



Principal's Report

Shelagh Powell

Kia Ora everyone and welcome to the latest copy of the Courtyard Courier. Thank you to all those who have contributed to the many interesting articles inside, we hope you can find some time in your busy schedules to take a moment over a coffee or tea and enjoy them.

We have welcomed Maree Hawtin-Morrow to the teaching team this term and wish her well as she settles into a part-time teaching role in Room 1 alongside Danielle, Catherine and I. Maree has been away on a three-week teaching placement, but has now returned to us.

It appears that winter has taken its toll on everyone regarding colds, flu and other nasty bugs and so it is timely to appeal to you the community to keep children home if they are unwell. Vomiting and diarrhoea bugs predictably spread very quickly and our Policy 'Illness and Infectious Diseases' states that families are required to keep children home for 24 hours (minimum) or 48 hours (ideally) after vomiting and diarrhoea have stopped even if your child appears well. In this way the spread of bugs will be kept to a minimum. Latest news from the Ministry of Health indicates there is an increase in the number of people with the H1N1 flu virus; however, they are not expecting a repeat of last year's situation, nor are they recommending that schools and early childhood centres close. Nevertheless it is good practice to be vigilant and cautious.

The teaching team have been busy reviewing both our Head Lice and Transition to School procedures and welcome comments on our amendments. For those unsure of our Policy and Procedure review process, all policies and procedures requiring review are placed next to the sign in sheets for community comments prior to being adopted at Board meetings. We welcome your comments and interest in our policies, as these underpin and enhance the smooth and successful operation of our preschool from both a governance and management perspective. Recently a sub-committee has been working hard on a Cybersafety Policy and Procedure and this has been out to the community for response, so very soon we will be requesting families sign our Cybersafety Procedure.

The teaching team are continuing professional development. Debbie has started her studies toward a Montessori Diploma, Helen has commenced her third trimester toward her Montessori Diploma and as I mentioned, Maree has been on Teaching Practice, the final before her graduation at the end of the year. Paula and Danielle are beavering away on final papers that will see them reach completion of studies for a Bachelor of Teaching and Learning at the end of the year.

Reflective practice is the keystone to ensuring we maintain and improve quality outcomes for all stakeholders at the Courtyard and so to this end, the team are continually reviewing our teaching practice. Our current focus is "Our curriculum is informed by assessment, planning and evaluation (documented and undocumented) that demonstrates an understanding of children's learning, their interests, whanau and life contexts." It has begun some great debates and discussion at staff meetings, which ensures as educators we are all reflecting on current practice and seeking to improve.

I'm sure you will all agree that the extensions to both Room 1 and 2 look like they have always been there and has enhanced our outdoor area 100%. It has meant that we can still have some outside playtime while protected from the harsh weather conditions, and this will be more noticeable

Inside this Issue ...

Chairperson's Report
Page 2

Transitioning Your Child
To Primary School
Page 3

Is Giftedness a Growing
Trend?
Page 4

The Absorbent Mind
Page 5

Living With A Gifted
Child
Page 6

Television:
Friend or Foe?
Page 7

Beyond Five
Page 8

Profile: Catherine Doody
Page 9

Property
Page 9

In Brief ...
Page 10



when the sides are on and we can encase ourselves behind the barriers. A very big thank you to Emma Godfrey, our fabulous project manager who oversaw the planning, onsite job and completion thereof during the previous school holidays. Stage 2 is currently in the planning stage and we will be seeking community consultation on ideas and suggestions that may help us.

The next event for the community to rally around will be the Working Bee on Saturday 11 September.....more on this from Damien.

Bernie McCarthy (Sydney's mum) has been working alongside Katrina Greenslade (Pete's mum) to collate the Courtyard Cookbook and we are looking forward to offering the community the opportunity to purchase this soon.....could make an excellent Christmas present!

Keep warm, safe and healthy

Shelagh

Chairperson's Report

Jeff Horn

As you will be aware, since the last Courtyard Courier the first stage of the upgrade to the outdoor environment has been completed.

The extension has allowed our children to have outdoor time even when it has been wet. This is a great addition to the preschool and allows the school to make great use of both indoor and outdoor environments. I would like to say a big thank you on behalf of the Board to Emma Godfrey for all her work in project managing this extension to the preschool. She has done an amazing job, putting in a lot of time and effort to ensure it was completed during the school holidays and to such a high standard.

There were a couple of major changes contained in the recent budget that have affected the funding for the preschool, namely changes to GST, increasing from 12.5% to 15%, and changes to the funding levels for the 20 Hours ECE funding rates.

The changes to the ECE funding rates will represent a drop in funding of over 7% when these come into effect from next February. The Board has been busy looking into the impact of these changes. When ECE funding was introduced we took the step of increasing the rolls in both Room 1 and Room 2 to 25

children each day. We budgeted the roll being 22 in each class and have been fortunate to have a full roll of 25 children in each class as well as increased numbers in the full day and extended day programmes. Given these increased numbers, the Board at this stage will not have to make any changes to rates currently being charged. This includes absorbing the increase in the GST rate. Obviously the Board regularly reviews its budget and changes may be necessary in the future.

A positive initiative coming out of the budget is the increase in the 20 Hours ECE funding to now include five year olds, allowing parents the option of keeping their children at the preschool for longer. This will allow their children to access the full three year Montessori programme.

We are nearing the end of winter and I hope all families and whanau are keeping warm, managing to keep clear of the winter illnesses and are looking forward to spring.

Jeff

The Courtyard Quiz Night Is Coming

Date will be advised soon and then get your team together for another great night of trivia and fun



Transitioning Your Child To Primary School

Paula Scott

“The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind. If we therefore mind this embryo as our most precious treasure, we will be working for the greatness of humanity”

Maria Montessori

Transitioning your child from preschool to primary school is often an uncertain time for both families and children. There is a sense of loss for leaving the safe and familiar, to enter the uncharted waters of the primary education system. Every parent hopes for the best, that their child will be liked by others, that they will settle quickly and be happy, make friends and most of all, that they will succeed. As Montessori teachers in a three to six year mixed age classroom, we work closely alongside children and families/whanau during their final four-six months with us in readiness for moving through to primary school.

We aim to support families to be as confident and ready for the move as possible. We forward plan for the child to provide a variety of experiences to support their learning in settings which offer them a rich variety of materials and plenty of opportunities for collaborative learning both with children of varying ages and abilities and with adults. Opportunities for group learning experiences and individual learning allows each child the time, space, resources and support to follow their interests in their process of self-creation.

A child's social development and the learning of academic skills are both important and we believe children's dispositional attributes such as confidence, risk taking, perseverance and trust influence how successfully a child's development can evolve. As teachers we sensitively provide experiences which increase the difficulty, complexity and challenges of activities to meet chronological age spans and children's increased understandings. Much of this is in the hope that when a child is ready to move through to primary school, they will be ready.

As part of our transition practice we invite the new entrant teachers from the primary schools we feed into, to visit our preschool. This gives primary teachers a much clearer understanding of where their new children have come from and promotes a closer working relationship between preschool and primary school. It supports us in our aim of readying the child for school by also readying the primary school for the child. Families experience this as a link between home and their local community, hopefully creating a win/win situation for everyone.

When a child is not quite ready for primary school the problems with developmentally inappropriate practice are that in such situations, children exhibit higher levels of stress, and in the long term, this may be harmful to these children developing favourable attitudes towards school and learning.

In the short term, children may have difficulties settling in, forming friendships and developing appropriate behaviours. Anxious children may display nervous behaviours such as an inability to form meaningful friendships, enter play and show understanding or acceptance of others.

Therefore the information we share with parents and schools can inform, educate and empower parents so that they are better able to plan for their child in ways that support and guide them in a smooth transition.

Lately our transition to school procedure has led us into a process of self review. This is particularly timely as we have three new teachers on board and a significant number of children transitioning to school between now and the new term in 2011.

- We now ensure that each child's transition to school letter is posted to the new entrant teacher at least one week before the child's first school visit.
- A few days later the teacher responsible for writing the letter will contact the new entrant teacher to discuss the content of the letter and generally discuss the child.
- An opportunity will be offered for a face to face chat if either teacher or parent feels this is necessary.
- A teacher will meet parent and child at the school on the first visit at 8.45am to support transition into the classroom and will leave after the bell rings. The child enters the classroom with their parent.

As these changes are part of our regular process of self-review, they have not been formally adopted until we have revisited how successful these new strategies prove to be. So watch this space and remember that your own thoughts, feelings and observations in regard to transitioning your child to primary school are warmly invited.

Paula

Kildays Nit-A-Way Spray

**Wash hair with normal shampoo and towel dry.
Apply solution to hair and let dry. Leave in for up to ten days.
Re-apply after each hair wash.**

Available from Hardings Chemists, Beckenham



Is Giftedness a Growing Trend?

Danielle Graham

The term 'gifted' is an interesting concept to consider and it is often used to describe children who show a range of exceptional performances in many contexts. Gifted and talented children have been around for generations, however we have not been as aware of them as we are today, therefore exactly how far have we evolved and is it possible that because the term 'gifted' is so well known in today's society children are being deemed 'gifted' when they are just simply extremely talented? Back before the term 'gifted' was fabricated it was perceived among most that if a child was 'gifted' then in some way their gift would show. However 'gifted' children can be tricky to spot as a 'gifted' child can be very capable in several learning and development areas but can require support in another area. This can provide confusion when determining if a child is gifted or not.

The Montessori early childhood environment is a very rich environment, which promotes an independent and self creation style of learning and development in all children. The environment provides the freedom for children to follow their own learning style and extend themselves if interested. Therefore it is often in this environment where 'gifted' children are noticed.

Defining a 'gifted' child is not an easy task, as in today's world children are being provided with more and more exposure to

learning experiences, and therefore have a better general knowledge than children from previous generations. This provides children with the opportunity, if they choose to take it, to consolidate new knowledge presented to them at a faster rate, resulting in very 'talented' children. However are these children 'extremely bright' or 'gifted'?

Gagne is a researcher who has dedicated his time to observe 'gifted' children and he defines giftedness as, "the possession of natural abilities or aptitudes at levels significantly beyond what might be expected for one's age, in any domain of human ability" (2003). The key to Gagne's view of giftedness is that it defines outstanding potential rather than outstanding performance. Gagne argues that we should not use the terms 'giftedness' and 'talented' synonymously. Rather, he suggests that we should use these terms selectively to identify two different stages in a highly able student's journey from high potential to high performance.

The following table by Janice Szabos provides a very good comparison between a child who is 'extremely bright' and a child who is 'gifted'.

Bright Child

Gifted Child

<i>Knows the answers</i>	<i>Asks the questions</i>
<i>Interested</i>	<i>Is highly curious</i>
<i>Is attentive</i>	<i>Is mentally and physically involved</i>
<i>Has good ideas</i>	<i>Has wild and silly ideas</i>
<i>Works hard</i>	<i>Plays around, yet tests well</i>
<i>Answers the questions</i>	<i>Discusses in detail, elaborates beyond the group</i>
<i>Listens with interest</i>	<i>Shows strong feelings and opinions</i>
<i>Learns with ease</i>	<i>Already knows</i>
<i>6-8 repetitions for mastery</i>	<i>1-2 repetitions for mastery</i>
<i>Understands ideas</i>	<i>Constructs abstractions</i>
<i>Enjoys peers</i>	<i>Prefers adults</i>
<i>Grasps the meaning</i>	<i>Draws inferences</i>
<i>Completes assignments</i>	<i>Initiates projects</i>
<i>Is receptive</i>	<i>Is intense</i>
<i>Copies accurately</i>	<i>Creates a new design</i>
<i>Enjoys school</i>	<i>Enjoys learning</i>
<i>Absorbs information</i>	<i>Manipulates information</i>
<i>Technician</i>	<i>Inventor</i>
<i>Good memorizer</i>	<i>Good guesser</i>
<i>Enjoys straightforward</i>	<i>Thrives on complexity</i>
<i>Is alert</i>	<i>Is keenly observant</i>
<i>Is pleased with own learning</i>	<i>Is highly self-critical</i>

It is important to remember that one key to determining if your child is 'gifted' or just extremely bright, is to remember a 'gifted' child seems to become very intensely interested in particular information and with little exposure or assistance from an adult will explore and gather amazing facts, relating to that particular interest. Their strong curiosity and powers of observation coupled with an exceptional memory provides 'gifted' children with a strong base to acquire and understand new skills and knowledge.

Today in New Zealand the term 'gifted' has certainly developed and in my opinion it will continue to evolve and develop, as social society changes and expands.

Danielle



The Absorbent Mind and the Sensitive Periods

Debbie Cocks

“Children are motivated by the two great developmental characteristics, the absorbent mind and the sensitive periods and thus they build up an understanding and love of the world around them and develop their skills and concepts.”

Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori believed that children have the ability to soak up the surrounding environment like a sponge, merely by being in it. “The child soaks in like a sponge, whatever is there: good or bad, beautiful or ugly, peaceful or violent”. (Polk, Lillard 1996 p.26). Through this process of absorption the child is building into himself or herself a part of his/her mental being. The child learns attitudes, language, movements and behaviour.

The mind of the child is different to that of an adult. The child is in possession of a form of intelligence that is different to ours. The nature and workings of this absorbent mind are full of mystery. Montessori described the absorbent mind as a privileged form of mind (Montessori 1949). The child is able to absorb without fatigue. It is with this concept in mind that the environment of the Montessori classroom is prepared.

The period of the absorbent mind is the most important in a person's development. The child “constructs his mind step by step till it becomes possessed of memory, the power to understand, the ability to think.....” (Hainstock, 1997 p.61).

The Unconscious Mind

The absorbent mind characterises the period of transformation from zero to six years. This period can be split into two subdivisions. The first is from zero to three and is called the 'unconscious mind'. In this period, the child's mind is continually unconsciously absorbing information from their environment. This period is particularly significant in the formation of intelligence. It is a period of creation.

The Conscious Mind

The second subdivision is entitled the 'conscious mind'. In the period between three and six years, further development takes place. This is now a conscious period of construction. The child now absorbs information from the environment consciously. The faculties that were created in the period between zero and three years are now used by the child. The child is now able to will, think and remember.

Examples of the Absorbent Mind

The first and most obvious example of the absorbent mind is that of language. The child is able to absorb and learn how to pronounce perfectly the language he or she hears within their environment. In contrast, adults generally struggle to acquire new languages. The child also absorbs whichever culture they have been born in to, growing up to follow the customs that were unconsciously imprinted at this time.

Maria Montessori described sensitive periods during a child's development where conditions are extremely favourable for development at a particular stage. Sensitive periods are blocks of time when the child becomes absorbed with one characteristic of the environment at the exclusion of all others. These sensitive periods are transitory. Once one sensitive period passes another quite different one will replace it.

“When a sensitive period is at its height we may compare it to a search light – coming from within the mind – illuminating certain parts of the environment, leaving the others in comparative obscurity. The effect of this luminous and selective ray of attention is such that, where before there was confusion and chaos, there now comes into being order and distinction”.
(Standing 1962)

During a sensitive period, the child will exhibit an intense and extraordinary interest in certain objects and exercises. A special interior vitality and joy is evident as the child makes contact with his or her world. The child possesses a special sensibility which enables him or her to focus attention on certain aspects of the environment at the exclusion of others. The child is compelled by an intellectual and spiritual desire. It is not simply an emotional reaction. “They (sensitive periods) appear in the individual as an intense interest for repeating certain actions at length for no obvious reason, until – because of this repetition – a fresh function suddenly appears with explosive force” (Polk Lillard 1972, p.32). The child does not become fatigued during the sensitive period, the opposite occurs. The child feels satisfied by the resulting work and becomes stronger, calmer and feels better.

Debbie



Living With A Gifted Child

A Parent's Perspective - Katrina Greenslade

It was with a little apprehension that I agreed to write this article on our perspective of living with a gifted child. My first thoughts when Shelagh rang to ask me was that we might be opening ourselves up to judgment by other preschool parents, and also wondered whether sharing this fact that Pete is gifted would affect the way we were viewed, or how Pete would be looked at, in our every day passing.

But I have read about this phenomenon - 'hiding' the giftedness away so that we aren't viewed as pushy parents, viewed as thinking we are somehow elitist or perceived as gloating over our child's developments. We do yield to this phenomenon constantly, I find I avoid the word 'gifted' to anyone outside our immediate family, and have described Pete to curious individuals as 'advanced developmentally' instead. Anyway I did agree to share our perspective, and hoped that this may help break this cycle and hope you'll understand that this is simply 'our normal'.

We never realised Pete was gifted, we knew he was bright, but to hear the word gifted on our first parent/teacher interview at the Courtyard and hear what Shelagh had to say about him, both Mike and I went away a little shell-shocked - it was a lot to take in. With Pete being our first-born we had nothing at that point to gauge his development by, we simply accepted and thought that other three year olds did what he did.

We knew he was a bright baby and toddler and both of his Nanas, who are past primary school teachers, often commented on his advanced progress. Reading back in the notes I made in Pete's Plunket book, at 27 months he could say and recognise the alphabet, count to twenty, recognise and say all his shapes including crescent and trapezoid, spell his name out loud, write a P, and draw a happy face (on the wall!). Did we teach him these things? Yes. Did we force it upon him? No. Pete has always had an amazing ability to absorb information and a ferocious appetite for learning. He has always had a strong focus for things he finds interesting or stimulating, and often goes through intense periods of doing a particular activity - such as his early discovery of drawing with coloured pencils where he did this for the majority of the day for quite a few weeks. His longest focus and fascination has been on the topic of the human body which started nearly two years ago. Pete ditched the bedtime stories quite a while ago and replaced them with human anatomy and science based books and encyclopaedias. And I am not talking about children's non-fiction but some adult literature, with everything from the *Orbicularis Oculi* (the muscle around the eye) to the difference between the Cerebrum and Cerebellum in our brains. Mike and I have learnt a lot about the human body as well as Pete!

We enrolled Pete in a programme called Small Poppies which is run by The Gifted Education Centre and is for gifted preschoolers. This is one morning a week, and along with Shelagh and Monika (his Courtyard teacher at the time), we thought it might be beneficial for Pete to extend his learning, mix with similar like-minded children and also offer us, as parents, some support from fellow parents. In order to enrol Pete in the Small Poppies programme Pete had to have a small assessment with a Registered Educational Psychologist called Rose Blackett. After one term of Small Poppies Mike and I decided that as a comparison, the Courtyard and its Montessori programme is actually fulfilling his needs just as well, if not better. Also, Small Poppies operates without financial support from the Government so each term the fees are substantial.

The same organisation for Small Poppies also runs the One Day School programme which is for gifted six to twelve year olds.

Children attend their normal primary school (or home schooling) and for one day of the week they go to One Day School where they do various learning activities with gifted peers. Mike and I may keep this option open in the future, now that we are investigating the primary school options for Pete. With advice from Small Poppies, support from the Courtyard (and in part, to satisfy our own curiosity) we decided to have a full diagnostic assessment of Pete's cognitive abilities again with Rose Blackett. This for us was an important tool to approach primary schools with and say "THIS is what we are dealing with" and also important to understand the level of his abilities, and gain knowledge on how best to support his learning needs now and in the future. In some ways having a gifted child is like having a special needs child but at the other end of the spectrum. It is important for us to find a school that can cope with Pete's needs.

Is Pete more difficult or different to parent as a result of his giftedness? I have no idea as we don't know any different. (I think any parent will tell you that parenting is not easy!) I can tell you that living with a gifted child can be quite intense - Pete prefers the company and stimulation of adults and older children, although he has been making superb progress in the last six months and playing more like a 'normal' four year old with his peers. At home Pete loves to engage us in conversation, and his need for constant stimulation along with his thirst for information can drive us up the wall from time to time. We feed his brain with information and try to extend the learning on topics that he comes across that particularly interest him. For example, we visited Te Papa in Wellington recently and Pete was quite taken with the Colossal Squid. Pete has since Googled images and information on Giant Squids, and Te Papa has an excellent section on their website dedicated to the Colossal Squid that Pete has spent quite a few hours on. We also have to explain in detail what we require of Pete as easy answers like 'because I said so' just doesn't satisfy him.

Life with Pete can be quite amusing too - he is quite at home on the computer and I have to be careful what he sees me doing - a little while ago I was quite startled to discover a huge long list in my internet bookmarks of Cartoon Network Ben 10 games. The odd accident and bump on the forehead or shin has been met with wails of "aahhhhh ohhh I've hit my Frontalis" or "ouch ohhhh I've hurt my Tibia". Mike was also undressing our younger son for his bath one night and discovered he'd been labelled L E N N Y across the back of his long sleeve tee with a ball point pen. After the first couple of weeks at the Courtyard there was some resistance from Pete about going, and after getting to the bottom of why Pete didn't want to go he replied, "cause there's kids there". All the more reason why he needed to go.

I have witnessed Pete playing with friends on play dates where he is greatly disappointed that they aren't sharing his enthusiasm for his latest passion. It leaves me wondering sometimes to what degree does Pete realise the differences between himself and his peers? When will he find out and what will that reaction entail? The Courtyard classroom has been ideal insofar as the mixed age group of the children means he can converse and engage with older children, the high ratio of teachers to children and their level of care and expertise, plus the individualized learning progression, all currently cater for him perfectly - but I wonder what will happen when he starts school?

At the end of the day any parent wants their child to be happy and that is the key for Pete also. So whatever that means for him with schooling, we'll do what we can to enable him to be happy. And there is no doubt, like with any child, we will have plenty of adventures ahead!

Katrina



Television: Friend or Foe?

Helen Westrupp

Television, in New Zealand, has come a long way from when the first black and white sets were introduced in the 1960s and only a small number of households had one. There was only one main station so viewing choices were limited. Now televisions come in an array of sizes, provide up to 100 channels of entertainment and almost every household has one in the main living area and beyond. So it is not surprising that children are now finding it included in their everyday life, however what is the impact of this on developing bodies and minds? Traditionally, concerns for children were mainly focused around the content of the programmes being viewed, yet much research has been conducted on this area and has also found some links between television viewing and behaviour, obesity, and language development.

The programmes on television can provide models and “scripts” for social behaviour and interactions that can be observed in children’s play. When violence is depicted during scenes on television children can become confused on appropriate behaviour as the “good guys” are allowed to hit, kick and punch their rivals and it is acceptable, yet when they might assimilate the same actions into play situations it is often “not okay”. However, on the flip side there is evidence that some television programmes display pro-social content that shows positive interactions between a variety of individuals and ways to solve problems through a non-aggressive approach to conflict resolution.

It is not just the content that could affect children, it is what they are *not* doing while engrossed in television. Research has found that if children spend more than 20 hours a week (four hours a day) watching television, they double the risk of being overweight, compared to those children who watch less.

Yet it is not just the inactivity of children glued to the television set that is worrying researchers, it is the affect television is having on language development. A recent study of two-four year old children found that language development is negatively affected when the television was on, and parent-child vocal interactions significantly decreased when the television was audible. Research has also highlighted the impact of distracting and interfering effects of background television on children’s attempts to play with their toys and interact with family members. These are disappointing findings as we all remember the information given at our parent education evening from the Brainwave Trust, which reminded us just how important those rich child to adult interactions are. Face-to-face responsive and reciprocal relationships provide the foundation for all areas of child development and television cannot provide these relationships and experiences that scaffold early childhood development.

So is the television a friend or foe? Well it all comes down to how we use a television that determines what category it falls into. What can we do to minimise the harm and maximise the benefits?

- It is recommended that children under the age of two, because of the critical time for brain development do not watch **any** television and children older than this watch no more than one to two hours a day.
- Certain television programmes can be provided as an education resource for children, from incorporating sounds and numbers to hiring a DVD on a particular interest. The Discovery Channel can be great for this and can involve the whole family in discussion.
- Instead of using the television as a “baby sitter”, you can sit and watch the programme with your child to find out what they think about it, like what makes it funny or scary, or it may even bring up topics for discussion like “goodies/baddies” and certain behaviours. We can also include making “movie” nights, where you have a special time to all sit down together and have some fun.
- In the room where the television is situated try and have a variety of toys that your children love to play with like books, puzzles, blocks, boxes, and just about anything you can think so they don’t feel the need to watch the television. While they are playing try and switch the television off, so they can create a world of imagination without outside forces influencing and in some cases dictating how it should evolve.
- Keep television out of bedrooms so bad habits are not formed at an early age.

Moderation is a wonderful model in which to live. We do not advocate throwing your television out the window, however we do suggest only small pockets of time for watching it. As a general rule of thumb we would suggest waiting until after preschool before watching television, instead keeping the momentum of the morning focussed on preparing for preschool. Set children little tasks of making their own bed, morning tea and getting dressed and washed. This gives them purpose and a sense of being helpful and takes time, and you will not have to compete with the added distraction and competition of television and the array of programmes vying for viewers.

If you would like any more information please feel free to read an article in the March 2010 Tall Poppies magazine in the parents’ library.

Helen



Beyond Five

Shelagh Powell

With the advent of the Government extending funding to five year olds in New Zealand from 1 July 2010, it offers an excellent opportunity to present the benefits of staying at preschool beyond five. A key element of the Montessori classroom is the homogenous 3-6 year groupings. There are numerous benefits to this essential element of a Montessori education where children of various ages live and learn together.

Maria Montessori noticed that children tend to go through a social and emotional growth and transition period during their sixth year prior to further intellectual surges in their seventh and eighth year. She found that maintaining the same environment during this critical transition enhanced their readiness for academic challenges in the first year at school. Clearly, the full benefit of the educational programme accrues to our children in the third and final year where they have consolidated skills they have garnered for two years. Unlike traditional schools that begin children at school at age five, the Montessori cycle places them at the culmination of a three-year cycle during which they have experienced an “intellectual explosion”.

Montessori is not alone in this observation, with many education experts indicating that a later start can be more beneficial to children.

First, it exposes the younger children to the work of the older children and helps them aspire to one day master the same activities. Little ones look up to the “big kids” even more than they look up to adults. Second, it encourages mentoring by the older children that helps reinforce the skills they already know. By “teaching” the younger children, they increase and consolidate their own understanding of concepts. Anyone who has ever had to teach a skill to someone else may recall that the very process of explaining a new concept or helping someone practice a new skill leads the teacher to learn as much, if not more than the pupil. This is supported by research. Also the leadership of the older children has remarkable impact on the health of the three-year community they help lead. It allows the oldest children in each cycle to stand tall with confidence during an uncertain time while internalising the academic work of the first two years by sharing their knowledge and expertise with the younger children in the class. When children leave Montessori before they have had the time to internalise those early concrete experiences, their early learning often evaporates because it is neither repeated to a satisfying conclusion nor reinforced by Primary schools.

It is my experience that with such a packed curriculum to work to in the Primary sector, teachers neither want nor encourage too many experiences that facilitate development of independence and autonomy because of time constraints and in many cases limited resources.

In many New Zealand schools children do exercises and fill in worksheets with little understanding and a considerable amount of rote learning. However, all too often a few months down the track little of what they have “learned” will be retained and it will be rare for the children to be able to use their knowledge and skills in new and different contexts. Learning to be organised and learning to be focused is as important as any academic work and a focus in the Montessori environment. Unfortunately worksheets can look impressive, especially to parents of children attending Primary school for the first time, however all too often there is rarely any deep learning going on.

Montessori is focused on teaching for understanding through the manipulation of concrete experiences first. The Montessori materials give the child concrete sensorial impressions of abstract concepts first, and the opportunities to repeat, practice and consolidate.

It is sometimes difficult to swim against a strong tide and culture, and within New Zealand, we have always believed in the notion that children go to school at five years ready or not. After all, family members, schools and until recently the Government believed school at five is right, even though we do know that children are not legally obligated to attend school until they turn six. We almost begin to think we are doing our children a disservice if they do not start school on their fifth Birthday, perhaps with the misguided belief that they will fall behind peers if formal learning does not begin immediately. Yet research indicates that countries where formal schooling begins when children are seven years of age have a higher success rate of learning.

Recently (May 2010) Mary Ashby-Green (former Principal, and now trains teachers in literacy), wrote an article in the NZ Herald indicating that just because it is a deeply embedded tradition to go to school on your fifth Birthday, it does not make it the most effective. Mary Ashby-Green stated that with the introduction of National Standards and the focus on those failing in literacy, it seems a perfect time to create the greatest advantages possible for our children. The PIRLS study (a comparative study of reading achievement in 35 countries) makes mention of New Zealand’s unique ‘tail of failure’ phenomenon, and also notes that we are the only country in the study with a random intake date for children starting school. Ashby-Green believes that at the very least we should be looking at scheduled intakes of once a term rather than arriving in a random manner. “At no other time in a student’s life do we do this, yet we are asking the most vulnerable students to do this at the most crucial time of their education when they are the most dependent on the full attention of an adult” (Ashby-Green 2010). It simply means children would begin school at the beginning of a term. This would give them ten solid weeks of learning without random interruptions of newcomers who need to go back to the beginning.

There is no doubt that many children will start school at five and do very well, with only minor adjustments to a new environment and routines, however many schools also need to change their way of thinking, as mentioned in Ashby-Green’s article. Change can be difficult and takes time to strategically plan and implement. From our perspective as both early childhood educators and Montessori teachers, staying at preschool until six or at least until the beginning of a new term will ultimately benefit children and provide time to strengthen social and emotional development.

Shelagh



Profile:

Catherine Doody

Hello, my name is Catherine Doody and I am one of the new teachers from Room 1. For those whom I have not yet had the pleasure to meet, here is a bit about myself. I am a Canterbury girl born and bred. I attended Christ the King Primary School and then went on to Catholic Cathedral College. From there I attended Canterbury University where I completed a BA in History and Mass Communications. I then decided to pursue my passion of working with young children by obtaining a graduate Diploma in Early Childhood from Auckland University.

My motivation for working within the early childhood field stemmed from growing up as the youngest in a family of four where my memories of childhood were filled with adventures and excitement. It was during my formative years that this nurturing environment allowed me the opportunities to interact with people of all ages including young children. From these experiences I developed a passion and a great sense of joy when working and playing with children of all ages. My parents always encouraged me to follow this passion with the ability to spend time playing and exploring with younger cousins, to helping out at Brownies and babysitting. In my final year at high school I was given the opportunity to participate in

a gateway project that allowed me to work at a Kindergarten one day of a week for a term. It was then I realised I wanted to be an early childhood teacher. As part of my degree I further followed this passion by taking education and psychology papers to better understand child development.

I am a creative person and love drawing, painting and cooking for my family. I am excited to be working here and hope that I can meet all the families that make up the community at the Courtyard. I look forward to getting to know the children, and putting the theories I have learnt into practice.

So come and say hi, I would love to meet you!

Catherine



Property

Damien Straw

As most of you will know, the Courtyard has had a lot of work done over the last holiday period. A whole new deck area has been constructed in front of Room 1 which has completely changed the appearance of the playground. It has been done in keeping with the existing building, looks great and is a huge improvement. Our newly installed weather screens will give some protection from the elements and make the areas close to the buildings useable in bad weather. Most of these improvements have been overseen by Emma Godfrey. She has dedicated a lot of time and effort to this and the result is outstanding! On the first day back after the holidays we were watching the children's surprised faces when they saw it for the first time, they certainly approve!

In the near future there are more improvements to be made which will complete what has already been started.

The outside area towards Selwyn Street is destined for improvement and the Board will be speaking with John Allen, a professional with some experience in this situation, for his thoughts to see what will be in keeping with the rest of the work and the existing building whilst also giving the most benefit to the children. We have discussed building some planter boxes and making an area for the children to grow some vegetables to supplement the rabbits' diets. The tap used by the children by the sandpit has been a problem due to the wear caused by the sand. We will be asking John Allen about this and think that some kind of water feature the children can get water from whilst also being a useful playground item in itself would be ideal. There is also a need for some more concrete areas which won't get muddy and therefore create more play area in the winter.

These are all areas which are being discussed and any ideas are welcome.

After what has already been done there is some need for a general tidy up at this stage and our September **Working Bee** is the chance to get things attended to. We will be focusing on these jobs:

- Staining of the fences.
- Topping up the playground bark.
- Cleaning away the dust and debris left from the building of the deck.
- Topping up the sandpit.
- Clearing out, cleaning and organising of the equipment shed and garage.

We urge you to help us on this Working Bee so please let us know if you have any special skills, would prefer to help with any specific task or have any tools or equipment which would help. All we ask is that helpers can stay with us for two hours work and if everyone pitches in we will get a lot of good jobs finished.

I will be sending out a notice via the Office next week in regard to this Working Bee.

Damien

In Brief ...

Notice of Withdrawal Forms have been sent out to families leaving the preschool at the end of this term, and if you think you might be leaving the preschool for reasons other than attending primary school please see Shelagh.

Fees are charged for the days your child is booked for during the term, inclusive of public holidays and teacher only day.

Teachers will be available for interviews at 8.00am, after session on a Friday or after extended/full day for morning parents and after session at 3.45pm for afternoon parents. Please remember interviews are 15 minutes.

Fire and Earthquake drills are practiced once a term.

Please feel free to add anything to your child's profile book in reference to learning stories or any information about your child's interests and experiences that we can follow and extend in the preschool environment.

Please do not park on the triangle sign on the road between the staff car park and our neighbour's drive. It is both illegal and dangerous to do so.

The car park is only for use by families who have babies, otherwise please park on the road.

The Government does not fund absences over three weeks, therefore if you are on an extended holiday during term time, you will receive an additional invoice for lost Government funding.

