We are reprinting a speech given by a Montessori middle school student from Atlanta ten years ago. We first reprinted it in 2007 on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the first Montessori school. On that occasion Montessori promised that children educated in a new way would become new children and that these new children would change the world. Since Post Oak is in the midst of its 50th anniversary, it seems a good occasion to reprint Caughlin Butler’s insightful and inspiring speech once again.
NOBLE CHILDREN

By [Anonymous]

Being asked to reflect on my Montessori education, I find it helpful to take one step back to the questions, how is the Montessori curriculum different and what difference has it made for me? I am thirteen now and have attended Montessori school exclusively from the time I was 20 months old. In considering how best to describe my Montessori education, the experience of my peers who have not been in Montessori has served as a point of reference and source of information.

A common topic of conversation among my friends is school. In these conversations the differences in our educational experiences are brought into sharp focus, and for me, those differences become shockingly apparent. Allow me to share a portion of a recent conversation I had with a friend with whom I have a great deal in common. We are close in age, family structure, live in similar homes and neighborhoods, worship in the same faith, have parents in the same profession, play violin in the same orchestra, just to mention a few important commonalities. However, the difference in our school experience represents a true dichotomy. Listen in:

Me: So what’s it like to have lockers? We have open cubbies instead of lockers.

Her: Open cubbies? Don’t people steal things?

M: I can’t imagine that. You say you rush from class to class. Why are you rushing?

H: Well our school is very big and some of my classes are on opposite ends of the school. And if you’re late, your teacher gets really mad and marks you late on the roll. Our classes are only 45 minutes, so they are really annoyed when you make the class get started late.

M: Only 45 minutes of class time? Most of our classes are an hour to three hours long. We used to have the longest time period for class be 1½ hours, but it wasn’t enough time to really get involved in our work, so we increased the time to 3 hours. This way, we have enough time and can pace ourselves. What are the teachers in your classes like?

H: Well, some of my teachers are, like, ok, but some are really mean. They give you all this extra homework, and you can be punished for, like, coming in late or talking in class.

M: Really? That doesn’t sound at all like any of my teachers. All the teachers I’ve had are companionable, interesting, and friendly. The only extra homework we get is assignments that weren’t finished the night before. You can’t talk in class?

H: Lucky! You have nice teachers. All of mine make me read books.

M: I love books! I love to read! Are you saying that you don’t like to read?

H: I can’t stand reading! It’s so boring and umm… yah. How can you possibly like reading? That’s like…just totally not possible.

M: I read all the time. In the morning, at night, during meals…all the time. Speaking of meals, we made a really delicious crock pot lunch last week and had fresh baked bread. It was a new recipe our teacher tried.

H: Wait…you, like, read while you eat? Like, no way, you have time to read during lunch? We have only a short time to eat during lunch. By the time we finally get through the lunch line we have to stand by the trash cans and eat really quickly or we’ll be late getting to class. You cook in your class with your teachers?

M: Well, we don’t cook our lunches together everyday, just once a week. Don’t you get time to socialize? We don’t have long lunches, but at least long enough to talk.

H: We don’t have like, any time to eat. It’s like, so unfair.

From this conversation, you can hear a marked difference between my friend and me and our educational experience. Our school lives contrast in ways that surprise us. I find that I perceive the world in a very different way from most of my friends and I attribute that difference to my Montessori education and two specific elements of it, the Great Lessons and freedoms and responsibilities.

The Great Lessons given in the elementary classes show students the grand scheme of life, tying together all the components of the Montessori curriculum. The key lessons focus on teaching these components. Without the Great Lessons, all the key lessons are diminished in value because they are not connected. Imagine you are trying to get somewhere and your map (The Great Lesson) is stolen. You cannot find your way, and landmarks (key lessons) are useless because you do not know where they are on the map.

My views are also influenced by the way I comprehend freedoms and responsibilities. I have learned that first I must be responsible for myself. In doing this I do not become another person’s responsibility. Second, I must be responsible for the communities that I am a part of. I must do what needs to be done in order to keep
peace and harmony. I also have been shown that more freedom comes with more responsibility. The less reliable we are, the less freedoms that we have. This simple truth, though often overlooked, is present everywhere in our society. For example, if you are not reliable enough to drive your car at the right speed, you will earn yourself a ticket, decreasing your driving freedoms. From my experience and perceptions, one way a Montessori classroom is differentiated from a traditional classroom is the focus put on strengthening our community and our respect for others by holding the belief that every person is important. We need them and they need us.

I find this important difference evident in the many communities of which I am member. Outside my Montessori school friends, many adolescents with whom I interact tend to see the world in a limited fashion. I attribute this to the absence of the Great Lessons to their education. It becomes a greater challenge for them to see the importance, connections, and interrelatedness of the subjects they learn. However intrigued they may be by different issues, it has frequently been my experience they see those topics in isolation and rarely make a connection of those interesting issues to a broader context or to their immediate situation.

The absence of clear lessons on and direct experience with responsibility and freedom are most prominently displayed in group and individual behavior. Spending time in groups that lack this training, I can best describe as unpleasant, frustrating, difficult, and on occasion, an ordeal; while, participating in groups who have been taught and learned early the value and importance of personal responsibility and teamwork, are best described as rewarding, pleasant and enjoyable. It is my opinion, that trying to work with others who do not appreciate the relationship between freedom and responsibility, is made difficult because they have become too caught up in their own needs and interests at the expense of those around them. Several times when I have been introduced to new groups, I gravitate and quickly make friends with people who tend to approach tasks in a similar focused manner and with similar expectations. Upon further investigation, we find we are the only ones in the group with a Montessori background. Our interests, conversations, and behavior share a common Montessori thread.

After sifting through my thoughts and observations on the differences between Montessori and traditional schools, I return to my opening questions, how is the Montessori curriculum different and what difference has it made for me? My conclusion is that Maria Montessori herself was different. Montessori had a goal that was higher than that of other educators. She strived, not to create highly talented students, but to instead fashion noble people. She wished to teach peace to children, so that they can teach peace to the world. This being her mission, she devised a teaching program that gave a child the tools they would need to someday fulfill what she called their Cosmic Task. Students in Montessori schools are taught to ask the question, “How can I make the world a better place?” This is the fundamental difference in the Montessori curriculum; it teaches a higher purpose. However, Montessori is not a miracle approach. It is only as good as it is used. Noble students are the product of nurturing environments at school and home, emphasis on the proper values, and a consistency in the things a child is taught. How has the Montessori curriculum made a difference for me? It has taught me to strive to do noble works.

is a Middle School student at the First Montessori School of Atlanta. This speech was presented at the International Montessori Council’s Congress and Peace Academy in the summer of 2003 as one of “The Voices of the Children,” and first printed in Post Oak News 9/05/03.
The 1980’s: a like, totally tubular decade remembered for music videos, Atari, and big hair. But more than its influence on pop culture, the 80s laid the foundation for all kinds of technological and cultural change that we can still find remnants of today in our smartphones, music, and fashion. So how did our 1980’s alumni pave the way for future Post Oak students? They helped form the tradition of engaging school trips. In 1981, Post Oak students visited Washington DC, toured the White House, and met with Vice President George Bush. Since then, off-campus learning experiences have continued to be an instrumental part of our curriculum. These trips have expanded to include places like Artesian Lakes, SHUMLA, Williamsburg (VA), Crow Canyon (CO), and more. So while the rest of the country was solving Rubik’s cubes, buying cassette tapes, and watching Pretty in Pink, our most excellent Post Oak students were working to set the tone that here at Post Oak, learning isn’t just confined to a classroom. It’s a motto that undoubtedly continues to carry on today!

A 50-FOR-50 MOMENT

We have uploaded a wonderful list of volunteer opportunities that have been shared by our Post Oak School community to our website! You can find this helpful gathering of information on the 50-for-50 page, which is accessible via a link on the left hand navigation on the site. Be sure to log your 50 for 50 community service projects there as well!

A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU

We would like to extend a very special thank you to the family for their donation of over 35 gift cards for dinner for two at Beck’s Prime that were given away at the Jubilee Centerpiece Raffle!
October 2013

Dear John,

On behalf of AMI/USA I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate both you and the entire Post Oak school community for your dedication and passion to Montessori education over the past 50 years! Your leadership since 1995 has provided continuity for the long-established traditions as well as the vision for the future, including the opening of a high school and AMI teacher training center! Albeit I am not able to attend, I’m with you today in heart and spirit.

Since 1982 the school has been AMI recognized—dedicated to high Montessori ideals—and has nurtured and grown a wonderful place for children to flourish. The staff has played a major role in the evolution of a truly remarkable school as well as the parents, grandparents, board members, and alumni.

The Post Oak School has stood as a shining example of the work Maria Montessori pioneered years ago in 1907 in San Lorenzo. Even before receiving AMI recognition for the first time, Post Oak invited such Montessori luminaries as Margot Waltuch, Lilian Bryan and Elizabeth Hall to consult and offer support to the growing community.

Upon her visit in 1979, Lilian Bryan observed that, “All the classes of the school, primary, elementary, and middle school, seemed to be run by very enthusiastic, interested, and dedicated teachers. The friendly atmosphere pervaded throughout the school and had its positive effect in the classes, outside the classes, and even in the offices. The productivity of the children was a true reflection of the positive energy felt in the whole school.”

John, you have done a wonderful job leading The Post Oak School to maintain the same expectations today as were apparent more than 30 years ago and these are so important when educating our most precious resource. I applaud your efforts, and again send my most heartfelt congratulations on a job well done to you and the entire Post Oak community!

On behalf of AMI/USA...

Congratulations!

Virginia

Virginia
Post Oak's 50th Anniversary Jubilee
MORE PHOTOS ONLINE IN THE PARENT COMMUNITY...
Fall has officially started, and so has our season for The Post Oak Annual Fund. As Class Captains, we are spending this next month contacting each and every one of you to provide all the information you need to make an educated donation to our school’s annual fund. Each year presents us with new challenges and opportunities. As a school that prides itself on continuous improvement, I’m here to tell you that last year’s funds have been utilized in just that way.

Here are just two of many examples:

First, we have responded to the challenging times we face in our communities across the country by installing and implementing a new security program that will keep our children safe. Without your donations last year we could not have spent money on building improvements, law enforcement, consultation and a customized security plan.

Second, have you noticed our gym is jammin’? A portion of the annual fund money sent Mark Tucker to Arizona State University this summer, where he attended a workshop hosted by one of the best physical fitness educators in the country, Dr. Robert Pangrazi.

PF is now focusing on individual skill development, incorporating music in their warm ups and alternating sports every two to three weeks. By now you should have heard from your Class Captain (parent volunteer leading your eldest child’s class through this one month campaign) and seen a few more examples of our fund use. At the same time John Long and the Board of Trustees are reaching out to every family and presenting the details about our Big Work capital campaign. Yes, we are asking you to contribute to both fund raisers. The Post Oak Fund will continue to help us with our current operations while the capital campaign will allow us to do needed major renovations on campus and to help with high school startup expenses. Please make the time to understand both before you donate.

Thank you in advance for your contribution and thank you to all our brave Class Captains!

Paula Mey
2014 Post Oak Fund Co-Chair

For printable response forms or to donate online, go to www.postoakschool.org or contact the Development Office at (713-661-6688) or christinacantu@postoakschool.org.
Post Oak’s 50th Birthday Bash is a wonderful, community-focused event where you can bring the whole family, have a picnic, and enjoy an afternoon on the Post Oak school grounds. Mystery boxes will be raffled off during the event, which covers the cost of this free family day. There will be lots of great activities for all ages, from infants to high-schoolers. Bring your friends and family, and join the fun!

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2
FROM 10 A.M. TO 1 P.M. ON
POST OAK’S BACK FIELD

IT’S ALL PART OF THE EXPERIENCE!

• Food trucks!
• Incredible Inflatables
• Classic Games: three-legged races, sack races, and much more!
• Musical Dots (a.k.a. Cake Walk)
• The BIG Earthball
• Paparazzi booth
• Color Me Happy – face painting, festive temporary tattoos, and hip hair!
• Balloon Artists
• Instrument Petting Zoo
• Arts & Crafts
• DJ entertainment
• Green Team booth
• 50th Anniversary Celebration booth
• Birthday Cake and Cupcake station!

DON’T FORGET!

RAFFLE TICKETS WILL BE ON SALE
OCT. 25 – NOV. 2
ADMISSION OPEN HOUSE

Tuesday, November 19th – 7 p.m.
Thursday, December 12th – 7 p.m.
Thursday, January 16th – 7 p.m.
Wednesday, February 12th – 7 p.m.
Tuesday, April 8th – 7 p.m.

Post Oak Kids Care Club

Post Oak School’s Kids Care Club (POS KCC) is a service organization open to the entire Post Oak School community. Our goal is to find ways we can contribute to the world around us while spending time and learning valuable life lessons with our families. We try to find projects that all ages and abilities can participate in. For more details, please join our Facebook group http://www.facebook.com/groups/278032742310211/ or email

1102 Autrey Street, Houston TX 77006
www.postoakhighschool.org
"Where’s the tank?" That was my first thought when Mirani first invited me to attend a F.I.S.H meeting. I came to find that F.I.S.H (Families Integrating School and Home) is an informal parent group that brings parents and school experts together. Its focus? Assist families bring home Montessori-based activities that complement skills children are learning at school.

At its inception, F.I.S.H was one parent’s desire to better understand the education her child was receiving at Post Oak and support him in it.

Four years ago, a [then] new Post Oak parent came to observe her eldest child (age 3) in his classroom. "I...found my son in a state of deep concentration using a real knife to cut apples into tiny bite sizes. Imagine my shock as I watched him handle an object that I had kept from his little grasp since the day he began motoring around the house. His teacher informed me it was all okay because she had given him a lesson. A lesson I thought! Ha! I continued to watch and soon after all the apples were cut, my son carried a tray around the room. He stopped at each and every classmate and offered a snack. I could not hear what he was saying but his actions spoke loudly. If someone dismissed the offering, he would wait patiently next to that person until they tried one and if they walked away, he would follow close behind. Needless to say, when his work was completed, every child had tried some apple. His task had come full circle and a huge light turned on for me.

I call it my ‘ah ha’ moment. If he could do cutting work at school, why not at home? Why not cut fruits, vegetables, cheeses, etc. at home? His teacher advised me of the tools I needed and off I went. We began our ‘homework’ that very afternoon. Before long, he moved beyond cutting and began cracking eggs, making guacamole, and brownies. The whole thing came full circle when he served up some of his own creations as his birthday snack at school.

What I had also realized that same morning was why my son was trying so hard to serve us water at home. Sometimes he would even bring out small bowls of pretzels at random times throughout the day. Unfortunately, we had been discouraging him because of the mess made while preparing our surprise snack. And now I realized this whole time he was just trying to use the skills he learned at school with something he enjoyed in his own home environment. "Ah ha! I said to myself, now knowing he was practicing what he had learned in school, I was able to look at his small accidents in a completely different light."

I am sure some of you are thinking this was really no big deal, but for us it was a turning point in how we approached the activities in our home environment. I began looking for more and more opportunities to leverage the subjects my son was exposed to in school with activities we could do at home."

took her epiphany several steps further, asking for and receiving assistance from faculty and staff at Post Oak and opening the discussion to other parents. F.I.S.H is the result.

This year we have a robust agenda. Topics will touch on independence, food choices, developmental norms, cooking, art, and the building blocks of reading and mathematics.

Parents of infant, primary, and elementary aged students are invited to attend these highly informative sessions. Please come with questions and attend any you can.

Join us next week, October 18th at 9:00 a.m. in the common room for our first meeting: ‘ Accomplishing Independence from Infancy to Elementary.” Primary teacher, Emily Hansen and elementary teacher, Orly Kluk will be presenting.
No-Waste Lunches

Part 2 of 2, by Post Oak Parent

So, have you put some thought into how you can make your lunch kits less wasteful? We’re aiming for your child to bring home only washable containers, and leftover food (which you can re-use or compost), without having had to throw anything away at school.

The Post Oak School does its part by supplying dishes, silverware and cloth napkins for lunch. The actual lunch is the other half of the equation. Here are some of the common wasteful culprits:

• sandwiches in bags
• fruits and veggies in bags
• prepackaged chips, cookies, fruit bars, granola bars, cheeses, and fruit leathers
• prepackaged yogurts, apple sauces, and puddings
• crackers, pretzels, chips, and other snack foods in bags
• disposable juice boxes, juice pouches, soda cans, water bottles, and milk cartons

Buying in bulk or large containers and using washable containers is a great way to reduce waste. Miraculously (wink!), it will also reduce the amount of money you spend on groceries!

For containers, there are a wide variety of options, depending where on the “spectrum” you are in your green-ness. If you don’t mind using plastics, Tupperware type containers will work well. For health, environmental, and ease of care reasons, I find the stainless containers to be the best options. As far as bags are concerned, consider a cloth sandwich and snack bag, that you can wash and re-use.

As far as lunch boxes, any lunch box works. I’m a fan of the Japanese style, bento boxes. Bento-style lunches are super in, and they actually help you to prepare a more balanced meal as well, by the division and sizes of the containers. And apparently, the visual stimulation of the pretty, divided and organized box results in your kid eating more! There are many companies that sell them now, my favorite being Planetbox.com. We will have samples at our Field Day table and you can get group discounts (on the PlanetBox) by signing up.

Unfortunately, I have not found a locally-owned store that sells some of the wonderful containers that will help you shift towards less waste. Having said that, we have some great chain retailers, like the Container Store, and some fantastic online shops of course. (Look out for links when we launch the updated green team page!) Whole Foods also carries a selection of “green” lunch containers and re-usable snack bags.

Oh, and for drinks, consider letting your kid drink WATER! In a glass. The healthiest. Cheapest. Least waste producing, thirst quenching, non-fattening drink there is on earth!

Join the Green Team!

Watch the Post Highlights for the next meeting time or email [email] at [email]
Montessori Journey
January 24, 6–9 p.m.
January 25, 8 a.m.–2 p.m.

Registration for the Montessori Journey is now available on our website. This two-day (adults only) workshop is a powerful, hands-on approach to understanding how and what your child is learning. We invite and encourage current Post Oak parents to attend, whether for the first time or for those desiring a chance to take the journey again. Space is limited, so sign up early to reserve a spot.

Cost: $30 per person.

What parents have said:

What was your most memorable experience of the day?
“The realization that learning can be fun and stepping out of your comfort zone can be so rewarding.”

What value do you feel you have derived from this experience?
“A greater understanding of the environment and method behind Montessori and what my child’s day is like.”
1. An Upper Elementary student works with fractions.
2. Learning long division using the bead materials in Lower Elementary.
3. Practical life skills are gained through the exercise of scrubbing outdoors.
4. Lower Elementary students study the geography of Africa together.
5. Hand washing is essential before serving snack in a Primary classroom.
6. Lower Elementary students explore Geometry with their teacher, Mrs. Kluk.
7. Replacing the materials after a work cycle in Upper Elementary.
8. Primary students work on long division with the golden bead material.
9. Upper Elementary students play the game of Life during afternoon free time.
10. Our Bearkats out making moves on the field!
11. Matching sounds is one way to train the senses in a Primary classroom.
Shop & Share

Don’t forget to link your Randall’s Remarkable card and Target Visa Credit Card or Target Credit Card to The Post Oak School!

For more information, visit our website For Parents > Giving & Getting Involved > Store Rebate Programs.

Grandparents’ & Friends’ Days

On November 25 & 26, 2013, we invite your child’s grandparents, relatives, and special friends to visit The Post Oak School for breakfast and a student presentation. This will be followed by a visit to either observe the Infant Community and Primary classrooms, or to enter the classrooms for Elementary, Middle School, and High School. If you would like your special guests to receive an invitation, please fill out the form online via the left-hand link on our home page.

POPAP Coffee/Work Day

Wednesday, Nov. 6
8:45 a.m.–noon

Check out our calendar online or download a copy at www.postoakschool.org