense curiosity of elementary children to understand the world, where it came from and how things work. She watched adolescents thrive when given the opportunity to apply what they have learned to real life projects and to make a contribution to the community.

Montessori identified distinct phases of growth and learning which she called planes of development. These planes cover the ages of 0 to 6 (preschool), 6 to 12 (elementary), 12 to 18 (adolescent) and 18 to 24 (young adult). Each plane has its own sensitive periods for learning, which include key interests, critical skills and lessons. For example one of the sensitive periods for babies and toddlers is learning language (their own mother tongue, or several languages). The key lesson for babies is developing trust and a positive world view and for toddlers it is autonomy-- "me do it", or as my daughter used to say, "my byself". Preschoolers are making sense of all the impressions of the world they have absorbed during the first three years and begin to categorize and classify, such as distinguishing who's a boy and who's a girl. The language they have learned is codified as literacy emerges. Independence and initiative are key lessons as they continue to learn to do more and more for themselves and contribute to the family or classroom community. Elementary children take pleasure in working hard and the key lesson is industry. They are able to immerse themselves in physical chores, learning a musical instrument, playing a sport, giving their all to a task that captures their imagination. It is a sensitive period for learning about the world of people and nature, culture and science. Adolescence is a time for learning about my own identity, my place in the timeline of human history, in my community. It can be a time of great idealism and energy to change the world.

When you think about how you can help your child's learning success, we invite you to think about the whole child. There are so many kinds of learning going on at once. The

work of the head, the intellect is supported by the work of the hand--touching, feeling, working, making, exploring, doing. The work of the hand is inspired by the work of the heart, the passion, the inner drive, sharing and collaborating with others.

Here are some things you can do at home to support your child's Montessori experience:

1. Love your children. Accept them for who they are, just as they are, their perfect selves. Give them a positive view of themselves, the world and the people in it. They'll come to school believing in themselves and trusting the teachers, ready to collaborate with their peers.
2. Talk to your child. Ask open ended questions that require more than a one word answer. Find out their unique gifts and talents and support them. Listen to what they want to talk about. What are they interested in? Share what's important to you.
3. Read to your children and with your children. Books open up the world and give children a rich vocabulary and important background knowledge, making school more relevant. Get your child a library card.
4. Work with your children. Make dinner together, fold the laundry, dig in the garden. Let your child be a contributing member of the family. They will learn important skills, become more independent and build a self image that says "I am capable of making a difference." Even toddlers can pour cereal, match socks, push a vacuum.
5. Give your children rich cultural experiences. Seek out opportunities to hear different languages, hear new music, taste a variety of foods. Go to museums and concerts, play in the park, let them see that you are comfortable with people of all colors and kinds. They'll be prepared for a variety of people and experiences at school.
6. Enjoy the natural environment together. Learn the names of plants, insects, birds. Encourage curiosity. How did that hill get there? What does that bird eat? Why are there stripes in this rock? Find the answers together.
7. Encourage independence. Offer the "least amount of assistance necessary to do it myself." Find ways your children can be more self-sufficient. Avoid being a "helicopter parent"--don't hover.
8. Show your children the connection between freedom and responsibility. When you use your freedom to choose responsibly you get to keep it, and it grows. When you use your freedoms irresponsibly they go away. Your child will be ready to be a responsible member of the classroom community
9. Show an interest in school. Say positive things about school in front of your children. Show the children you like their teachers. Ask questions about the work they bring home. Help with homework, projects and research. Volunteer, get involved. Your child will see that school is important to you, and your child will feel like they belong.
10. Realize that what you teach is everything you are.