Do you store ketchup in the refrigerator or in the cupboard? I have to admit I’d never considered that question. I’m an unquestioning ketchup-in-the-refrigerator guy. I grew up in a ketchup-in-the-refrigerator family, I married a wonderful ketchup-in-the-refrigerator woman and we raised our kids, well you know how.

Who’s asking such a question? Scott Page, Professor of Complex Systems, Political Science, and Economics at the University of Michigan. Dr. Page was not playing Trivial Pursuit with the board chairs and headmasters of ISAS member schools. He was speaking to us at a conference in the Galleria this week. “Leveraging Diversity” was the title of his talk and it turns out that the answer to the ketchup question has a cultural dimension most of us were blind to. African Americans and Australians are among the groups more likely to store ketchup in the cupboard.

continued on page 2
The Difference
by John Long, continued from page 1

So what?

Was this just another diversity workshop encouraging me to be understanding and inclusive of Australians and African Americans? No, Dr. Page looks at diversity through a very different lens. Emphasizing the creative energy that emerges from groups of diverse thinkers, he sees differentiation and diversity contributing directly to creative problem-solving and economic vitality. That got my attention.

In a review of Page’s book, The Difference, Claudia Dreifus wrote, “Rather than ponder moral questions like, ‘Why can’t we all get along?’ Dr. Page asks practical ones like, ‘How can we all be more productive together?’ The answer, he suggests, is in messy, creative organizations and environments with individuals from vastly different backgrounds and life experiences.”

So what’s this got to do with school? What kind of school environment will best promote creative problem solving? What kind of school environment will best prepare students for adult life? What kind of schools will make the largest contribution to creative enterprise, entrepreneurial activity, and economic growth? Schools with the greatest diversity of thinking.

I look at Post Oak’s hall of flags, celebrating the 55 countries of birth of Post Oak students and parents. It is emblematic of the school’s ethnic, religious, cultural, racial, and national diversity. But they all attend Montessori school; don’t they all think like Montessori kids?

To be a Montessori kid is to be a divergent thinker. Last spring the Wall Street Journal asked, “Is there something about the Montessori approach that nurtures creativity and inventiveness that we can all learn from?” At the same time, renowned creativity expert Sir Ken Robinson declared “school kills creativity.”

Montessori teachers encourage and celebrate diversity of thought. Montessori students don’t spend time trying to figure out the answer hidden inside the teacher’s brain. They are encouraged to think for themselves; to find their own solutions to problems; and ultimately, to identify their own problems and to pursue their own interests. Montessori kids don’t all think alike; they each have their own ideas. They are independent thinkers. And to amplify this diversity of thought, Post Oak kids come from a host of different backgrounds.

A couple of years ago a family left Post Oak for another school. At the time they commented to me, “Post Oak is just too diverse.” It was not hard for them to find a school that is more homogenous, where the cultural background of students and their families is more singular. That can feel very comfortable. How can we understand this perspective?

As a part of his research, Dr. Page assigned contrasting work groups to deal with difficult problems. He did this a number of times with different problems and different groups of people, and the experiment was always a variation of this: one group had highly qualified people with similar backgrounds. The other group had people of different backgrounds in terms of technical training and education as well as culture, ethnicity, and intelligence. Though the first group was comprised of a team of experts, the more diverse groups consistently produced measurably better results, measurably better solutions to difficult problems.

However, when they were surveyed about their experience working together, the more homogenous groups thought they had done better and were happier with the group dynamic. Why? The group was more like them. Thinking was within a narrower band, so each person’s ideas met with less resistance from the others. They felt more comfortable and so they rated the group dynamic as better. But when it came to finding more and better solutions to difficult problems, the diverse groups were more generative and more creative.

In his book Who’s Your City, Richard Florida discussed diversity in terms of a “wide variety of talents and specialities.” He went on to say, “The city…is a complex, self-organizing ecology whose form cannot be predetermined or controlled from outside. Its diversity is the true source of innovation and economic growth.” This certainly echoes Scott Page. And it describes in macrocosm the Montessori classrooms we have created at Post Oak.

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Underlined phrases in this article are links to websites—access them in the online edition (link on the left side of the homepage).
Congratulations to Kathy Long’s and Debbie Nickerson’s classes for reaching 100% parent participation in The Post Oak Fund! Thank you for your support!

$50,000 remains to reach our goal of $250,000.

If you haven’t yet participated in this year’s campaign, consider the impact Post Oak has on your family. Please make your gift today!

—Christina Kopanidis-Cantu, Development Director

MATCHING GIFTS

Make your gift count twice! Many companies have matching gift programs. If your company does, please pick up a form from your business or human resource office, fill it out, and submit it to Post Oak’s development office. We’ll take care of the rest. Thank you!
"My dream is to do international commercial real estate development. I will travel anywhere, learn any language," said former Post Oak student Justin Boyar. "I've always been adaptable to new situations. Montessori definitely supported me in that."

Justin started at Post Oak as a Primary student and attended through grade five. He reminisced about learning Spanish at a young age. "Patricia Onofre taught me Spanish starting in Lower Elementary," he said. Justin continued studying Spanish for 14 years and is now fluent. "I almost minored in it in college. It was obviously influential."

As an 11-year-old Upper Elementary student, Justin recalled a teacher-organized, two-week trip to England and Scotland. "We went to Cambridge, Stratford-Upon-Avon, Edinburgh, London, Bath – we went all over the UK. It was my first time out of the country. I loved it so much I went back and did a study abroad program in London in high school. The trip really shaped me. I want to work internationally so it was a very formative experience for me."

Following his time at Post Oak, Justin attended Spring Branch Middle School, Memorial High School, and graduated from Episcopal High School. "I went to public school to get out of the bubble, but five years later I switched to Episcopal. I'm glad I got the experience of both. I wanted to poke my head out and look around."

After graduating from Tulane University with a BA in philosophy, Justin spent some time in Manhattan working for a boutique commercial real estate finance firm that included work in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Following the crash of the financial markets Justin came back to Houston to "seek shelter from the storm." He decided to pursue an MBA at the University of Houston. With some encouragement from a peer advisor, Justin and one his classmates started a real estate club, planning events and networking with some of the largest commercial real estate firms in Houston. The club now has over 60 students with an active audience of over 150. Justin also led the charge for U of H to establish a real estate certificate, an MBA with a concentration in real estate. As a result of his work he received a Texas Business Hall of Fame Foundation scholarship of $10,000 for "bridging relationships with civic leaders in the real estate community and establishing a real estate program and student following at U of H." Justin was also awarded a graduate assistant fellowship that covered his tuition. "I am a Graduate Assistant to John Walsh, who is now the Executive Director of the U of H graduate real estate program. We are also founding the Bower Real Estate Center and the Graduate Real Estate Program."

In the next three to four years they plan to establish an institute dedicated to research, events, and symposia. Plans are also in the works for a Master's degree in real estate, which would be the first of its kind in Houston. "We are the fourth largest city in the nation with one of the largest concentrations of real estate and development companies. There is such a demand for it and zero supply. We are feeding into a situation where the real estate community is really behind this and wants to build a practice-based real estate program at the University of Houston and is 110% behind it."
Alumni Night 2012
Best Night of the Year!

Join us for the 2012 Post Oak Alumni Night on Thursday, January 5, 2012 from 6:30–8:30 pm.

We are excited to welcome back the high school students, college students, and young professionals who graduated from The Post Oak School as they reflect on their experiences in Montessori. How did their education at Post Oak help prepare them for their subsequent education and for life? Parents of our current students as well as prospective parents are encouraged to attend this event.

Post Oak alum and USC film school graduate Sam Geer will present.

It isn’t hard to see how Justin’s Post Oak education helped shape his current success. “Post Oak was great for me because I’m project oriented. The teachers allowed me to take initiative to do my own projects and that was critical for me. I always felt privileged to attend The Post Oak School. The kind of experience I got here was positive and impactive. It is a really creative place. It is a place that really enriches you. The school supports who you are and doesn’t try to conform you to how they think you should be. Post Oak is really about nurturing you from day one and helping you become the best person you can possibly be.”

Coffee with the Elementary Director

November 16, 2011
9:00–10:00 am
common room

Topic: Transitioning from Primary to Lower Elementary

In this gathering, directors Mirani Smith and Jeff Schneider will highlight the changes in the child and in the Montessori environment through the transition to Lower Elementary.
Thanks to the Post Oak community for a great turnout at Book Fair this year! And special thanks to the chairs, Jennifer Chavis and Jessica Gregg, and all the volunteers who helped coordinate the event. If you missed Book Fair, you still have the chance to support the library by becoming a Friend—see the form on page 11.
1. Naming objects and talking about them.
2. Setting up a long division problem.
3. Working with the addition strip board.
4. Identifying countries in Lower Elementary.
5. Opera auditions.
Montessori Journey

Each year, parents, prospective parents, and employees of The Post Oak School have the opportunity to explore the world that students experience each day from Infant Community through Middle School. Here is a small sample of photos from this year’s Montessori Journey.

Photos by Debbie Henderson and Elaine Schweizer
High School Open House

November 29, 2011  7:00 pm

to be held in the main gallery of our Museum District partner
The Glassell School of Art
5101 Montrose Boulevard

Think you know what a high school classroom looks like?

*Think again.*
Your Child & Healthy Food Choices

Are you feeling challenged and stressed when it comes to meals and food choices for your child? Are your children's food selections anything but healthy? Is your child stuck in a food rut?

If your answer is yes, meet Aimee Taylor. A Post Oak parent who has mastered the art of healthy eating for parents and children. She is a healthy lifestyle consultant who spends her time helping families develop a way to balance their schedules while providing healthy meals and snacks. From planning and cooking to presentation, she can empower your child to make healthy food choices by helping you develop critical food smarts.

Please join us on the evening of Tuesday, December 6 from 7:00 to 8:00 pm to meet Aimee as she presents some of her tips and tricks for helping us help our children make healthy food choices. Childcare will be provided – please call the front office.

—Mirani Smith, Early Childhood Director

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Thank you for your support of the Post Oak Library

Opera!
Costumes, Set, Marketing, Done-In-A-Day, Hospitality, and more!

Join one of the opera subcommittees to help create this biennial production.

Email Tanya Gee to sign up.

Opera dates
Remember to mark your calendars with the new Opera dates:

OPERA WEEK
January 30–February 3, 2012

PERFORMANCE
February 3, 2012 at 7 pm
**NOTICE BOARD**

**Grandparents’ Days are almost here!**

Do you still need an invitation emailed to a relative or friend for this year’s Grandparents’ Days on November 21 & 22? Email Kathryn Murphy (kathrynmurphy@postoakschool.org) with their details.

Let your guests know that **valet will be provided**.

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**Volunteers Needed:**

**Grandparents’ Days Chaperones**

Nov. 21 or 22 from 8:30 am to 11 am

**Contact:**

Kathryn Murphy (kathrynmurphy@postoakschool.org)

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**Bearkats basketball starts next week!**

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**ABOUT THE WEEKLY POST**

*The Weekly Post* appears on most Fridays of the regular school year. You can receive a printed copy from your oldest child, or a PDF version online.

Submit letters, articles, or photos in electronic form by 5:00 pm on the Tuesday before publication to Communications Coordinator Elaine Schweizer (elaineschweizer@postoakschool.org). If publication is on a Thursday due to school closure on Friday, then the deadline is 5:00 pm on the preceding Monday.

All photos in *The Weekly Post* are by Elaine Schweizer unless otherwise noted.

The Post Oak School was founded in 1963 and accredited by both the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS)

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