

MMS Fall Workshop
Best Practices V:
November 8th, 9 am
Dearborn Heights Montessori

President's Corner

Fellow Montessorians,

As we begin a new school year in our Montessori environments we all have hopes of that perfectly normalized classroom. We plan, observe, and make adjustments in order to guide our students individually in their work and as a whole to improve upon our classroom community. Perhaps a little help from our friends could make this task easier.

If you should find yourself looking to improve your craft by networking with fellow Montessorians, find your way to our "Best Practices Workshop" which will be held on Saturday, November 8th at The Dearborn Heights Montessori Center. Thanks to the hard work of our MMS Governing Board we have created a well-rounded line-up of seasoned teachers eager to lead us through refresher courses as well as workshops with new and fresh ideas. What better way to recharge your battery, kickstart a new goal you've been striving to reach and come together with fellow professionals in a friendly constructive atmosphere.

Hope to see you there!
 Mary Lamos

MMEAN Update

The Montessori Advocacy group continues to work on your behalf to try to show the Star Rating Scale is an inadequate rating system for Montessori schools. Several outstanding schools have volunteered to go through the evaluation process to demonstrate to the government organization that a top rating is impossible for an authentic Montessori school to achieve. This task has required many hours of work on the part of the MMEAN Advocacy Group. We hope that our efforts will result in an appropriate rating scale that will not penalize us for adhering to Montessori's philosophy and will recognize excellence in Montessori schools.



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MMS Fall Workshop – Best Practices V

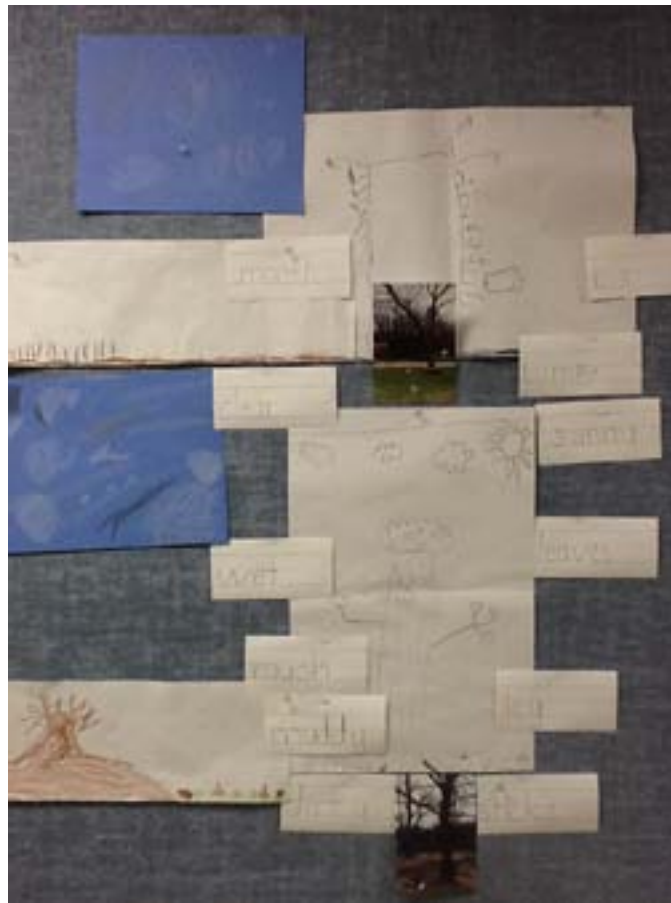
Next month, the MMS Fall Seminar will take place at Dearborn Heights Montessori on November 8 starting at 9:00am, 8:30 for registration . This popular format, Best Practices workshops, will again offer a wide variety of topics that will add to your knowledge or introduce new areas of interest. Classes designed for Infant/Toddler through Middle school teachers will be offered by many experienced, gifted Montessorians. Administrators will also enjoy classes designed for them.

This event not only offers you an opportunity to learn new concepts, it also gives you the chance to visit one of the premier Montessori schools in the area. In addition, many vendors will be on hand to show you their latest materials allowing you to purchase items with no shipping charges added.

Registration forms will be going out shortly, so be sure to sign up early to take advantage of the early bird registration discount.

And don't forget to include your MMS membership application that will give you additional discounts! MMS individual membership at \$15/year is one of the best bargains in around! And MMS school affiliation tells your parents that you are an authentic Montessori school!

Please note to those coming from the north, John Daly is closed north of the school. Try taking Telegraph down to Cherry Hill and then turning north on John Daly to the school. Also, Dearborn Heights staff would appreciate your cleaning up after yourselves, i.e. taking your cups, napkins, papers, etc. to the garbage cans before you leave.



In the Documentation workshop learn to create extensions that document the child's work that make learning visible.

Rules Are Made to Be Broken? Not DHS Rules!

With the ubiquitous use of cell phones and the convenience of cordless phones, many centers may forget or overlook the fact that a functioning land-line must be available in the school. While rare, power outages do happen and your cordless phones will not function. Should the parents need to contact you during this time, they would be unable to do so. The rule also requires that you post emergency phone numbers and information on your location adjacent to every phone, not just the land line. While this information is undoubtedly known to everyone in your building, during an emergency, people often forget the most basic information. Having it written down next to the phone may save precious moments. Please don't overlook this rule.
Rule 400.1864 Telephone Service

(1) A landline excluding payphones, cell phones and cordless phones shall be available, operable and accessible in the building during the hours that the center is in operation. An operable land-line telephone does not require electricity in the center to operate.

(2) During the hours the center is in operation, a telephone number know to the public and available to parents to provide immediate access to the center shall be provided.

(3) Emergency telephone numbers, including 911, fire, police and the poison control center, and the facility's physical address and main cross streets, shall be conspicuously posted immediately adjacent to all center telephones.

But What's the Difference Between.....?

As Montessorians, we are often asked what sets Montessori apart from other educational philosophies. This article found on Spielgaben gives a brief explanation that you may find helpful.

There are many different educational philosophies throughout the world, all of which are designed to promote academic and social growth in children. They take many shapes and forms and come from a variety of perspectives, focusing on different aspects of children's intellectual, cognitive, and social development.

Some of the most child-centered educational philosophies have their origins in the theories of child development specialists and psychologists who believe that young children learn best through play and self-discovery. Among the most well-known of these philosophies are the Froebel Method, the Montessori Method, the Reggio Emilia Method and the Waldorf-Steiner Method. These four methods all approach early learning from a developmental perspective, and stress the importance of play and self-directed exploration. There are many similarities in the approaches as they all strive to educate the "whole child" and believe that children should be responsible for their own learning to varying degrees. There are also several differences in the philosophies and environments of the four different methods.

THE FROEBEL METHOD

Modern kindergarten owes its beginnings

to the German educator Friedrich Froebel. In 1837, Froebel created a program based on principles of early childhood specialists which became the foundation for kindergartens everywhere, as well as several educational philosophies which are the basis of many preschool and early education methods today. Froebel believed that young children possess unique capabilities and needs, and that adults should serve as the "gardeners" of children's potential. Froebel asserted that young children could learn best in atmospheres that provided a stimulating and prepared environment where they could explore and learn from their own perspectives.

Key Features of Froebel Schooling Methods

Froebel education stresses that parents are the first educators for children, and that there should be close links between home and school. The main goal of a Froebel education is to teach the whole child in all developmental areas: socially, academically, emotionally, physically and spiritually. There are four main components of the Froebel Method: motor expression, social participation, free self-expression and creativity.

The Froebel Philosophy stresses that:

- Play Drives Learning Play meets the biological need to discover how things work. Froebel education believes that play is purposeful and not idle, and that meaning is created through hands-on play activities.

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New MMS Board Member – Emily Myers



Emily Myers has been around the Montessori block a long time, but is a new board member of MMS. Her first experience in Montessori was as a volunteer

in a preprimary class at a Catholic high school in Wheeling, West Virginia. She loved the materials and knew working with children was what she wanted to do. She pursued a college degree in Montessori while attending Xavier University in Cincinnati. With her degree in hand, Emily moved to Washington DC and worked at The Barrie School for a number of years before joining the public school sector. She met a nice young man from Detroit and returned with him back to his home town.

For 15 years she has worked at Ferndale Montessori Center. In the last few years she has had the pleasure of sharing ideas with many interns and young teachers who have passed through her class. In the summer Emily loves teaching Math and Geography to adult learners at Michigan Montessori Teacher Education Center in Waterford. It is exciting for her to join MMS and get to meet so many experienced teachers creating wonderful opportunities for children.

- Children can only learn what they are ready for. Children develop differently and should be allowed to learn at their own developmental pace.
- The teacher should serve as a guide. Teachers should not be viewed as the keepers of knowledge, but instead as guides who can help lead a child to understanding.
- The classroom should be a prepared environment. Although Froebel classrooms may look like they are designed for free play, they are actually very carefully prepared, presenting children with the tools and materials that are optimal for their level of development.
- Movement is imperative for young learners. Froebel classrooms are alive with finger plays, songs, and all forms of movement.

Another key component of a Froebel classroom is the use of the materials referred to as the Froebel Gifts and Occupations. The Froebel gifts are a series of sets specially designed materials, which provide hands-on explorations of solids, surfaces, lines, rings and points. Children use these materials to explore principles of movement, math, and construction. The Occupations are a set of activities designed to provide further hands-on explorations and practice with skills like clay work, wood work, lacing, weaving, drawing, and cutting. Again, these materials are designed to allow children uninterrupted periods of play where they construct their own meaning of how things work.

Strengths of the Froebel Method

There are many strengths to the Froebel method. One of the main strengths for students who attend a Froebel School is that they learn to see problems from many angles and to solve them independently. As they work with materials, they gain perseverance as they attempt to figure out how to manipulate them to create the output they want.

The Froebel method also works well to encourage independence in students. Since they are used to solving problems that arise during their play, they feel confident in their ability to handle issues as they arise. The Froebel classroom develops fine motor skills in students, which aids them with later learning and activities, such as writing and advanced art skills.

Criticisms of Froebel Education

Critics of the Froebel education believed that the structure of the program was too rigid. More progressive educators modified the original program into the kindergarten that we know today, which includes more free and imaginative play. In addition to the Froebel gifts, other unstructured materials were added such as doll houses and large blocks where children could experience more free-play and social interaction. Reformers decided that children needed other ways to express themselves, and also added music, art and movement activities to Froebel's original ideas.

There are also those who believe that there is too much focus on fine motor skills, and that more language, writing and reading would benefit students. Many think that the focus on the gifts and occupations should be



supplemented with more academic types of activities, reading and writing specifically, so that children who are developmentally ready for these types of activities will have the opportunity available to them.

THE MONTESSORI METHOD

The Montessori Method, which is popular today in many places around the world, was developed by Maria Montessori, a medical doctor, in 1897 in Italy. Montessori began to develop her methods after attending pedagogy courses in Rome, and carefully observing children beginning at birth. In 1907, Montessori opened her first school, Casa dei Bambini, or Children's House, and her methods attracted interest from educators

throughout the world. In 1929, Montessori founded the Association Montessori Internationale to support international growth of Montessori methods and teacher education. Montessori schools are based on the belief that children are naturally eager learners who can create meaning in a carefully prepared and supportive environment.

Key Features of the Montessori Method

The Montessori approach is a child-centered one that operates on several defining principles. The goal of a Montessori classroom is to develop the whole child, which includes physical, social, emotional and cognitive abilities. The job of the teacher is to open each child's full potential, and not to view them as clay to be molded.

Hallmarks of Montessori include:

- **Mixed Age Groupings:** Children of mixed ages work together in classrooms. Younger students observe older ones, which helps to prepare them for upcoming and more

challenging materials. Older students serve as mentors and guides for those who are younger.

- **Big Picture Focus:** The Montessori approach operates on the belief that children learn best when they possess background knowledge about a subject. The Montessori curriculum is often referred to as "cosmic", meaning that learning builds upon prior exposure, building deep understanding.

- **Focus on Sensitive, or Critical, Periods:** Dr. Montessori believed that there are certain times when children could best obtain certain

skills. Instruction is matched to a child's sensitive window for acquiring the skill.

- **Prepared Environment:** The physical environment of a Montessori classroom is designed with children in mind. All furniture is appropriately sized, and materials are placed to be accessible by the children in the room. The environment is prepared with developmentally appropriate materials designed to stimulate multiple senses and stimulate learning. Self-correcting materials are available so that students may work on them independently. These materials can be cross-curricular, including blocks, letters, and other types of manipulatives.

- **Focus on Peace:** Respect for all life forms is stressed, along with focus on inner-peace, peaceful interactions, social justice and community service.

The Montessori classroom is home to many specially designed materials and manipulatives that are appealing to children and are designed to teach one skill at a time. These materials are designed so that they can have multiple uses and grow with the child. The materials are designed to invite interaction and activity, and use a hands-on approach to make abstract concepts, such as base 10 math, more concrete.

Key Strengths of the Montessori Approach

Children are prepared for the real world, where they work side by side with people of all ages and dispositions. They also develop self-discipline, independence and analytical thinking. All materials in a Montessori

classroom have a proper place, and it is the responsibility of each student to properly store their materials when they are done to maintain order, which is very important to this philosophy.

Students who learn under the Montessori Method develop a true understanding of their work, instead of just rote memorization. They develop a true life-long love for learning. This is a method that focuses on personal growth and development, and has been shown to foster maturity and creativity in students. Lessons fall into three main categories: lessons for practical life, sensory and language, so they become well-rounded and independent individuals.

Criticisms of Montessori Schooling

Critics of the Montessori Method refer to the cost of maintaining a program. Since the approach uses sanctioned furniture and materials, the costs can be rather high. The program relies on high quality expensive materials and furniture which is expensive. Another criticism of the approach is that the classrooms contain only one of each pieces of "work" as the activities are referred to. In theory, this should encourage children to share, but critics state that it often creates a competition between students and that older students often win out over the younger ones. A final criticism many people have is that it can be difficult for Montessori students to transition into a "regular" classroom, where they may be sitting in rows and working on prescribed curriculum. Many parents send their children to Montessori programs for preschool and first grade, but then move them

into traditional elementary schools.

THE REGGIO EMILIA METHOD

The Reggio Emilia Method was first introduced following World War II in Italy by a group of educators and parents who wanted to create a community-centered approach to teaching and learning. The director of this movement was Loris Malaguzzi, who studied the works of many pedagogists and child-development specialists and used their theories to create an atmosphere that he felt would best support and encourage early childhood development.

These educators and parents founded their approach on the basis of respect, responsibility and community through an atmosphere of exploration and discovery.

Key Features of Reggio Schooling

The Reggio philosophy is based on natural child development as researched and described by many child psychologists and researchers. The key features of the program include the ideas that:

- Children learn best through a multi-sensory approach: Reggio classrooms contain experiences that appeal to all senses. Children will be touching, seeing, hearing, moving, speaking and listening.
- Children should have some control over their own learning: Reggio classrooms are about children making their own meaning through exploration and discovery. Children are seen as co-constructors of

knowledge, instead of being viewed as targets of instruction. They participate in many different projects where they can observe, hypothesize, question and clarify to create understanding.

- Children must have many ways to express themselves: Children in Reggio schools gain deep understanding of the materials in their classrooms and the world around them. They look at materials from a variety of ways, and participate in long term projects designed to let them view a subject from many angles.
- Relationships are important: Both relationships with other children and with adults are imperative in the Reggio Emilia classroom. Children are expected to work together in communities to collaborate with each other.
- Children need to have relationships with the materials they are to explore: The physical environment of a Reggio classroom is highly important and designed to be aesthetically pleasing as well as engaging.

The environment is considered to be the third teacher in a Reggio setting. In addition to these principles, Reggio Emilia educators refer to the “Hundred Languages of Children” which refers to the many ways that children have of expressing themselves. Children are encouraged to display their understanding through a

variety of means.

Key Strengths of the Reggio Schooling Method

Most people agree that the main strength of the Reggio method is the ability to use the environment as a teacher. Other strengths are the mix of long- and short term projects which provide students with deep understanding of the subject matter.

Another strength is the documentation that Reggio teachers collect about their students. This is where the idea of a portfolio of student work was originated. In the Reggio method, teachers are seen as researchers. Flowcharts are very important in these classrooms to document what has occurred, and for future considerations.

Criticisms of Reggio Emilia Schooling

The Reggio method had been called one of the best approaches in the world by many different news magazines and researchers, but it is not without its critics.

The main criticism of the Reggio approach is that it is not a formal model, with defined methods, and teacher certification.

Without teacher certification it is sometimes difficult for teachers to truly know how to implement this model, and classrooms can sometimes be chaotic.

Waldorf Steiner Method

The Waldorf Steiner method is another approach that is based on an understanding of child development. It was originated by Rudolf Steiner in Germany, and his first school opened in 1919. This method was modeled strongly on the work of the Jean Piaget, who believed that young children learn best through play and that childhood is divided into three stages.

Key Features of Waldorf Schooling Methods

- Children need to learn through all senses: All lessons are designed to appeal to the “head, hands and heart” meaning that it is important to educate the whole child. Steiner believed that people actually have twelve senses, the traditional five plus thought, language, balance, movement, warmth, life and individuality.
- Imagination is at the heart of learning: Waldorf classrooms include a great deal of storytelling, fantasy, make-believe play, art, drama and crafts. One of the toys in a Waldorf classroom is an old-fashioned, faceless doll. It is believed that this stimulates creative thinking and imagination in children.
- Life-skills are imperative to a complete education: Children in Waldorf classrooms are taught things like wood carving, sewing, gardening, and sculpting. They are

offered opportunities to take up things like learning a musical instrument or knitting. These things give children a sense of achievement and allow them to learn more complex skills later in life.

- A lifelong love for learning can be achieved through the arts: This serves to create a sense of wonder about different subjects. Curriculum such as math can be examined through graphic-arts projects, and a multi-disciplinary approach is desirable.

In addition to these key features, the Waldorf-Steiner approach believes that children need to be surrounded by beauty in an aesthetically pleasing atmosphere. The classroom is a home-like setting filled with natural materials where children have periods of guided free-play, which focuses on their developmental needs.

Benefits of Waldorf Schooling

Children in a Waldorf classroom are taught respect, cooperation, compassion and social responsibility. Because of the focus on arts, Waldorf students score well on tests of creativity. Students are discouraged from using technology at young ages, which contributes to their creative imaginative thinking.

This lack of exposure to televisions, computers, and other forms of technology create students with extended attention

spans. They are able to focus on tasks for longer periods of time as they are not used to the instant gratification that technology can provide.

Criticisms of Waldorf Schooling

The main criticism of Waldorf schooling is that children are not taught to read until they are seven or eight years old. Many worry that children will fall behind, particularly if they transfer to a traditional school where reading is taught at an earlier age.

Teachers who are trained in Waldorf receive training in the spiritual philosophy known as Anthroposophy, which includes theories about spirits on earth and reincarnation. These ideals are not taught explicitly to students in Waldorf-Steiner schools, but many worry that the schools have hidden agendas.

COMPARISON OF THE FOUR METHODS

Although these four well respected methods of early childhood education have a number of similarities, there are also some differences that set each one apart from the other. All four of these philosophies are seen as alternatives to traditional education and are based on the ideal that children learn best in an environment where self-discovery and exploration are the norm.

They all discourage rote memorization and traditional worksheet type activities in favor of hands-on activities that allow children to develop true understanding of a concept.

They also share the goal of improving society by allowing children to realize their full potential not only academically, but also cognitively, socially, intellectually and emotionally.

Some of the differences in these approaches are in regards to the role of the teacher.

There are also differences in the approach to reading and writing instruction, as well as the physical environments, and the way that play is approached.

Spirituality

The Montessori Method is not affiliated with any particular religion, but it stresses that all religions should be respected. Morals such as kindness, joy, love and fundamental goodness are presented.

The Waldorf schools operate on a philosophy called anthroposophy, which is not a particular religion, but a set of spiritual beliefs that address questions of humanity, and addresses the need for artistic expression. It operates primarily out of a philosophy of freedom.

The Reggio Emilia approach is considered to be spiritually aware but not religious,

while Froebel education has been described as mystical, as its founder Friedrich Froebel held deep religious belief

Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher differs slightly with each of the four preschool methods. In all of them, the teacher is not seen as the keeper of the knowledge, as is the case with some traditional schools, but their role is seen differently within each method.

In the Montessori schools, the teacher is seen as a guide, as is also the case in a Froebel school. In Waldorf schools, the teacher directs and in the Reggio Emilia schools, the teacher is seen as a co-collaborator. This is a simplified version of the teacher's role, but it speaks clearly to the expectations.

In the Montessori, Froebel and Reggio classrooms, the materials that children use are prepared by the teachers, whereas they are prepared by students in a Waldorf classroom.

Montessori teachers work with multi-age classes. In a Waldorf room, the teacher stays with students throughout the primary years, where a three-year assignment is typical in a Reggio room.

Reading Instruction

Another major difference between the four philosophies is their views on reading and writing instruction. The Montessori schools supply children with sandpaper letters so that they can combine their tactile needs with their curiosity about reading and writing. Students in these schools often write before they read.

In the Waldorf Environment, children are exposed to language arts skills later than they are in other approaches. They do not read in preschool or kindergarten and reading is not taught until elementary. Stories are based on word literature, myths and legends. They feel that reading will come more naturally if it is not pushed, and is only taught very early if children express a desire. There is a stress on oral comprehension.

Reggio Emilia teachers do not systematically teach reading and writing. Emergent literacy is fostered by children recording and documenting their ideas in multiple ways. The environment is print-rich and phonemic awareness activities are introduced as children are deemed ready, but there is no formal phonemic awareness activities are introduced as children are deemed ready, but there is no formal reading instruction.

Froebel classrooms are centered on play-based discovery with no formal reading instruction occurring.

Play Based

All four of these methods believe that play is an important part if not the most important part of how a child learns. All of these systems have strong components of play-based education although they are approached slightly differently.

In a Montessori classroom, play is seen as the children's work. Materials are selected and prepared in a purposeful manner, and children work on them in a purposeful manner as well. Materials are selected for growth in four main areas: practical life, language development, math and sensory education. Practical life activities are unique to this approach.

A Froebel classroom shares the ideals of its originator, Friedrich Froebel who originated the idea that children learn best through play. Play is seen as the avenue for discovery and understanding. These classrooms are more about open-ended play which is not seen as purposeful as much as a means for self-directed comprehension of how things work. Hands-on explorations are the hallmark of a Froebel classroom.

A Reggio Emilia classroom is looked at as a third teacher. The environment is carefully selected, and extremely important to the philosophy. The materials here are not designed solely for particular concepts,

as they are in a Montessori classroom, but are often plucked from nature with the objective of exploration. Learning here is more project-based, and manipulatives are often natural.

Play in a Waldorf classroom stresses artistic expression. There is a great deal of imaginative play here. Activities include dress up games, storytelling, singing and music.

View of the Child

In the Reggio view, the child is seen as a rich and active learner. They are seen as competent beings that need to be connected to adults and other children.

In the Montessori Method, it is believed that children have a desire to take care of themselves and their surroundings and that adults should not "serve" children as it will ultimately hurt their self-esteem and growth.

A Waldorf philosophy focuses on children as active learners who should not be rushed through their developmental stages. They are seen as capable, active learners. Froebel classrooms believe that younger children should be taught much differently than older children and that through play, they can develop intellectually, spiritually and socially. He believed that children should be protected from

outside influences in a safe and nurturing environment.

Physical Environment

Other differences in the classrooms occur in the physical environment and set up of the space. All four of these methods believe in including child-friendly and developmentally appropriate materials, but the approach to classroom set up varies.

A Waldorf classroom has the goal of being an extension of the home. The colors are warm and homey and it is designed to feel like home to the children. The use of natural materials is also a hallmark.

A Montessori classroom is carefully prepared environment with child-sized furniture and materials. Order is an extremely important feature of these classrooms, with materials being limited to those which are deemed developmentally appropriate.

The environment is very carefully considered in a Reggio Emilia classroom where the environment serves as another teacher. Both the indoor and the outdoor spaces are carefully designed. Teachers want students to notice textures, color and design. There are spaces for large and small groups, as well as space for individual work.

Froebel spaces too are carefully designed

as Froebel himself believed that children can be changed by the environment in which they are placed. He believed that the learning space should be growing and changing over time depending upon the wishes of the inhabitants.

Conclusion

All of the approaches mentioned represent ideal settings for children where they can be free to achieve their full potential. The spirit of exploration and self-discovery are prevalent in all of these methods, which are considered alternatives to traditional schools. Although they differ in some ways, they are all concerned with teaching the whole child in a wholesome atmosphere where individual needs are considered and celebrated.

Parents who are considering one, any or all of these schools for their young children are wise to consider which setting would be the best one for their child, as no two of them are alike! Parental involvement is key, and several visits to each of these settings should give you a good feel for which philosophy best meets the needs of your family, and where your child would feel most comfortable.

The play-based methods that are addressed by each of these wonderful programs celebrate the innocence, imagination and inquisitive natures that are characteristic of young children.