

# FORZA VITALE!

April, 2012



## *Walking In*

*As at most Montessori schools, the staff at Montessori Children's House share ideas about children and parenting with our parents. Periodically we attach a short article to our weekly Newsnotes. This is one that I wrote shortly after our school opened and noticed most parents carrying their child from car to school—and in some cases from a nearby apartment building to the school. OMA members are welcome to use it any way you wish—borrowing, re-printing, re-writing, etc. Or let me know if you have a different approach.*

*David Cannon, Montessori Children's House, Portland*



I'll admit it: I still cringe a bit when a phone call begins, "I'm looking for a nice place to drop my child when I go back to work....." But it does remind me of the happy fact that you are not "dropping" your children here!

One day last spring after I took our granddaughter to her toddler class at Cedar Montessori School, a new parent there started a conversation like this: "I love seeing these little tiny children walking themselves up to the door along with their mom or dad, carrying their own lunch bag. It's so different from the other daycare we used before where most of the kids were carried from the car to the door hurriedly as if they couldn't walk."

I recalled this the other day watching a couple of our toddlers walking in (and down the long hallway, in the case of the Heron Cove children). I thought I'd share a few thoughts after years of observing at schools for young children.

First, I am *not* arguing for you to stop carrying your child down the sidewalk or through the door if that's your practice. I don't presume to know enough to do that. This might be a rare moment of physical closeness in a busy morning of preparations followed by a long day at work. I'd be the last person to ask you to give that up in order to have that particular exercise of independence for your toddler. You have plenty of other opportunities to develop independence.

But I do think the child walking under her own power into her school in the morning is a meaningful and positive thing for those who do it.

Our job is to share perspectives with parents so that they have the most possible options and ideas to consider. Many of us have benefited along the way from the perspectives of others that in some cases led us to try something new. Here are just a couple of things you might want to consider:

- ***Movement.*** It's absolutely the case with children (and to a lesser extent all of us) that when we move, when we use our muscles large or small as part of anything we do, it engages our minds and our hearts much more fully. That's been well established by research on early learning, and many of us can relate to it intuitively as well. It's one of the reasons that "learning by doing" is such a key principle of Montessori and of other successful teaching techniques. The principle applies more broadly than just learning situations, however. If a child walks into a place under his own power—be it the preschool, the zoo, the grandparents' house, or anywhere else—he begins there more connected to whatever it is. It isn't hard to imagine that very young children walking themselves to the preschool even five or ten yards are getting mentally prepared to greet, to prepare, to do what they do here. Consider providing that opportunity by your example and gentle encouragement; and of course the days when your child isn't quite sure if he is ready to engage, he'll show you by asking to be carried on that occasion, which is great. No routine needs to be for always!
- ***Independence.*** Yes, Montessorians and parenting books talk about it a lot, and sometimes parents understandably react and say "Enough already! They're so young, and they've got many years ahead when they can be independent and will have to be. I treasure the baby and toddler years."

We would say that it's all a matter of degree. Of course your child has fewer arenas for independence now than she will next year and fewer then than the year after. But it is important to recognize that since the moment of birth a child is "programmed" to move in the direction of greater independence all the time, that this is the essence of human development, and that it's the art of child rearing and nurturing to provide the "roots and wings" in a balance that's optimal for your child. Security and safety are fundamental—psychological as well as physical—but that's only half the equation. The other half is to move out and up, to find one's own self, to do things for one self—to look outward, to walk, feed oneself, to reach, crawl, explore, and to begin doing the most important things in the world—the things you see adults doing. They must be terribly important, the child's unconscious mind reasons, because the adults are doing them!

Studies in recent years have only confirmed the belief that meaningful self-esteem develops from meaningful accomplishment, at every stage of life. Children who are permitted to do things for themselves (and taught to) are generally happier, sunnier, and more active. They learn the most and tend to go through life seeking and meeting challenges well. Older children and adults who can function independently and competently have the best foundation for functioning cooperatively and socially. I know these are huge generalizations, but it so important to those of us who have had the chance to observe this for decades that we have a hard time not sharing it with friends, and it encourages us when we see these correlations confirmed and shared ever more widely in our society. We at the Montessori Children's House will not only share these views, but we'll be happy to point to other sources of information on the subject to those who are interested in pursuing it.

That walk from car to classroom is just one little moment and not of universal importance by itself. You may be encouraging independence appropriate for your child's age in hundreds of ways, and this may be the time you choose to carry her or him as you did when they were smaller, a very sweet moment for both of you. (Some parents carry a child to the bedroom at night for the same reason after a day of activity and "independence" for both of you.) I just hope that if and when your children walk here or start doing

anything else like that for themselves, you will get the same pleasure from seeing it and appreciate it like those of us here whose work is so much about helping children to help themselves.



**About David Cannon:** David Cannon taught in the elementary Montessori classroom for eight years and was a school administrator for 20 years. He has recently opened a new school in the South Waterfront neighborhood. Montessori Children's House serves toddlers and primary-aged children. Also, he works part-time as a consultant in public affairs and education, and has several volunteer jobs. In addition to serving as Treasurer of the OMA Board, David has volunteered on the MINW Board, three Montessori school boards, and as a city planning commissioner.

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