

Élan Vital Newsletter



Élan Vital Montessori School

Top 10 New Year's Resolutions

1. Spend More Time with Family & Friends
2. Fit in Fitness
3. Tame the Bulge
4. Quit Smoking
5. Enjoy Life More
6. Quit Drinking
7. Get Out of Debt
8. Learn Something New
9. Help Others
10. Get Organized

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NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS AND THE FIRST TUESDAY

Happy New Year!!!

One of the best things parents can do for their children is to teach them about the principle of the First Tuesday. Now we are all familiar with New Year's resolutions as a way to improve ourselves but the principle of the First Tuesday affords a better chance of success.

Since most of us need deadlines to accomplish our goals, New Year's has become a time of new beginnings. However, the problem with New Year's resolutions is (one) resolutions are hard to keep and (two) New Year's comes only once a year (well not counting the new year's of other cultures). So most of us are defeated before we start because we may last 5 or 6 days on our resolutions before we fall off the wagon, stub our toe or lose our patience. In addition, since the next deadline is 359 days away, we never make any significant changes.

And that is the beauty of the First Tuesday principle – which is not to be confused with the fourth Thursday of Thanksgiving or the first Tuesday in November following the first Monday for elections or Heaven help us when does Easter fall? The First Tuesday Principle is this: On the First Tuesday of

each week – WAIT a minute, you say, there is only one Tuesday in each week. Yes, but that is the beauty of it because every Tuesday IS the First Tuesday.

Now the real beauty of the First Tuesday is that it is not Monday. Got that? There are too many things to start on Monday – back to work, school, or any number of things that steal our attention from significant change. By Tuesday, we've gotten rid of Monday, we still have energy, hopefully, to tackle something as big as change. Now if we set our new resolution into effect on Tuesday and we last all of 4 days it's okay because we now have the weekend to complain about what a sorry sort we are or indulge or whatever. Moreover, Monday is given to getting the week started and that is okay because the First Tuesday is coming and we can start over again.

Now next week if we last 5 days our competitiveness kicks in because we all like to win. Therefore, the next week we gun for 6 days. And when we make it (and it may take us a month) we start talking about streaks or even better play-offs (sorry, too much football on the mind from New Years). What happens if we make 7 days? Right, we start a streak. If the streak lasts 10 or 11 days, we still have the

First Tuesday to get another streak going.

What we have done is to take an impossible goal of "change for Forever" and break it up into a manageable First Tuesday. It would be wonderful if we had the strength of character to make wholesale changes as necessary but since we don't the best part of the First Tuesday comes in realizing that if we can even modify our behavior by 4/7 we are on our way to significant change.

Eventually the good habits we establish (not all habits are bad) will begin to take over and effect a lasting change. We may like the results of the 4/7 so much we will eliminate our own resistance to change and get on with our lives.

The First Tuesday is a charm. It teaches us to forgive ourselves but at the same time to hold ourselves accountable to the next deadline. Nevertheless, for those who don't want to change, the International Date Line offers some possibilities for a Second Tuesday but for some of us they just wouldn't be far enough apart.

This article was published in the Dallas Times Herald January 1, 1991.



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Snacking can help you lose or maintain your weight.



Go Healthy! Easy Snack Substitutes

For those of you who made one of your resolutions #3 on the Top 10 New Year's Resolution list, here are some healthier snacking pointers. These snacks accommodate vegetarians, as well.

- *If you are looking for a crunchy, cheesy snack:*

Don't grab for a bag of Cheetos, try Cheddar Mini Rice Cakes instead.

Calories Saved: 190

- *If sweet and creamy is your delight:*

Forgo the flavored yogurt for plain yogurt, berries, and a few almond slivers.

Calories Saved: 90

- *If you are hankering for something salty:*

Leave the Pringles and have Baked Lays instead.

Calories Saved: 70

- *Want dessert?*

Skip the apple pie and go for a baked apple sprinkled with cinnamon.

Calories Saved: 270

- *Have a chocolate craving?*

Forget the brownies and go for a piece of dark chocolate.

Calories Saved: 100

- *Is portion control your problem?*

You can still enjoy Oreos, but go for the 100-calorie pack.

Calories Saved 170

- *Always add fiber*

Instead of crackers and peanut butter, have apples and peanut butter.

Calories Saved 150

And don't forget...Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy and lean proteins are the best bets. Make sure to incorporate all of those in your diet.

Joanna Luppino contributing at ModernMom on Tue Dec 15, 2009 12:30pm PST

Primary Snacks for the week of:

1/4 — Ralston G.
1/11 — Poppy P.
1/18 — Rafael M.
1/25 — Alden R.
2/1 — Michael S.

Montessori Concepts and Terminology

The Process of Normalization

In Montessori education, the term "normalization" has a specialized meaning. "Normal" does not refer to what is considered to be "typical" or "average" or even "usual." "Normalization" does not refer to a process of being forced to conform. Instead, Maria Montessori used the terms "normal" and "normalization" to describe a unique process she observed in child development.

Montessori observed that when children are allowed freedom in an environment suited to their needs, they blossom. After a period of intense concentration, working with materials that fully engage their interest, children appear to be refreshed and contented. Through continued concentrated work of their own choice, children grow in inner discipline and peace. She called

this process "normalization" and cited it as "the most important single result of our whole work" (*The Absorbent Mind*, 1949).

She went on to write,

Only "normalized" children, aided by their environment, show in their subsequent development those wonderful powers that we describe: spontaneous discipline, continuous and happy work, social sentiments of help and sympathy for others.

. . . An interesting piece of work, freely chosen, which has the virtue of inducing concentration rather than fatigue, adds to the child's energies and mental capacities, and leads him to self-mastery. . . One is tempted to say that the children are performing spiritual exercises, having found the path of self-perfectionment and of ascent to

the inner heights of the soul. (Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 1949)

E.M. Standing (*Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*, 1957) lists these as the characteristics of normalization: love of order, love of work, spontaneous concentration, attachment to reality, love of silence and of working alone, sublimation of the possessive instinct, power to act from real choice, obedience, independence and initiative, spontaneous self-discipline, and joy.

Montessori believed that these are the truly "normal" characteristics of childhood, which emerge when children's developmental needs are met.

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Primary News

Welcome back! We are so happy to be back in school, beginning our 2010 school year. We hope that you all had a very joyous holiday season. Thank you to all of the parents that attended The Nutcracker, and our Winter celebration. We believe that both were wonderful experiences for the children. We were impressed by how well our children sat and paid attention during The Nutcracker. The sets, dancing, and music were all beautiful.

Some changes have been made to our classroom over the break. We have added many things to our language and practical life areas. We will continue adding over the coming weeks, thanks to your generous gifts to our class! Catherine and I are so grateful!

Peace


Catherine and Katie

Open House

Our open house for prospective parents is scheduled for Thursday, January 21 from 6 - 8 at the school. There are postcards at the school that you can send or give to anyone you think might be interested. Please spread the word and help us achieve our enrollment goals for the 2010/2011 school year.

Live, Laugh, Learn
An extraordinary child deserves an extraordinary education. A Montessori education is like no other.

Please join us for a Prospective Parents Open House
January 21, 2010
6pm - 8pm at Élan Vital



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Elementary News

The elementary class has new pets! The Wyatt family gifted the class with butterfly larvae and a habitat for them. We have been reading about the life cycle of butterflies and became very excited as our Painted Lady butterflies emerged from their chrysalides. The boys can not wait to feed the fish and butterflies everyday.

Do you know why the planets are circular? The elementary class knows the an-

swer. We have had much fun discovering what Newton's Laws of Gravity are all about. Our experiments showed us how friction, mass, inertia, and speed effect the movement of everything around us.

Much time was put into preparing for our Winter Celebration. The boys were joined daily by Hayes from the Primary class as they practiced reading their lines from the Nutcracker. They were very interested in

seeing the Nutcracker ballet performed and the differences between the two versions brought up many good questions. Their favorite part of our celebration was baking cookies for the parents to enjoy.

Heather

Student Reporter

Each Month we will be featuring a different student reporter to give us a child's perspective

Heather: What is your favorite thing about school?

Parker: Going swimming at the YMCA on Fridays

H: What did you work on this month?

P: Experiments about gravity.

H: What games do you play at recess?

P: Star Wars with Kenneth and Josh

H: What is your favorite subject?

P: Math is because we use fun stuff to learn it.

H: What type of "fun stuff" do you get to use?

P: The beads chains to learn

multiplication.

H: The best part of our Winter Celebration was....

P: Baking cookies.....and then eating them. Yum-yum!



This month's student reporter is **Parker Wyatt** in the Elementary class.

“That’s Not Montessori!”

I could not contain myself one day at school recently when a parent of three children shared something she had heard from her eldest daughter. The day after Presidents' Day weekend, Brooklyn Heights Montessori School (BHMS) was in session for our Lower Elementary through Middle School students and there was a staff work day for our Preschool faculty so no school for Preschoolers. That morning, the eldest daughter was grumbling about the fact that she and her Lower Elementary brother had to go to school while her Preschool brother did not, and she announced to her mother, "That's not Montessori!"

Cute, and it got me to thinking about the statement "That's not Montessori," a phrase I heard quite often in my first years as head of a Montessori school. Not having been trained as a Montessori teacher, I was at the mercy of teachers, parents, and trustees as to what was and what was not Montessori. I began to reflect on what "That's not Montessori" means. For example, in my first 2 years, I was told, "That's not Montessori". . .

- When I sat on a Preschool classroom table;
- When I explained to parents that we would begin to record absences and tardiness on student reports;
- When I referred to Montessori materials as toys;
- When the business manager would not allow students to start school on the first day of school if tuition payments were not up to date;
- When I took a set of golden beads out of a child's hands and did the work for the child;
- When our basketball team started to win more games than it lost.

As an educator of 30 years (albeit not a Montessori-trained one), I was feeling somewhat perplexed in those early years at BHMS. Slowly, I sought guidance from teachers, checking in, asking, "Is this OK?" or "Is this Montessori?" Eventually, after reading books by and about Dr. Montessori, observing, observing, and observing students and Montessori teachers in the classroom, and attending classes and conferences on Montessori methods and philosophy, I began to get the hang of it. Several quotes from Dr. Montessori helped:

"The first aim of the prepared environment is, as far as it is possible, to render the growing child independent of the adult." (The Secret of Childhood 1966, p. 267)

"The child has other powers than ours, and the creation he achieves is no small one; it is everything." (The Absorbent Mind 1984, p. 34)

"The child is truly a miraculous being, and this should be felt deeply by the educator." (The Absorbent Mind 1994, p. 121)

Last spring, I discovered Not Quite What I Was Planning: Six-Word Memoirs by Writers Famous and Obscure by Larry Smith and Rachel Fershleiser. The book, filled with personal memoirs that are limited to only six words, gave me the idea to ask the question, "What is Montessori?" anew, and limit responses to six words. I first posed the question to 26 new heads of Montessori schools, whom I addressed at a Center for Montessori Teacher Education (CMTE) summer workshop. Here are some of their six-word descriptions:

- Prepared environment led by the learner
- Centered on human development for life
- Engineering the self-development of children
- Peaceful nonjudgmental choice-structured inquiry learning
- Exploration, freedom, observation, individuality, community, service
- Child-centered, engaging environment, intellectually stimulating
- Is it good for the child?
- Lifelong, curiosity-based, child empowering learning

Then I presented the same question to a group of parents, teachers, staff, and trustees here at BHMS. Some of their responses were:

- Prepared environment, independence, collaboration, whole child
- Hands-on learning, compassion, diversity, open hearts
- A learning environment to inspire children
- Curious, moving, touching, materials, enough time

- Self-directed, child-centered education philosophy
- Independence, confidence, knowledge, compassion, community, peace
- Experiential education that inspires our students
- Nurturing individual human potential for life

Holding true to the Montessori approach, I asked some Upper Elementary students, "What is Montessori?" Here are their responses ... in six words:

- Montessori is the awesomest school ever
- An open door, only go forward
- Friendship, joy, honesty, warmth, Barb, Tim [UE teachers]
- Next year I will miss Montessori
- Blown away by the wonderful curriculum
- Interesting, fun, surprising, cool, friends, OK
- Granted, their answers probably reflected mostly on their BHMS experience, but I was still intrigued by their clever and insightful responses.

Finally, I asked Middle School students, specifically asking that they try to describe Montessori as a whole and not just speak to their BHMS experience. Here is what they said:

- Helping reality evolve in prepared environments
- A place of imagination and creativity
- Caring, nurturing, kind, guiding us up
- Montessori is community, independence, and respect

What is or is not Montessori is certainly open to individual interpretation and can be construed to make a particular point, but, undeniably, Montessori is about children. I have been immeasurably helped in my understanding that Montessori is about respecting the child and establishing an environment where the child can learn on his own, making decisions that affect his life and the lives of others.

Excerpt from Dane Peter's Article
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