

Courtyard Courier

Volume 64, Term 1 2016

A Few Words

Naumai Haere Mai

Welcome to the first Courier for 2016. We hope you find some quiet time to read the articles within and take something new from one of them (or more) that you didn't know before. The team discuss at length the articles each of us will write in the hope you, our community, will feel more informed by the end!

Term 1 is well underway and summer holidays are now distant memories. While it was a slow start to summer, we finished with a glorious end of January and a hot February. Hopefully autumn will ease us gently into winter, offering some warm days with lovely sunshine. So here we are speeding through March and Easter is nearly upon us. We are looking forward to the Easter Picnic and the very popular Easter egg hunt for the children.....an anticipated, talked about event for sure!

We have welcomed many new families this term, some back with second or third children and some new to preschool with their first. Wherever you fit, we hope you enjoy becoming part of our Courtyard community and friendships for children AND parents grow.

The feeling of belonging contributes to inner well-being, happiness and identity for everyone and as we have many families with us from many different parts of the world, feeling welcomed here with us is at the heart of what we do.

The Education Review Office who have recently been in, highlighted our strong focus on children and families' wellbeing and pastoral care. Their overall report will be published for the community to read within the next few weeks. We hope you take the time to read this, as we believe it is a positive report highlighting the things we do very well and the next steps to work on over the coming three years.

Term 1 is traditionally a busy term, and as you will have noticed from the Diary of Events distributed at the beginning of the term this one is no exception. It isn't often that Easter falls outside of the school holidays however this year it does, with the first term break three weeks after Easter. As our email said, we have decided to open on the Tuesday following Easter Monday to help out working families and anyone who may just like Tuesday to themselves!

The shared morning tea provided opportunity to mix and mingle over morning tea and a chat while the children enjoyed playing with friends. Thanks too, to parents/whanau that supported the Parent Education Evening. The support is appreciated by the team, although it would have been nice to see more families attend and support the team as a lot of work is put in to these evenings to ensure the delivering is professional and informative.

As I have mentioned, the next social event for everyone is our annual Easter Picnic and Easter egg hunt and on a serious note, the AGM is scheduled for Friday 8 April to which everyone is welcome to come along after drop off; it shouldn't take more than 15 minutes. If you are unable to make it, minutes of the meeting and reports will be available for you to take next to the sign in/out sheets. On Saturday 9 April we encourage you to come along to our Parent/Child morning where you can informally observe what your child/ren have been working on during the term.

It is one year ago that I informed you that our new classroom to cater for two-three year olds was going through the process involved with any new build. It has certainly taken much longer than anyone anticipated (as can be the case with any new build) however we are making slow and steady progress.

On behalf of the teaching team, we hope you enjoy the rest of the term and enjoy Easter and holidays.

Shelagh



A big thank you to Anita McKirdy and Shirley Skinner for being great Parent Liaisons. Good-bye to Shirley as she heads to South Africa with her family, and welcome Michelle Adair as Room 1 Liaison.

Montessori in the Home Environment

Montessori is more than just a method of education with specialised didactic materials that children 'do' while at preschool; it is a 'way of life' that can be carried successfully into the home. As children spend the greatest amount of time at home, establishing consistent practices advantage everyone; child and parent alike and makes for easier transition for children between the two environments.

Sometimes parents are more unwittingly in tune to Montessori practices anyway, they just don't always know it or recognise it!

As parents you can create an interesting and stimulating home that takes the real needs of your child into account. Keep your home a home but make it possible for your child to function in it as independently as possible. This translates to involving them in real life home activities. Get children involved in cooking, cleaning, taking care of their own things, feeding the family pet etc. To apply some of the fundamental Montessori principles (order, aesthetics, interest etc.) to everything you make available for your child – will help setting up your home in a way that respects the needs of your child and promotes interest and activity.

Have a look at your home and each of your family activities and find ways to promote and encourage independence for even the youngest of children. Find ways to give your children freedom to choose – real choices, not just choices in the areas that don't really matter; children are not silly!

Find ways to give your child time to engage in their chosen work without being interrupted or disturbed. This requires sensitivity and careful observation on the part of you – even the most innocuous activity could be an important and valid task of self-development through the eyes of your child.

Something like endlessly opening and closing a door might seem a futile waste of time to an adult and you might feel it is being done to annoy you however, it presents an important developmental step forward for the young toddler who is starting to learn about doors and how they work. Giving a child the time to engage in the activity and to work at it until they are finished will not only avoid the power struggle that will almost certainly ensue if you try to stop them, but will bring them a step closer to using doors independently which will have a knock-on effect in other areas of independence. For example, being able to open the wardrobe door to choose their clothes for the day, or being able to open the door to the kitchen cupboard to get the items needed to set the table.

Children in the first three years of life have a very strong tendency to order. You can support this tendency by keeping your home uncluttered and tidy, with a place for everything and everything in its place. Children who are exposed to the daily ritual of packing things away when they have finished with them, will automatically absorb this behaviour and will participate in tidying up after themselves from the time that they become mobile. Large toy boxes and inaccessible shelving do nothing to promote the development of the child's sense of order. Shelves that are low to the ground and small baskets and other containers for a limited selection of toys and

activities mean that children can reasonably be expected to cope with packing away.

If they are introduced to jobs that are made to look fun and they can see them through themselves, children from age two to six love caring for their home.

How 'care of the environment' activities can be practically adapted to the home environment:

- Have a small broom or a dustpan and brush where your child can easily access it so as to sweep up any spills and keep the kitchen floor tidy. You could find a few small easily directed tasks for your child to do every day if they wish, such as sweeping up the bits around a pet's bowl, the crumbs under the dining table or wiping down the place mats after a meal.
- Also consider having separate cloths (one for the floor and one for the table or bench) which your child can access to easily wipe up any spills. These could be placed in a washing basket when dirty and the opportunity to teach your child about the process of doing laundry is then presented. Before teaching your child to use these cloths, ensure they feel like a real help for pointing out spills because if the cloths are associated with nagging and reprimands for being careless, they will not want to use it.
- If you were to keep your cutlery in a lower drawer, children could be involved in the simple daily task of setting the table before family meals. This also applies to crockery kept on a low shelf in a cupboard where your child would be able to replace dishes after unloading the dishwasher for example.
- From time to time things need cleaning which cannot simply be put through the washing machine or dishwasher. Children will enjoy washing soft toys or dolls and pegging them on a low line.

Children will take pride in their home environment and care for it themselves, understanding that work is for everyone, not just Mum and Dad. The self-esteem a child gets from doing 'real' work is of great benefit.

Dr Montessori wrote "*teach me to do it by myself*". If a child can do something, doing it for them, especially if you are better, can be humiliating. The child's need for order is one of their strongest natural desires and they will feel more secure if they know where to put things, where to find them and how to care for them.

How to implement and practise 'self-care' skills at home:

- Encourage children to participate in folding laundry. They can easily fold face and cleaning cloths, tea towels and bath towels or even their own clothes.
- Whilst enlisting your child to help with the laundry, they can practise doing up buttons and zips as you work through the clothes together. Perhaps they could help to do up the zip of your coat or their younger sibling's coat, tie up Dad's barbecue apron or fasten the velcro strap on the baby's shoe.

- If week day mornings are too rushed, children may like to spend time on weekends choosing their clothes for the day and dressing themselves entirely. All that time spent working on the dressing frames in the Practical Life area of the classroom can be put to use at home.

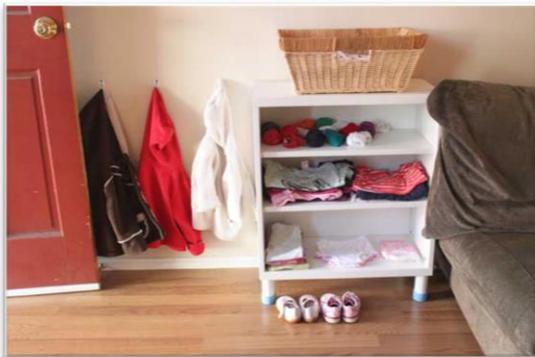
How skills developed in the Practical Life area of the classroom can be utilised at home:

- Provide your child with a small jug with a good spout for carrying out tasks such as watering plants, filling up the dog's water bowl or pouring themselves or other family members a drink.
- A set of little egg cups or even yoghurt pottles and a small jug will encourage your child to practise their skills of pouring during bath time.
- Involve your child in everyday tasks such as food preparation and baking. Not only will they be exposed to maths and language while reading recipes and measuring out quantities, they can practise spooning different ingredients as they do in Practical Life.

- Give your child the opportunity to use a knife for spreading hummus on crackers to be eaten as a snack or for buttering the family's toast for a shared breakfast.
- Children are able to chop fruit to make a fruit salad or chop vegetables to help with lunch or dinner preparation after they have been taught to safely use a sharp knife.
- Consider setting aside the bottom shelf of your fridge for your child to have access to small jugs of drink, fruit and the ingredients for making sandwiches and snacks. Even children as young as two can be trusted to get their own prepared snack or cold drink.

The Montessori approach is to use positive reinforcement to get things done. If children feel these activities are jobs or chores, they will not be interested in performing them. We are actually providing children with opportunities to develop independence, to reveal their competence and increase their confidence.

Shelagh



What Can We Learn From Learning Stories?

To write learning stories, we need to get to know the individual child we are writing a learning story on.

A 'Learning Story' is a record of what a teacher has seen a child (or group of children) doing during their time at the Courtyard. It might be while they are inside working on an activity, outside contributing to the care of the environment or on an excursion demonstrating responsibility and independence. Learning stories provide us with a picture of real children in real situations, working with real problems and opportunities. They invite us to speculate on what we can do to support the child and what might change for the child.

This snapshot becomes a 'learning' story when the teacher adds her interpretation of the child's dispositions toward learning (such as courage and curiosity, and perseverance). Dispositions can be inborn in our children, such as the curiosity required to explore and learn. They might be social, such as the tendency towards acceptance, empathy, and co-operation. They could also be intellectual and reveal themselves through the asking of questions, solving problems, persistence and seeking answers. Or they might be physical such as risk taking and confidence.

We would probably agree that some dispositions are more desirable than others. Children's desirable dispositions, such as resourcefulness, curiosity, and persistence, can be strengthened in the carefully prepared environment of our classroom and outside area. Conversely, the environment also supports the reduction of undesirable dispositions, such as selfishness, impatience, and intolerance, through role modelling, grace and courtesy lessons and peer pressure. (If you would like to read more on this look up *Why Children's Dispositions Should Matter to All Teachers* by Denise Da Ros-Voseles and Sally Fowler-Haughey, *Beyond the Journal • Young Children on the Web • September 2007*).

The framework of the learning story is focussing on:

What happened?

What is the learning happening here?

What opportunities or possibilities are there to extend, challenge or deepen learning?

Or notice, recognise and respond.

To write learning stories, we need to get to know the individual child we are writing a learning story on. We gain this knowledge through observation and from you, the child's whanau. The primary audience for learning stories is the child and family and the stories are written with that in mind. While we, the teachers have our perspective on your child's learning, we know that you do also. The family and whanau perspectives are a valuable voice to contribute to the story to keep us connected and help us to know and understand your child. We know that parents value the visual

aspects of the stories and frequently share them with other family and whanau members, so how about contributing their voice to the story as well as yours. Assessment and planning processes are deeper for having whanau input.

Not sure what to write? Here are some examples of parent voices to inspire you:

xxxx we are so proud of how you have started at Montessori with so much confidence and independence. You are so pleased that you are now able to do big boy things like xxxx! Just remember we all have to take little steps before we can run! We look forward to watching you begin your learning journey and seeing all the wonderful things you discover along the way.

"Whaowhia te kete matauranga" (Fill your basket of knowledge).

We have been able to catch snippets of this relationship develop as well, xxxx often talks about playing with xxxx. We're really pleased he's developing a friendship with such a lovely wee girl.

I have done a lot of travelling over the years, so when xxxx came home with the picture of South America that she had created, it was so very special for me to see. And now to read the story behind it, really is wonderful. What a clever girl you are xxxx. I have forwarded this story on to all of xxxx's grandparents. We are all so very proud of what you are learning xxxx, and at your incredible ability to focus and learn new skills and knowledge.

xxxx has been becoming much more "grown up" since she started at the Courtyard Montessori. She now puts everyone's dishes in the dishwasher, puts in the soap, shuts the door, and pushes the start button. Today when dad was tired she walked out of the bedroom and shut the door on the way out without being asked. She is looking after kids, and is always sensitive to the needs of others. If another child is in distress, she will tell them not to cry and hover over them until they are okay. She just keeps maturing at a very rapid rate.

Natalie

New Zealand Ranks Fifth in World Literacy Survey

<http://www.nzherald.co.nz/>

2:30 PM Tuesday Mar 8, 2016



New Zealand ranked higher in literacy than Germany (9), Canada (10), the US (11), UK (14) and Australia (15). Photo / Petrina Hodgson

New Zealand is the fifth most literate country in the world.

In a newly released study, *The World's Most Literate Nations*, New Zealand is ranked in the top five - joining Nordic countries such as Finland, Iceland, Denmark and Sweden to claim the top spots.

New Zealand ranked higher than Germany (9), Canada (10), the US (11), UK (14) and Australia (15).

The study, conducted by John W. Miller, president of Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, Connecticut, looked at literate behaviours and their supporting resources - five categories such as size and number of libraries and newspaper readership.

"The power of literacy and the value of being part of a literate world is often taken for granted," Mr Miller said.

The team examined data from 200 countries but, due to lack of relevant statistics, only 61 made the cut.

"The factors we examined present a complex and nuanced portrait of a nation's cultural vitality, and what the rankings strongly suggest and world literacy demonstrates is that these kinds of literate behaviours are critical to the success of individuals and nations in the knowledge-based economics that define our global future," Mr Miller said.

The study looks at two aspects of literacy - achievement in two international tests, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); and literate behaviour characteristics, which includes population, newspapers, libraries, and years of schooling.

One consistent finding, according to Mr Miller, is that "there is no meaningful correlation between years of compulsory schooling and educational expenditures on the one hand and test scores on the other".

Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway earn five of the top six slots in the study, largely because "their monolithic culture values reading", Mr Miller said.

He also points out that the rankings would be "very different" if the PIRLS and PISA test scores were the only indices used.

"The Pacific Rim countries, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, and China, would top the list if test performance was the only measure. Finland would be the only non-Pacific Rim country to rank high.

"When factors such as library size and accessibility are added in, the Pacific Rim nations drop dramatically."

* The complete rankings are available at: www.ccsu.edu/wmln

TOP 20 MOST LITERATE NATIONS:	BOTTOM 20 NATIONS
1. Finland	42. Mexico
2. Iceland	43. Croatia
3. Denmark	44. Chile
4. Sweden	45. China
5. New Zealand	46. Brazil
6. Norway	47. Serbia
7. Switzerland	48. South Korea
8. Latvia	49. Singapore
9. Germany	50. Costa Rica
10. Canada	51. Argentina
11. United States	52. Morocco
12. Estonia	53. Turkey
13. Belgium	54. Georgia
14. United Kingdom	55. Qatar
15. Australia	56. Thailand
16. Ireland	57. Botswana
17. France	58. Tunisia
18. Slovak Republic	59. Colombia
19. Israel	60. Albania
20. Czech Republic	61. Indonesia

A Summer of Learning

This summer I spent my holidays in Auckland taking part in the second instalment of my current post graduate study. Many of you already know that I am working toward the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) 3 to 6 year old diploma of teaching. This qualification is highly regarded worldwide and I feel privileged to have the Courtyard's support to undertake this study. Last summer we were introduced to the AMI way of delivering the Practical Life and Sensorial curriculum and this year we covered language and maths. Interspersed were heavy doses of Montessori theory and presentations on the delivery of art, music, science and geography.

Language

Language is a system of communication consisting of sounds which when fused together make words. Language is a way of passing knowledge, a means of communication, a way to share thoughts and to build relationships with other human beings. Language is invaluable in the way it enables us to learn from others. It is also a fundamental human instinct and all humans have the ability to use language as a means of communication unless a medical issue interrupts this.

A dictionary definition of language describes it as signs or marks that have a shared meaning agreed on by a group of people. Dr Maria Montessori in her book titled "Education for a New World (The Clio Montessori Series) page 39" explains that "language is the expression of agreement among a group of men, and can be understood only by those who have agreed that special sounds shall represent special ideas... It is the instrument of thinking together."

Every living thing communicates; even insects who can produce smells to send messages. Each living thing is predetermined to make the sound they were destined and designed to make. Human beings on the other hand are different. We are lucky enough to have a range of means of communication such as verbal communication and gesture for example.

In the Montessori Children's House (our Courtyard preschool classrooms) the adult's role in promoting each child's language development is to:

- Model appropriate language.
- Listen to what the child is saying.
- Ensure the child can see our mouths when we speak and get down to be at their eye level.
- Be mindful of our tone.
- Be concise and use correct rich descriptive language in complete sentences.
- We respond to the child with full answers and not simply one word.
- We do not use language and gesture at the same time.
- Model respect by not interrupting the child when they are speaking. Respect is also shown to the child by not speaking about them in front of them.
- We role model the art of conversation with turn taking etc.
- We listen for defects in the child's language but we do not

correct them. Instead we allow the child to develop their ability in their own time, keeping mindful that there may be occasions where outside intervention may be necessary (such as from a speech language therapist).

A gift we can offer children is to let our own natural love of language show by using rich descriptive language.

Maths

At one time maths was simply about counting but today space, science and computers all involve maths. Early maths was not ready-made rather it was created by humans because it served a purpose. Eventually mankind was tired of roaming so wanted to settle down and villages were made. People needed to know how much food to bring back so every day maths was created eg. villages began bartering with other villages for fruit and fish. They began to count and calculate for bartering purposes and this evolved into language for numbers and counting. The progression to inventing marks to represent amounts was relatively quick and evidence of these have been found in caves in the form of tally marks.

In the Montessori Children's House (our Courtyard preschool classrooms) we provide children with early simple representations of maths. We use words that define quantity as a part of our everyday vocabulary and these concepts are accessible to the children sensorially through the use of the Practical Life materials. Algebra, which is the most complex branch of maths, is too intellectual to give to children early so instead we offer it to them in the sensorial solid form via materials like the binomial cube.

We sometimes get asked the question "Why maths for such young children (meaning preschool aged)?" Dr Maria Montessori explained that the human mind is mathematical by its very nature. We are born with the human tendencies of exactness, precision and calculation and we estimate as our nature. This is evident when we pack a bag and is maths in a practical way.

At the Courtyard, the adult's role is to support the child's mathematical mind. We use mathematical language to express quantity and sing songs and recite poems to support this. Children can then recite or 'rote count' and it is important to realise this does not mean they can actually count as they are not typically ready at two and a half or three years old. We show them later when they are ready, usually after they turn four. Activities such as setting places at the table for group lunch involves maths in a practical way and children absorb the concepts and the precise terms used. The way we meticulously order our classroom environments aids the child in their mathematical development as it supports their human tendency for precision which leads to the development of a mathematical mind. Children in a Montessori environment have the advantage of working with materials that provide hands on practical experiences in the areas of Practical Life, Sensorial and Language. We then judge when the time is right to formally introduce them to our maths materials. *Kim*

Hyperactivity Reduced if Kids Start School at Age 7, Study Finds

Principal Mark Potter believes children should start school later, especially boys.

Starting school at age 5 can be too early and many children are not ready, a Wellington principal says. That was why Berhampore School blended early childhood practices with the New Zealand curriculum to give 5-year-olds an easier transition to school, delaying formal learning until they were older, said its principal, Mark Potter.

The practice was lent merit by a recent Denmark and United States study that found delaying a child's first day of school for a year had mental health benefits, including reducing chances of hyperactivity and inattention, which meant they fared better in school.

The Gift of Time? School Starting Age and Mental Health co-author Professor Thomas Dee, from Stanford University, said delaying the start of school reduced hyperactivity and inattention in 73 per cent of children. "It virtually eliminated the probability that an average child at [11] would have an 'abnormal,' or higher-than-normal rating for the inattentive-hyperactive behavioural measure," Dee said.

Children in the United States and Denmark start school when they are 6, or the year they turn 6, so the year's delay means they wouldn't be at school until 7. Dee said the study found that parents of about 20 per cent of children in the US had deferred the start of school. "The study will give comfort to those who have done it," Dee said. "And for those who are making the decision, it'll give them a chance to consider the benefits."

In New Zealand, a child did not legally have to be enrolled at school until 6, but most attended school from 5. Berhampore School had mainstream and Montessori classes, where children started at 6, not 5. Principal Mark Potter said many of the inattentive or hyperactive behaviours stemmed from anxiety and for some kids that could stem from starting school too early.

He believed children should start school later, especially boys. "We've found that 5-year-olds are quite different to 6-year-olds. If we put 5-year-olds into the Montessori environment, they are just lost. They are just not at the same level and really struggle. "That's why in the traditional school, we have a different transition programme for 5-year-olds."

However, it was not a magic recipe as every child was different, so it was also about what age schools started more formal learning. "We rush our children into reading and writing far too soon. Some children are ready for it, but there are a heck of a lot that aren't," Potter said.

The findings were no surprise to Petone mother Clare Goodman, who pulled her son, now 9, out of a mainstream state school when he was 5 and enrolled him at Raphael House Rudolf Steiner School. Children did not start formal schooling at Rudolf Steiner schools until the year they turned 7, therefore 5 and 6-year-olds remained at kindergarten.

"It just wasn't working for my child. If he had stayed [in mainstream school], I'm sure he would have been labelled ADHD or autistic. "He's a bit of a dreamer, but they worked with him without labelling him and he's not like that now." She first noticed something was not right when the daily reading book became a battle and the teacher told Goodman that her son was not concentrating in class. "I thought, 'I'm not enjoying my child as much as I want to any more'. I love reading and I didn't want it to be a chore for him. "The change was straight away, he was so much happier."

Education Minister Hekia Parata said she could not comment on the study, but that she was happy with a starting age of 5. "What early childhood teachers and new entrant teachers are saying is that an early, consistent transition to school creates a better platform for learning."

The Courtyard Team



Shelagh Powell
Principal



Natalie Collins
Teacher Room 1



Paula Martin
Teacher Room 1



Helen Westrupp
Team Leader Room 2



Kim Gardener
Teacher Room 2



Shelley Findlay
Teacher Room 2



Gillian Hunter
Office Administrator

Sometimes it's Hard to Say Goodbye

When your child first begins attending the Courtyard Montessori Preschool it is a time of adjustment for both the child and the parents. It is common to feel a sense of separation anxiety, as the two of you have been very close and completely tuned into each other from the very beginning. Fear of separating is related to fear of the unknown.

It can be heart tugging for everyone involved. The child who is clearly anxious and upset at being parted from their parent, the parent who feels like they are abandoning their child in a time of great need, the other children in class who feel worried to see a classmate upset, and the teacher who is trying to be strong for all.

This is one of the hardest times for a parent whose child is struggling to separate and it can be challenging for the teachers too. Remember, separation anxiety is a phase, it is perfectly normal and it does pass.

Here are a few strategies and things to focus on when preparing for a morning drop-off at preschool.

- **Acknowledge how your child is feeling** – It is good to acknowledge your child's anxieties, temporary unhappiness is very real and very normal. At home when your child is happy and relaxed, talk about those feelings. Conversations around "I know you feel sad when I drop you off but you will have a great time and I will be back for you soon" is good enough. Learning to cope with sadness is an important learning process for your child so talk about sadness when you're both feeling safe and happy, at home. Remember not to over talk it though, just a little, not a lot, so healthy distraction and a change of subject if your child continues to bring it up is best.
- **Make the goodbye prompt and positive** – The best thing you can do is not put any energy into preparing for the morning drop-off with lengthy discussions, bargaining and promises. This builds on fear and anxiety for your child so that on arrival they are already wound up. Don't mention preschool until you're on your way in. Walk in happily, support your child's independence to manage their belongings, give them a hug and a kiss, followed by "have a great day and I'll see you soon (or state time)". One more minute or one more hug prolongs the inevitable and creates heightened pain for all parties.
- **Avoid bribery** – Avoid the temptation to offer your child rewards or bribes for being brave, for not crying or for being 'good'. It's healthier if your child sees attending preschool as a normal part of daily life, not something to be endured like a medical procedure.
- **Create a 'goodbye' routine** – we all thrive on routine. Often establishing a familiar and consistent goodbye routine is instrumental in successful goodbyes. It may be the child entering the classroom independently to head to the window and wave goodbye as you go out the gate. It may be a special

hug, handshake or saying which is like a secret code between the two of you. Maybe that special moment between the two of you offers just the right amount of reassurance to your child.

- **Be on time** – Arriving late or at erratic times often feeds anxiety for a child. If your child becomes distressed by being rushed or having to enter the classroom when most other children are there and the work-cycle is underway, it may be because they feel displaced. It can be stressful for them as they struggle to find a friend to connect with. This is often because the children they like to work with are already established in their chosen activities. Collecting your child on time is equally important.
- **Encourage friendships** – Be extra observant and chat with your child about classmates they like. If this is not occurring naturally within a term or two, ask the teachers about suitable children that you can talk about with your child when at home. Setting up the odd play date or social encounter outside of preschool can be hugely instrumental in helping your child develop an early sense of well-being and belonging at preschool.

Remember, there may be moments when your child regresses. It can evolve from busy times at home, significant family events or even from being unwell. This is perfectly normal. Just stick to the same strategies you applied in the beginning and we should all notice an improvement within a short time. Which leads me to my last helpful tip...

- **Trust your child's teachers** – You may not feel that you know us that well, so take comfort in knowing that we teach young children because we are particularly fond of them and we hold a wealth of professional expertise and knowledge based on current child developmental theory. Our strategies will most definitely be based around nurturing the child, keeping them close, engaging them in interesting tasks, and helping them to find a friend and form friendships. Our purpose is to develop confidence in the child through independence, routines and through observing their strengths and interests, and working with these. We are always willing to step in and help you with goodbyes if needed.

'Nāte moa I takahi te rāā – 'Early influences will last throughout life, take care of the young.

Paula

The Classroom Environment

The Montessori approach to learning is a wonderful blend of a prepared environment, robust philosophy, and 'Montessori' teachers. It is with all of these aspects working together that we create an education for life. This is where the Montessori philosophy can sometimes get misunderstood as a place where the aim is to teach reading, writing and arithmetic, and while we do have the materials for the children to use to learn these skills, our main goal is to help children cultivate a love of learning and develop skills for life.

The Montessori classroom is a place where a community can learn and grow together. This starts by having the mixed age range of 3-6 year olds, as this offers many benefits to everyone who is part of the community. When new children start, the established children instantly start becoming aware of what they can do, sharing their skills and knowledge which in turn boosts their confidence. This then encourages them to reaffirm their own knowledge by assisting the younger children integrate into the community life. Naturally the younger children then start looking up to the older children, learning the ways of the classroom and aspiring to be just like them. There are so many examples we could share with you of how the children are working together in our classroom, however the most recent example is the acceptance of new children. It is heart-warming to see how the already established class shows patience and understanding, even as their mat is walked over or work is tampered with. For example if a new child was to upset the order in the established community, I hear the children say "he is just new and learning how to do things". What a great example of the level of tolerance and understanding that the established children show and the new children will learn this through ongoing role modelling.

This respect is one of the key aspects underpinning all that takes place in our Montessori community. Teachers show respect towards one another, the children and the classroom and through this role-modelling children develop a sense of respect for each other and the activities they share. Respect refers to the way children interact with each other, how they treat the materials, and developing the social skills that enables them to work both collaboratively and cohesively. All skills that they will need for future education and work places.

Another aspect is the cycle of activity and there are three key components that children are able to complete with independence

and autonomy. The first step is to select an activity. The children know the activities they can choose as they are materials that a teacher has shown them relating to their interests and ability. Children then work with their activity developing the skills associated with it while at the same time deepening their concentration as their focus and attention is captured. Finally when the children have completed their activity fully and their internal desires are satisfied it is time to pack the activity away. This is a precise job as they need to pack it away exactly how they found it showing respect for the activity and the next person who is going to use it.

For children, this ability to choose and practice work which interests them starts the process of building a sense of independence and the confidence to tackle more challenges by themselves. They are able to follow their interests, work in collaborative situations motivated by a shared desire, and practice until they have achieved the goal they have set themselves. This is all driven by the inner motivations of the child striving to become an independent, contributing member of society.

Montessori named her first school for children, 'casa de bambini' which translates to 'children's house' and because of this the role of the teacher is a passive one. Our role is to observe the children to see what they choose for themselves, what they spend their time focusing on, and then connecting the child to activities relating to the areas that they are showing great focus and interest in. We have a clear understanding of each child's stage of development, so we are able to 'direct' a child to any particular activity we feel they need to achieve in order to further their skills and knowledge. This is a time when we show children how to use the materials, either in a one to one basis or in a group situation. We are important in helping to initially establish the mini-community however soon we step back in this role as the children start managing the environment for themselves. It is our goal to provide time, opportunity and desire to develop their independence and skills for life.

Your children are involved in a wonderful community where they are establishing an understanding of community living by being active learners, exploring, practicing and thinking for themselves. What better way could you think of than this to develop skills for life!

Helen



There is a great sense of community within the Montessori classroom, where children of differing ages work together in an atmosphere of cooperation rather than competitiveness. There is respect for the environment and for the individuals within it, which comes through experience of freedom within the community.

— Maria Montessori —

AZ QUOTES

