

## *Hanging in with Montessori in Tough Times*

*by Tim Sedlin, The Montessori Foundation*

The economy is in the dumps, you're worried about money, and you've got a child in Montessori. It's reenrollment time, and, like millions of parents just like you, you're going to have to decide what to do next year. Now what? If you've hit the wall and simply cannot afford next year's tuition, you might want to check to see if the school can lend you a hand. You might also ask the children's grandparents to see if they are in a position to help. More and more often, grandparents play a major role in helping their children with tuition. But for many of us, the issue may not be so much if we can afford to continue to pay the cost of tuition; instead, we may have concern about what the future may bring and a sense that now may be the time to move on.

It's no secret that I'm a died-in-the-wool, true-blue Montessori fan, but you've got to make an important decision. So how can I help? I can encourage you to ask yourself three questions:

- 1. Why did you choose Montessori for your children in the first place, and has your thought process changed over time?**
- 2. What have you been hoping to see your children take away from their years in Montessori, and how important are those outcomes?**
- 3. How important do you feel the next few years in your children's education will be? How might they benefit if you are willing and able to stay the course, and what may be lost if you can't?**

Benjamin Franklin wrote that an investment in education pays the best dividends. Centuries later, most people would still agree with him. Every year is precious, and however our children are treated and taught by us at home, in school, and on the playground by their peers, will have tremendous influence on their future.

There is pretty clear evidence that Montessori gives children the skills that they need to excel. We can all understand why some parents will be tempted to take their children out of private school in tough economic times. Historically, most will give it some thought and decide to stay. Why? One reason parents have expressed in the past, and are expressing again today, is the importance of keeping things as stable in their children's lives as possible in times of great stress. But in the case of Montessori schools, there is yet another factor to consider: how can we best prepare our children for the future? Today, the global economy has changed. The great opportunities are shifting to enterprises and fields based much more on innovation and information. The schools that most people think of as being 'traditional' are actually not very old historically. The large public school districts developed in the big cities only spread out to the suburbs after the second world war. The traditional American school was, for centuries the one-room school house, which had multi-age class groups and teachers, who tended to remain with the same groups of children for several years. Because children were immersed in the everyday life and work of their family and community, they tended to have much more direct, hands-on experience with practical mechanics, everyday tools, daily chores, and the cycles of the seasons from planting to harvest. The things children were expected to learn in those much smaller and simpler schools placed greater emphasis

on cultural literacy, history, geography, the lives of famous people, great inventions, and great poetry and literature. Can you see the parallels between the one-room school house of American past to Montessori?

The large schools that we all know today were consciously designed to educate the masses according to plans and a course study developed in the school district's central offices. And ironically, for much of the 1900s, the organizational model that inspired policy and procedure was the approach to mass production and depersonalization of the American factory and corporation. Students were considered the 'raw material', the school was thought of as a 'factory' and teachers were thought of as the 'work force'. The tension between labor and management is still present to this day in most school systems.

In an information-age economy, we need and reward people who see things in new and different ways. There is far less need for the workers who just put in their time and go along with the current party line. It is obvious that corporations are far less committed to loyal employees. But what may not be obvious is that the best jobs are increasingly going to the people who are incredibly intelligent, creative, and forward thinking. It is a high octane blend of people skills, the ability to organize and coordinate projects, and the innovation that wins elections (think about the incredibly well-organized grassroots campaign run by President Obama) or that builds successful businesses (think about Google Founders Sergie Brin and Larry Page, or Jeff Bezos, Founder of Amazon, all who credit their success in large part to their Montessori education).

We know that Montessori works! I am constantly amazed that year after year so many parents express the same concerns, as if Montessori were a new, untested experiment. **There are tens of thousands of Montessori schools around the world, and they have produced outstanding graduates for more than one hundred years. Montessori has historically been the choice of parents, who do not value conformity but rather the cultivation of their children's curiosity and creativity.**

In my case, I wanted my children to be fascinated by books, interesting people, and new ideas. I wanted to ensure that they felt their education was a gift, not a burden. I did not want to encourage them to accept what their teachers taught without question. I did not value obedience over kindness, respect, and courtesy. What are your own goals?