

# Welcome to



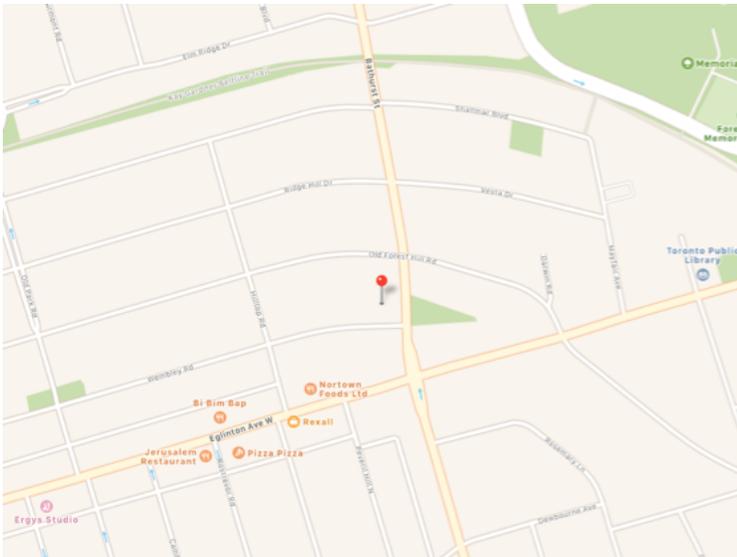
2 Wembley Road, Toronto  
Ontario, M3C 2E9



Where learning is fun & kids come *Alive*

[www.aliveprivateschool.ca](http://www.aliveprivateschool.ca)

Conveniently located in the Forest Hill United Church at Bathurst & Eglinton in Toronto, we are a non-religious school dedicated to providing a safe, caring, home-like environment. A place where children have fun while learning so they can excel in their later education and in life.



Dear Parents,

Welcome to Alive Montessori & Private School.

We are very happy to be in our new location at 2 Wembley Road. Our existing students will appreciate the improvement in the space. To our new students and parents, we know that our school environment will be very different from anything you have experienced before. What other school do you know where students don't want to leave when it's time to go home?

We provide an interesting and exciting environment to stimulate the child's natural desire to learn. Our pre-school children are taught using the Montessori method and are expected to be able to read by the time they enter Grade 1. Our elementary children are taught using the Enriched Ontario Curriculum as a guideline; to this, we add many other activities and areas of knowledge to interest and challenge the students.

Our goal at Alive Montessori & Private School is to give our students an excellent education that becomes the foundation leading to a better job and a better life.

To give our children the best chance to succeed, the enclosed information package for parents gives you guidelines we have found from experience lead to the best results. Please read these carefully and provide any needed items for your child.

We are always open to hearing from you if you have any questions about your child's education.

Sincerely yours,

Julia Simon

(Principal)

## Some of Our References:

*“Before my son started going to Alive he didn't like school; he hated to write and didn't like math very much. He had started not caring much anymore. Julia got him back excited about life and now he loves to write and is a year ahead in all subjects.” [A.W.]*

*“Ms. Julia is no ordinary teacher. She stands out because she genuinely loves children ... I wish every school could be like Ms. Julia's school; our world would be better for it.” [H.W.]*

*“Our son spent the past year at Alive Montessori. He is 4.5 years old; however, as a result of the exceptional level of attention shown by Julia Simon, his ability to do simple math, reading, writing are beyond our expectations ... There is a level of care and attention that is shown to the children that you simply do not see in other schools.” [J.B.]*

*“Before [in public school], getting them to do homework was a battle; now at Alive Montessori, they do their homework as soon as they come home. When they are done, they do extra math and reading on their own; when they go to bed, they say that they can't wait for tomorrow to go to school ... The improvement in their reading is amazing (and this has happened in just two months).” [T.S.]*

*“My two children (11 and 9) adore Julia not only as an educator but also as a person. They love spending their time at Alive Montessori & Private School and if they had a choice, they would have spent even the nights at her school. Julia's ability to connect with her students and her talent at teaching simple concepts, as well as more advanced topics, are both truly superior.” [G.B.]*

*“I am the mother of a 9-year-old who was having many problems in the public system when we moved back to Canada. The school thought my daughter may have had learning disabilities, dyslexia or ADD. I truly believed that there was an issue with the school's system of teaching and subsequently enrolled her at ALIVE. After Mrs. Julia took her under her wing, my daughter jumped from not knowing the alphabet to reading and loving to go to school ... Julia has had a very positive effect on my daughter and for that I will always be in debt to her.” [M.M.]*

*“I love the experience at Alive Montessori school. My daughter is doing so well. She gets the benefit of a safe environment for which I am truly grateful.” [C.W.]*



One of our Montessori classrooms with the vast array of educational material.

*“When I came to this new [high] school I already knew most of the curriculum, all thanks to Miss Julia and her amazing teaching. She really brings out the best in people.” [A.J. – Former Student upon entering high school.]*

*“As parents, we were frustrated and upset with the public school system and their lack of commitment to our children’s learning success. Since working with you, we have seen immediate improvement and positive changes in their confidence and our children’s attitude towards learning. Their ability to comprehend and use what they are learning continues to be visible.” [D.G.]*

# Why Should I Consider Alive Montessori & Private School for My Child?

It is a common misconception that only “the rich” send their children to a private school.

In 15 years as Principal of a private school, it is my experience that this is rarely the case. Most parents who send their children to a private school are people of average means who just care enough to invest in the future success of their children.

When questioned, all of our parents have compelling reasons to send their children to our school. Some of the more common are as follows:

- “The standards of the public school system are too low”
- “There are too many kids in the classroom and my child is not receiving enough individual attention”
- “I don’t feel that the school is safe for my child”
- “He is behind in his reading, and his writing is atrocious”
- “We’ve had behaviour problems ever since he started going to school”
- “She doesn’t do well in large classrooms”
- “She already knows what they are teaching and is bored”
- “My child is getting bullied by other kids”
- “There is not enough discipline in the school”
- “I’m being told he has ADHD or Learning Disability”
- “The school doesn’t seem to care”
- “They want to put him on drugs”
- “Some of the other children are having a bad effect on my son”

- “My daughter is not learning anything in Kindergarten”
- “I don’t know what’s wrong, but my child hates to go to school”

The common thread for all these parents is that they care deeply about their child’s future success. Income usually has little to do with the decision to send a child to a private school; most parents have to make significant sacrifices to be able to do so.

A poor education will limit your child’s potential for success, but he or she will reap the rewards of a proper education for a lifetime.



# Our Commitment to You and Your Child

We know that you are making a very large commitment to your child's future when you send him or her to Alive Montessori & Private School.

In actual fact, the very best gift you as a parent can give your child is a superb education. After all, the skills and abilities learned in school largely determine the success your child will have throughout his or her life. This is particularly important in our rapidly changing modern world, where continuous learning has become the norm.

The first few years of schooling are vital, as they establish the foundation for all subsequent learning. It is here that they will learn to read and write and where they begin to get familiar with mathematical concepts; skills that they need to have for all future learning. Correcting a poor start in schooling afterwards is made much more difficult because the child's ability, confidence and attitude toward learning, whether positive or negative, are largely set in these early years.

We set very high standards for ourselves as teachers and for our students. For example, we expect all of our children to begin reading at age 4 and to be fluent readers by age 6 or 7, well before the expected goals in the public schools. (It is heartbreaking when poor teaching in the early years results in so many teens and adults who can read and write only with difficulty.)

We know that you are placing your trust in us to give your child the very best education possible. Your child will be treated as an individual and given personal attention. We will do our very best to keep him or her engaged and interested in learning by making it fun and related to the real world. We teach life skills, work ethic, mental and physical discipline, manners, and how to work as a team and care for others.

And because we consider ourselves to be partners in the future success of your child, we listen and work with you, the parent, on forwarding the best interests of your child.

As Mark Twain so aptly put it, "Don't let schooling get in the way of your education." We want your child to receive a real education – one that will

give him the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve success in a career and in life.

## Julia Simon (Principal)



Julia Simon was born in Szeged, Hungary, a small town near Budapest, in 1959. No doubt encouraged by parents who were both professional educators, her interest in education was cultivated at an early age.

Her father was a renowned Hungarian philosopher, historian and linguist who taught at the college level. (Before his college career, he taught high school and had great success teaching gifted students for academic competitions and university entrance.)

Julia's mother was a schoolteacher who later became the principal of a large inner-city elementary school. By focusing on art, she was able to

engage the many disadvantaged children under her charge and turn their education and lives around.

Julia's early interests included athletics (she was an accomplished gymnast and swimmer), dance, art, music, writing and, of course, teaching. After High School, she attended Teachers' College where she graduated with an Elementary School Teachers Certificate. She also earned diplomas as a Librarian and Swimming Instructor.

During her tenure as a teacher in Hungary, she came to deplore the heavy state control over education under the Communist government then in power. It was this lack of intellectual freedom that prompted her to seek a new life in the West, and, after a brief residence in Germany, she moved to Canada in 1987.

Having to learn a completely new language at age 27, Julia gained a unique perspective on the difficulties in learning how to read and write English. (Unlike Hungarian, the spelling patterns in English are so varied that they form a singular challenge in learning to read and write.) With her own experience as a backdrop, and knowing that reading was the most important ability in all subsequent learning, Julia vowed that she would find and use the best methods for teaching children how to read and write.

Subsequently, she earned her Early Childhood Education Diploma from George Brown College in Toronto in 1990. It was shortly after this that Julia set up her first pre-school. After a divorce and with no other financial support, she was forced to develop a strong work ethic in order to raise her three children as a single mother. This meant working very long hours at additional jobs on top of her demanding work at the school.

With several years experience in teaching young children behind her, Julia immediately recognized the potential benefits to the children when she came upon the Montessori method of teaching. After a year studying, she earned her Montessori Pre-School Diploma in 1995 from the International Montessori Training Centre in London, England.

In 2001, Julia started her first full-fledged Montessori school when she opened the Bambolino Montessori Pre-School Academy in north-west Toronto. Two years later, with parents of pre-school children about to enter

the public school system clamouring for a better education for their children, she added an Elementary school program.

In 2011, she was forced to move her established school when the Toronto District School Board did not renew her lease. It was at this time that Julia renamed the school as Alive Montessori & Private School, which is now operating at a more central location in the Forest Hill United Church at 2 Wembley Road, one short block north of the Bathurst and Eglinton intersection.

Julia has always placed a strong emphasis on creating an environment that is full of vitality and fun. In this atmosphere, children develop a life-long love of learning – so important in today’s rapidly changing world where skills and knowledge will have to be constantly upgraded.

By making learning fun, and by giving the basic subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic the prominence they deserve, Julia’s students can excel in their education and establish a strong foundation for their future careers.

Parents who have entrusted their children’s education to Julia have seen her extraordinary passion, dedication and love for the children.



# Our Staff

The primary attribute common to all of our staff here at Alive Montessori & Private School is that we love and care for children and are passionate to see that they reach their full potential. I am very proud of our dedicated staff who work so hard to ensure that your children develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in life.

## **David McKague (Vice Principal)**

During the nine years he spent volunteering as a tutor, David became curious as to why children were having so much trouble learning in school, and in particular, learning to read and write. He began years of research into the methods being used, the history of English and written language, the influence of psychology and psychiatry in our schools, and the politics of education. He is currently assisting Julia with her dream of creating a school that exemplifies the best methods of teaching to enable our children to get off to a tremendous start to their education and their life.

## **Jenny Dos Santos (Elementary Teacher)**

With her obvious passion for teaching children, we are pleased that Jenny has joined us this year as the elementary teacher. Registered with the Ontario College of Teachers and did practicums at TDSB where she taught health care and child development. She has several degrees – a B.A. in Education for Technological Education, a B.A. of Health Administration, and a Masters Degree in Human Services, Health and Wellness. Her other interests include music, art, theatre and reading as well as being an accomplished event planner.



### **Sophie Yun (Pre-School Teacher)**

Ms. Sophie will be assisting in the pre-school and Kindergarten programs, as well as the food preparation for the school. Ms. Sophie is a licensed nutritionist, having earned a B.A. in food and nutrition in her native Korea and continuing her professional education here in Toronto. A year of volunteering as a teacher in social welfare centres shows her undying passion for teaching and caring for children.



### **Winnie Bumanglag (Pre-School Teacher)**

Ms Winnie received her degree of Bachelor of Arts in 2003. Travelled to Hong Kong in 2005 and landed in Canada in 2007 to work as a caregiver. With over a decade of experience in child care she developed a love for working with children and holds the standard that every child should be valued and treated with respect. We agree and it's been a privilege having Ms Winnie a part of Alive Montessori and private school.



### **Student Volunteers from Dan Roberts College:**

We are pleased to continue our relationship with Dan Roberts College; they are providing student teachers gaining experience as they work towards receiving their diplomas as Registered Early Childhood Educators. Their help is invaluable as it enables us to give more one-on-one attention to our students than would otherwise be possible.

# Mission Statement

At Alive Montessori & Private School our mission is based on the following premises:

- The word “educate” comes from Latin roots meaning “to lead out”. As such, we believe that it is our duty as educators to bring out the innate skills and talents of the children in our charge.
- Every child is a unique individual deserving of the best education possible.
- Every child has an innate desire to learn that must be cultivated, not blunted.
- Every child has his or her natural interests and strengths.
- Learning occurs at varying rates and every child learns at his or her own optimum pace.
- The Basics of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic are vitally important as these still form the foundation for all future learning.
- The goal of education is to give every child the tools he or she will need to become self-reliant and successful in life.
- Education does not have to be a dreary and dull activity. Done properly, learning is fun.

Our goal at Alive Montessori & Private School is to provide the best possible start to our children through proper education, thereby instilling a life-long love of learning in every child. We aim to create a safe, caring and fun environment where every child will learn and will become more and more confident as he or she gains in abilities.

*“Don’t let schooling get in the way  
of your education.”* Mark Twain

# What We Expect Education to Be: The Standards We Aspire To

Unfortunately, it seems that the public education system has become more concerned about “socializing” our children than on educating them. Is it any wonder that standards are falling when teachers can no longer fail students because it might hurt their self-esteem? Or when that one student who is disrupting the entire class is put on dangerous mind-numbing drugs because it is no longer politically correct to discipline him?

If one examines school books from a century ago, the expected standards of reading, writing and math skills were very much higher than they are today. Because the deterioration has been so gradual over a long period of time, it’s difficult for today’s students and teachers to appreciate the literacy and numeracy of previous generations. We may think that giving students A’s for mediocre work will boost their self-esteem, but we are really only cheating them of the tools they will need for success. Real feelings of self-worth comes from demonstrated competence, **not** from inflated grades.

So what are the standards we aspire to in primary and elementary education?

**READING:** While we are aware that there can be differences in maturation, we expect our children to be reading well before they enter Grade 1. In fact, many of our children are reading at three and four years old. The goal is that they will all be fluent readers (and by fluent, we mean being able to read as easily as listening to a conversation) in the early grades and well before they enter high school. Reading is the primary skill that enables everyone to be able to learn anything they want.

**WRITING:** With writing, we are in fact talking about two separate, but related skills. One is the ability to form letters by printing and cursive handwriting. With the advent of computers, both seem to be dying arts, yet are crucial in developing fine motor skills in young children that should be

learned before they use keyboards. The second writing skill refers to the ability to properly organize one's thoughts and to communicate them clearly in correct grammatical form and with proper spelling. This is considerably more difficult than reading, but it is expected that our students should ultimately be reaching for a professional standard with their writing.

**MATH:** Nowadays, it's all too common to see teenagers and adults who cannot do simple calculations like making change without a calculator. We believe this is totally unacceptable in a high-tech society. Handling finances requires math skills; those who are incompetent are less likely to succeed in handling and keeping their money. Math must be taught in such a way that students understand the concepts and develop the skills to be able to do calculations on their own, without the aid of calculators and computers. Taught this way, math also disciplines the students' minds so they are able to focus on problems until they find solutions. We expect our students to know the times table cold and to be able to do basic calculations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division quickly and accurately. Properly understood and drilled, students can also develop the skill of doing calculations in their heads.

**ART and MUSIC:** Hundreds of years ago during the Renaissance, much of the population received very little education. However, those who were educated were very well educated indeed, and expected to become proficient in art and music. We don't expect that all our students will become professional performers or artists, but we do intend that they receive basic knowledge of techniques that they are able to competently use. Our emphasis here follows from the idea that demonstrated competence increases confidence in the child that extends into other areas of his or her life.

**GYM:** Sadly, this is one subject that is being taken out of more and more of our schools. We cannot expect our children to have healthy minds if they are not allowed to exercise their bodies. Kids are naturally full of energy that needs an outlet. In fact, perhaps a majority of "ADHD" (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) can be "cured" just by allowing our kids to get the exercise they need.



**HISTORY and GEOGRAPHY:** We generally follow the Ontario curriculum for these subjects. One thing that should be noted, is that we are not trying to feed the children a bunch of facts, but to orient them to the larger environment and the occurrences that shaped today's world and to enable them to think and form their own opinions.

**LIFE SKILLS:** Learning becomes more fun when it can be applied immediately in one's own life. Children naturally want to help and to be considered useful; we nurture this by having them take care of plants and animals, cooking, cleaning, learning how to look after clothing, looking after the environment, using tools, and other practical activities.

**DEVELOPING THE ABILITY TO STUDY:** It is quite remarkable that students typically go through their entire schooling (including through university) without ever having been taught **how** to study. And by study, we don't mean memorizing a few facts or developing tricks just to pass an exam. We mean the ability to **really** learn anything they want – to thoroughly understand and be able to use and apply, with certainty, the information they are studying. And when they are able to do this, their confidence soars as they demonstrate real competence.



# What is the Montessori Method?

Maria Montessori was born in Italy in 1870 and continued her work in education up until her death in 1952. Ahead of her time, she was the first woman in Italian history to earn a medical doctor's degree. After practicing medicine for only a few years, she embarked on the career path for which she would become famous – as an enlightened educator for young children.



She was convinced that the conventional methodology of schooling left much to be desired and developed her own system to enable children to learn. This involved creating a carefully structured and stimulating

environment where children are exposed to many materials and activities from which they learn. Most parents are amazed when they first see the richness of materials in a Montessori classroom; it is certainly different from the typical classroom in our public schools.

Maria Montessori designed her materials along “sensorial” lines to allow the children to discover, learn and develop using all their senses. Sandpaper letters and numbers, geometric shapes to manipulate and compare, wooden blocks and beads for adding and multiplying, and so much more all contribute to the child's understanding of the world around him.

Dr. Montessori consistently taught reading and writing to children between the ages of four and six, well below the expected norm in our public school system. In fact, she was of the firm belief that this was the best time

to do so. She believed that children must re-create whatever it is that they are learning in order to understand it, and for this reason, she taught these vital skills in the reverse order from our usual educational standard – writing, and then reading.

From a humble start in a single room teaching poor children using her educational ideas, the Montessori method of education has spread throughout much of the world for the simple reason that it works. As a parent, there is no better gift you can give your child than a solid education that gives him or her the skills and confidence to be a success in his life.

Julia Simon, the principal of the Alive School is a certified Montessori pre-school teacher (Maria Montessori preferred the term “directress”, as this more accurately described the function – to direct the children to discover and learn on their own).

# Our Approach to Teaching Reading

There should be no doubt that teaching our children how to read well should be the most important function of our school system. In this information age, all other learning is dependent on this vital skill.

Unfortunately, our English language is not the easiest to learn to read and write. There are seemingly so many arbitrary ways to spell words that many teachers describe English as a chaotic mess. It is for this reason that an organized, step-by-step approach is needed. Failure in the early stages of teaching a child how to read can leave him so confused and discouraged that he gives up trying, making it much, much harder to correct later.

Compounding this is the fact that teachers (quite astoundingly given its importance) receive almost no instruction in how to teach reading when they go to Teachers' College. Without proper instruction themselves, it is little wonder that so many of them consider English spelling rules confusing and thus have so much difficulty teaching reading. But a proper examination of our language reveals many repeating patterns and consistencies, and there ARE ways to teach reading properly. Given the large numbers of students entering our high schools and universities with poor reading and writing skills, these methods are apparently not very well known or used.



One of the unsuspected difficulties in teaching reading is that it is generally taught before and separately from learning to write. Maria Montessori wrote, “Contrary to the usually accepted idea, writing precedes reading.” The famous Swiss educator Jean Piaget explains the reason; “In order for a child to understand something, he must construct it himself, he must re-invent it.”\*

We take these words to heart. Maria Montessori herself taught children to read and write between the ages of four and six, and in fact considered this the best age to do so. Using a logical, step-by-step approach, we see no reason for any child to fail to learn to read well. It is a skill all children must master to succeed in today’s world.



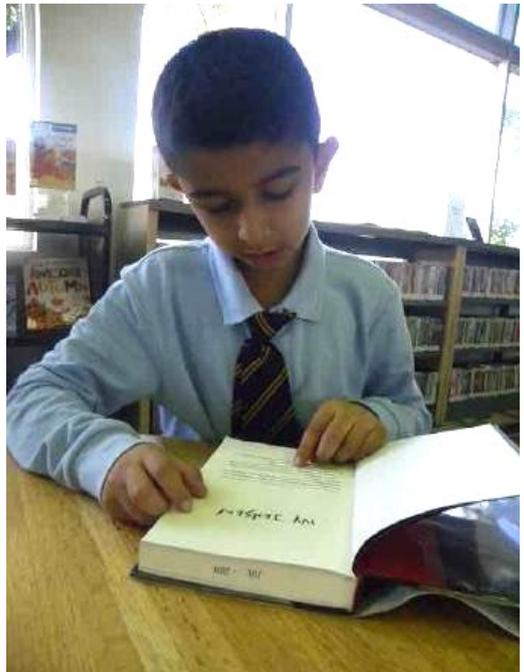
\* Both quotes are from *Why Johnny Still Can't Read*, by Rudolph Flesch. Harper Colophon Books, 1981 (pg. 116)

# Improving Your Child's IQ

Educators seem to place an undue amount of faith on intelligence – or at least on IQ tests which purport to measure intelligence. (Whether they do or not, or what exactly these tests do in fact measure, is another matter entirely.) Too often, however, if a student is doing poorly in school and that student also scores low on an IQ test, the teacher will give up on him or her. It becomes entirely too easy, perhaps reflecting human nature, to blame the student for failures in education. “What can I do with someone who isn't very intelligent and can't learn?” “Why should I spend too much time trying to sort out someone who is dumb when I have other students who have more potential?”

Before we place too much importance on IQ tests, we would be wise to realize one simple fact. No matter what else an IQ test is supposed to measure, it is, first and foremost, a test of reading ability.

A person who can't read well will never be able to score high on an IQ test. Not only is the thinking process subordinated to the difficulty in getting the problems off the page, but a poor and slow reader will also have difficulty answering enough questions on a timed test.



So the best way to raise your child's IQ score? Improve his or her ability to read! The ultimate goal should be that he or she will eventually be able to read as easily as he can listen to a conversation.

# Our Approach to Teaching Math

Computers and electronic calculators are wonderful tools that did not exist until just a few short years ago. However, one unexpected consequence of their arrival seems to have been a general deterioration in math ability in our schools. For example, we often see grade 3, 4 and 5 children unable to do the simplest addition and multiplication without using a calculator (or their fingers). Why should this be?

Because students are now allowed to use calculators on their exams, it seems that basic drills of multiplication tables or adding columns of numbers are no longer considered important enough to be taught in school. Even worse, since problems can be entered into a computer or calculator without much thought, the basic concepts behind them are often not well understood. This becomes apparent when students “memorize” some procedure or formula and yet have no idea why it works. They may be able to rote and mechanically work out problems, and even do well on exams, but without an understanding of **why** these procedures work, they eventually fall on their heads as the math becomes more difficult. Or they graduate not being able to use what they have supposedly learned in school.

By using real life examples and materials that clearly demonstrate the concepts behind all math procedures, our students learn that math is a valuable subject that can be applied to the real world around them. With this understanding as a solid foundation, they can then gain skill and certainty by practicing and drilling.

We ensure that our students thoroughly practice all aspects of basic calculation – arithmetic – so they are not helpless if a calculator is not available. Far from being a drudgery, when math concepts are fully understood and practiced, students develop a good number sense and take pride in their new-found skills.

Our modern world is full of distractions that can cause our children to have difficulty focusing. Properly taught, math also disciplines and trains the mind that has benefits in all aspects of a child’s life that require the ability to persist and to concentrate.

Math, dealing as it does with quantities, shapes, measurements, numbers, calculation, and their relationships in the physical world, is vitally important. Students must learn the basic concepts and develop a certain level of skill to be able to apply these to their finances, their future jobs, and their lives.

# Computers in the Classroom

There can be absolutely no doubt that computers are an integral part of our modern way of life, and that our children will need to become skilled in their use. And while we do have computers in the classroom, we deliberately minimize their use to concentrate on mastering the fundamentals required for all learning.

If computers are emphasized too early, we feel that this can actually have a detrimental effect on a child's education. We believe strongly that computers should not replace the training and disciplining of the mind required to fully master the basics of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.



It is much more important for young children to develop the spatial discernment and fine motor skills required for writing than the ability to punch letters on a keyboard. While this concept may seem quaint or “old-fashioned”, it results in children who can easily and rapidly translate these

skills over into using a computer when the time comes. And they will have meanwhile acquired the ability to be able to communicate in writing to anyone at any time. After all, how many high school students do we see now who cannot write legibly, or even at all, with a pen or pencil?

Learning to read and write our rather chaotic English language are the most difficult tasks our children will undertake in their education. Mastering these skills first are fundamental to being able to use computers later on, and in fact, are the keys to all future learning, including math.

Another unfortunate byproduct of our reliance on modern technology is the deterioration of math skills in our youngsters. Calculators and computers are wonderful tools, but when we see cashiers unable to perform the simple task of making change when the till is not working, something is sadly amiss. When this is the level of competence, these electronic marvels are no longer our servants, but have become our masters.

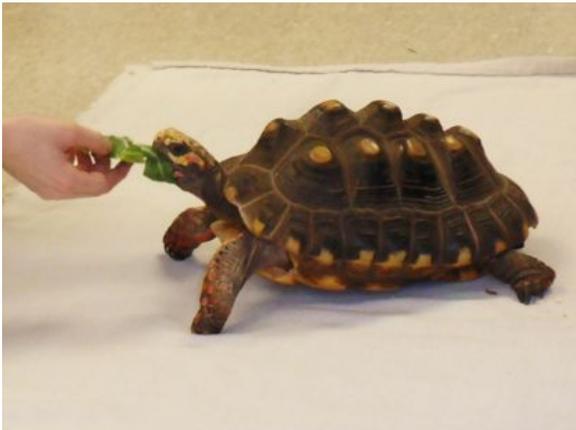
We want our students to become proficient in calculating in their heads or with pen and paper before we let calculators and computers enter the scene. In this way, students develop their number sense and reasoning abilities – and develop the mental discipline needed for problem solving. Only then can calculators and computers become useful tools for the student.

# Animals in the Classroom

Learning is most effective when it can be made fun and full of life. Contributing to this is the cooperation that develops as they work together and help each other.

This extends into the wider sphere of caring for all life forms, and the school does keep various pets to help raise the awareness and responsibility of the children. We currently have a rabbit, a hamster, a cockatiel that sings songs throughout the day, and various fish (that don't), as well as occasional visits from cats and dogs.

And of course, the children love to interact with these animals.



# Pre-School Montessori Program

Unfortunately, the current reality is that if your child enters school unable to read, he or she may never become a fluent reader. Not that there is anything inherently wrong with a child who can't read by age 6, but because the whole subject of teaching reading is generally poorly understood, it is very often poorly taught. And in large classrooms, a child generally does not receive the individual attention needed to get him or her over the initial hurdles and pitfalls in learning how to read. Failure in the early stages can lead to all sorts of negative outcomes that make it much more difficult to re-engage the child later.

Maria Montessori believed that the best time to teach a child how to read was between the ages of 4 and 6 – well below the expected norm of 7 or 8 today. She developed and adopted methods and materials to this end and discovered that the process was much faster and more thorough when children learn to read by writing first. In other words, they are re-creating the material for themselves and making it their own. Children are allowed to go through an “invented spelling” stage as they develop their own awareness of the relationship between the spoken sounds and the written letters.

Early reading and writing are but two aspects of our Montessori program, albeit very important ones. These skills form the basis for all subsequent learning – even math has its word problems. And before anyone gets too caught up in IQ scores, let's not forget that IQ tests are first and foremost tests of reading ability.

Dr. Montessori developed what she called a “sensorial” approach to teaching children. They were not expected to sit quietly at desks for hours at a time, but were given the freedom to explore in an enriched learning environment. All the senses were involved in hands-on learning.

For example, tools used in a Montessori classroom to teach reading include sandpaper letters and numbers so a child is able to get tactile feedback in tracing their shapes. Letters made of wood, fabric and other material give the child different options to keep their interest. And, of course, lots of material is provided to enable a child to write. The reading

material is carefully selected to ensure the child builds confidence by achievement.

The Montessori math program follows the same approach and is designed with lots of material for the children to handle to develop their sense of numbers, of size, of proportions, of quantity, of shape, and of the basic math operations of adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing. Beads and wooden blocks are used so a child fully understands the concepts of numbers and the decimal system, as well as the basics of the fundamental arithmetic operations of adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing. Metal and wood “pie” sections teach the concept of fractions. A simple abacus is used to develop their concept of calculation. And the children are given plenty of practice so they can master this vital subject.

Other material you will find in our Montessori classroom include large maps and map puzzles; jigsaw puzzles of varying levels; colour blocks to develop a child’s sense and knowledge of colour; scent bottles for identifying odours; games to improve motor and intellectual skills; different fasteners to teach children how to tie shoes, button shirts, fasten buckles; animal models to expose them to the natural world; and much more.

Our Montessori classroom is so different from the average classroom that we invite parents (and their children!) to experience it for themselves. Just give us a call to arrange a time for your visit.

# The Montessori Early Education Curriculum (For Children from 2 1/2 to 6 Years Old)

The Montessori Curriculum for children between the ages of 2 1/2 and 6 years is based on the following five areas of learning:

1. **Personal Independence and Care of the Environment**
2. **Education of the Senses**
3. **Language**
4. **Math**
5. **Cultural Studies**

In the Montessori system, children are placed in age groups spanning three years (e.g. 3, 4 and 5- year-olds work together). The younger children are inspired and encouraged by example and the older one's can help teach the younger ones. The full curriculum is designed to be completed over a 3-year period

## **1. Personal Independence and Care of the Environment (Practical Life Exercises)**

Children have an innate desire to become independent and take care of their own personal needs and to gain the skills to help others. The Montessori curriculum supports this inner drive by providing an environment and the necessary materials to support the path to independence.

- Exercises in personal hygiene
- Dressing
- Care of clothing

These are an integral part of the early childhood Montessori classroom. Activities to support the many skills young children need to accomplish on the way towards independence are all taught as specific lessons, with their own set of materials e. g. dressing frames, hand-washing exercises etc.

In order to work independently in a mixed age group, children are taught the rules of the classroom and how to move and work successfully within it.

- Handling the Montessori materials
- Tidying away work
- Taking care of books
- Using floor mats
- Looking after classroom pets and plants
- Preparing snacks & meals

These skills are all taught as separate exercises that are designed to give children the freedom and confidence they need in order to work at their own individual pace in the classroom.

Exercises in grace and courtesy are presented daily during circle time and in small informal group lessons.

The children learn how to behave in certain situations and acquire the social skills essential for every day living in society.

The children develop a sense of personal dignity, an understanding of their own culture and an awareness and respect for people of all ages and traditions.

Having the appropriate social and language skills enables a child to engage positively in the classroom community and beyond. Early conflict resolution skills are taught and attention is given to making good choices.

**Exercises are designed to teach the child how to:**

- Ask for something
- Introduce oneself
- Wait one's turn
- Offer help to others
- Make eye contact
- Apologize
  
- Welcome visitors
- Work cooperatively
- Offer refreshments
- Walk with a partner
- Behave at the table
- Behave in public places
  
- Shake hands

- Through the social interaction involved in carrying out these exercises, the children develop the ability to work harmoniously in a carefully prepared environment.

**Exercises for the development of fine and gross motor skills are carefully developed as part of the practical life curriculum.**

- Rolling mats
- Pouring liquids
- Threading
- Cutting space
- Sweeping
- Carrying chairs
- Walking carefully
- Carrying materials to a work
- Using utensils
- These activities develop dexterity and coordination and are closely linked to other areas of the curriculum.

The practical life component of a Montessori early childhood curriculum is the underlying foundation for success in the other four areas of the curriculum. Each task allows the child to gain independence, and to develop a sense of order, concentration, responsibility and coordination of movement. Children gain enormous freedom and confidence to work successfully both independently and cooperatively. The future success of the elementary Montessori environment is based on this core foundation of learning skills.

## **2. Education of the Senses (Sensorial materials)**

The Montessori sensorial curriculum allows the child to discriminate and order the impressions that have entered through each of his senses. Scientifically designed materials that isolate each sense help develop the child's intellect through hands-on exploration.

The child learns to separate and classify forms, colors, textures, tastes and smells. Exercises in this area refine the senses and develop skills in thinking, judging, concentrating, comparing and sequencing. The materials offer unlimited opportunities for the development of vocabulary and the essential development of dexterity that will lead to writing and reading.

The sensorial curriculum is divided into the following areas:

- ❑ **Visual Sense:** Children learn to discriminate by size, length, dimension, color, similarity, difference.
- ❑ **Tactile Sense:** Children learn to by touch. They match sandpaper and fabric of varying textures according to their similarities. They order material from rough to smooth and learn to contrast and compare.
- ❑ **Auditory Sense:** Children continue the process of matching, ordering contrasting and comparing, this time using various sounds, musical bells, instruments.
- ❑ **Complex Senses (weight, heat, shape, smell, taste):** Children explore all of the above qualifies by using carefully designed materials and exercises which sharpen their senses at a time when they have a particular developmental interest in this work (sensitive period).

The sensorial exercises are designed to prepare the child for more complex learning in language, Math and Cultural Studies.

### **3. Language curriculum**

Language in the Montessori early childhood curriculum focuses on the following areas:

#### **Oral Language**

- ❑ Listening
- ❑ Speaking

#### **Written Language**

- ❑ Reading
- ❑ Writing

The curriculum is designed to meet the young child's innate need to acquire language. Significant emphasis is placed on building vocabulary and oral competency. Through the use of the Montessori materials, children acquire a rich vocabulary for labeling, describing, comparing and contrasting their environment and the people in it.

Precise terminology is used. Discussion is encouraged, and the children are given the appropriate language to engage in a meaningful exchange as they get on with their work

Small group and circle activities are organized on a daily basis. These are opportunities for the children to enjoy a wide variety of language activities that are carefully designed to enrich their oral expression and strengthen their listening skills.

- Rhyming words
- Story telling
- Nonsense words
- Singing games
- Opposites
- Poetry
- Animal families
- Role-playing
- Nursery Rhymes

In essence, language enrichment is embedded in the Montessori curriculum and is a central point of focus when the teacher is giving a lesson in any of the other curriculum areas.

Written language is introduced to children at about 4 years of age. Skills are taught separately by careful use of specially designed materials.

- Pencil control
- Letter formation
- Sound/letter recognition
- Phonetic blending
- Word/picture matching
- Sentence construction

These exercises, when presented in sequence, lead the child to levels of competence in reading and writing skills. Children are encouraged to write their own "books" and so experience the joy of communicating their thoughts to others. Literacy skills develop rapidly as the child's own inner

drive to learn is supported by a carefully prepared program designed to meet this stage of activity. With the Montessori program, it is expected that children will be reading simple materials fluently by the time they are six years old.

#### **4. Math**

The Montessori early childhood math curriculum is firmly based on learning through experience. Children use a wide variety of carefully constructed materials to lead them to an understanding of the value and sequence of numbers 1 to 10. From there they are introduced to larger amounts and learn the concept of making groups of tens, hundreds, thousands (the decimal system). Number notation and place value are taught as the child develops an understanding of number concepts.

Four and five years olds are introduced to the basic operations of addition, multiplication, subtraction and division at a concrete level so that they gain a real concept what these concepts really mean.

Geometry is introduced in the early childhood program through the use of materials which are classified according to qualities e.g. “these shapes have three sides, they are called triangles,” “the four sides on these shapes are all the same size, they are called squares.” The child learns to discriminate, classify and name circles, squares, rectangles and polygons, always using materials to guide her.

Fractions are introduced, again in concrete form, and an introduction to the concept of equal parts of a whole lays the foundation for further work at the elementary level. Always, the child builds upon what she already knows and systematically progresses from concrete examples to abstract. She discovers number patterns, sequences and rules by handling the materials.

On completion of the early childhood curriculum, the child will demonstrate through the use of materials, an understanding of the following:

- Number value, sequence, and symbols from 1 to 1,000
- The four basic math operations

- ❑ Odd and even numbers
- ❑ Skip counting (early preparation for memorization of number facts)
- ❑ Reading and recording numbers for all of the above activities.

The program has the advantage of being able to meet each child's individual learning style and pace of development. Children who are not ready to complete the early childhood curriculum by the end of this cycle will continue the work at the elementary level where there are special linkage materials to bring about the understanding.

## **5. Cultural Studies**

The Montessori early childhood cultural program is based on an integrated study of science, the social sciences and the arts. Children are exposed to a rich, stimulating variety of activities based on hands on learning.

In keeping with the Montessori philosophy of education, the children first experience general rules of the universe (e.g. the division of land and water). These are gradually broken down into smaller parts (e.g. continents/oceans, countries, provinces/states, cities, etc.)

Stories of animals and children from other lands help the children to understand fundamental needs and how these are influenced by climate, environment and lifestyle. Cultural differences and similarities are explored through music, dance, costume and food. Festivals and traditions such as Christmas, Hanukkah, Chinese New Year, Diwali, St. Patrick's Day are celebrated through the arts, stories, geography. Working with cultural materials helps the children become aware that they are part of the large family of humanity.

Simple science experiments that demonstrate the qualities of matter: magnetic/non-magnetic; solid/liquid; living/non-living are made by the children as part of the study of their environment.

Weather observations and experiments help them to appreciate the variety of clothing, homes, food that exist to meet people's needs.

Materials are available to help the children label, compare and classify the parts of plants and animals. Particular emphasis is placed on having plants and pets in the classroom and around the school. The children learn how to

take care of these so that they thrive. They undertake experiments to discover the needs of plants and seeds.

An understanding of the passage of time is developed through the use of the clock, the calendar and personal time lines. This lays the foundation for an understanding of history in the elementary years.

### **Art, Music, Drama**

Art, music storytelling are all explored through a variety of media and structured programs. Children are encouraged to incorporate an activity from these streams as part of their cultural project work.

In short, the Montessori method of education introduces children to a wide variety of subjects in an integrated and interesting way. The information obtained by the child through practical activities is retained and forms a solid base for learning through the elementary years and beyond.

# Elementary Curriculum

The Alive Montessori & Private School elementary school program is based on the Ontario public school curriculum – with a difference.

First of all, we place a very heavy emphasis on the Basics of reading, writing and math to ensure that each child has a sound foundation on which to build his education. All other learning becomes simpler and more rewarding if these Basics are mastered. Therefore, our first priority with any new student is to bring these skills up to speed before spending too much time on other learning.

Unique to our approach is that we use “checksheets” outlining the materials to be covered and the skills to be mastered. The student is expected to fully understand each step before moving on to the next item. In this way, the student progresses at his or her own optimum rate. This moves away from the one-size-fits-all approach and allows us to provide the individual attention lacking in so many schools. It acknowledges the fact that learning does not occur in a smooth, linear progression, but happens in spurts. By using this unique teaching method, the slower student is not overwhelmed with things he is not ready for, and the fast student is not held back and allowed to become bored.

Another unique aspect of our approach is that we teach our elementary students *HOW* to study. Surprisingly, if you check the curriculum of almost any school from Kindergarten through university, you will find that this is a skill that is almost never taught. Yet in this rapidly changing world, it is vital that our students learn how to accumulate new knowledge and develop new skills quickly, thoroughly and effectively.

The typical modern classroom, for far too many students, has become a place that is uninspiring, dull and boring. This is partly the fault of the school environment itself and partly from poor textbooks and teaching methods that are too heavily weighted towards theoretical book knowledge. Most students will tune out if they cannot see how they can apply what they are supposed to be learning to their lives. It is still necessary to find hands-on activities that will engage the students and we

make sure that these are provided at our school. Our classrooms are lively, fun places with lots of activities to keep students interested.

While we use the Ontario curriculum as a base so the child does not get lost if the family moves or if he or she has to re-enter the public system, this is enhanced in many ways. We make extensive use of the E.D. Hirsch (of *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* fame) series *What Your \_\_\_\_ Grader Needs to Know* as well as other materials the children find interesting to give a more thorough and rounded education. Also, by taking the child's interests into account, we keep him or her involved and excited in the learning process.

You will also find that your child will not be inundated with homework. We don't expect parents to do our job; we expect the child to be disciplined and work hard to get his or her work done at school.

However, we do expect parents to encourage lots of reading at home, and to limit the amount of 'screen time' for their children. We have found from experience that too much time playing video games, or watching TV or YouTube, or being on-line with FaceBook, has a detrimental effect on the concentration and ability of our students to learn. In many cases, it can even affect behaviour negatively.

However, the reverse is also true; when the children are achieving successes and gaining new skills with a proper education, we often find that they become less interested in these largely time-wasting activities. Even the youngest children often are looking to broaden their horizons and challenge themselves with reading and other learning activities.

# Does My Child Have a Learning Disability or ADHD?

The simple answer is “almost certainly not”.

It is our belief that the term “learning disability” is grossly overused and would best be re-phrased as “teaching inability”. The term is far too often used to shift responsibility from the school and to blame the child when he doesn’t seem to be learning as well as he should. It is our experience that caring about the individual student and using proper teaching methods will resolve any so-called “learning disability”.

Likewise, we believe that behaviour problems in the school are primarily brought on by poor teaching or a troubling school environment and are not symptoms of a “disease”. Children who fail to understand what is required of them can quite naturally be expected to act up and become disruptive; imagine how you, an adult, would feel if you were forced to spend hours every day on tasks that you did not understand.

Furthermore, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) is not a disease as we understand the term in medicine. Although you may have been told that it is caused by a “chemical imbalance in the brain”, this has never been demonstrated to have any slightest basis in fact. If someone suggests that this is the case with your child, ask to see the medical test. You can be assured that one will not be provided because no such test exists – no lab test, no blood test, no brain scan, no test of any kind.

ADHD is diagnosed simply by observations of behaviour. This is done using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association. (The DSM can be considered the “Bible” of the psychiatric industry as governments and insurance companies will not pay for any disorder not listed by a specific number.)

For 314.01 Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, we have:

- 1) often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat (in adolescents, may be limited to subjective feelings of restlessness)
- 2) has difficulty remaining seated when required to do so

- 3) is easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
- 4) has difficulty awaiting turn in games or group situations
- 5) often blurts out answers to questions before they have been completed ...

These are the first five of fourteen similarly vague criteria, taken verbatim from the DSM.

Apart from the obvious difficulty in determining what is excessive beyond normal childhood behaviour, we are left with the fact that any “diagnosis” may tell us more about the person making it than about the child being diagnosed. A person who has little tolerance for the rambunctious joy in children may find these traits in every child. In fact, with such vague criteria, it’s possible that the “disease” being diagnosed is childhood itself.

We also have the unanswered question of how a drug is supposed to correct an unconfirmed chemical imbalance in the brain, especially as the drugs prescribed for ADHD do not occur naturally in any brain. As Peter Breggin, a psychiatrist himself and an opponent of drugging as a solution to psychiatric problems, affirms, “The only chemical imbalance we know for sure is the one introduced by the drug itself.”

Even if we do allow that a child’s behavior is troublesome, it is much more probable that it may be quite normal childhood response to problems completely unrelated to “faulty brain chemistry”. Here are some things parents can check for themselves.

- 1) Is the child very bright and bored because of a slow pace of instruction?
- 2) Can the child read or is he behind in this fundamental skill and on which almost all subsequent learning depends? Does he know that letters and combinations of letters represent speech sounds and that these go together to form words? Unfortunately, with large classrooms and little individual instruction, there will likely be many children who do not grasp this basic concept. Proper instruction can remedy this; any behaviour resulting from frustration because of not being able to read will dissipate.

- 3) As ADHD and other so-called learning or behavioural disorders are usually first diagnosed in the early grades, maybe we should question some of our assumptions regarding schooling. First of all, how natural is it for six, seven and eight year olds to sit quietly at a desk for hours at a time? Is the child getting enough physical exercise throughout the day? If he has no way to burn off excess energy, how can we expect him to be calm when this is required of him?
- 4) Are there any dietary or medical issues contributing to any perceived inappropriate behaviour? Is the child eating too much sugar or carbohydrates – unfortunately more common than not in this day and age of fast food? Is he getting enough protein? Does he have any undetected allergies or sensitivities to food additives, again more and more common with the proliferation of processed foods?
- 5) Is there some situation at school that is upsetting the child? Is he being bullied, taunted or teased? Does he not like his teacher for some reason?

The above is a partial list of factors that may cause ADHD-like “symptoms” that have nothing whatsoever to do with anything being wrong within the child’s brain. And this does not even take into account that children are unique individuals who mature differently and who learn in diverse ways and at varying rates. With this in mind, any concerns about particular childhood behaviours may be completely without foundation; perhaps simply realizing that “children will be children” can largely alleviate them.

We believe that schools should do what they are supposed to do – teach our children – and to do so by using correct education methods. To drug the child and blame him for our failures to teach properly is adding injury to insult.







