

P A R E N T N E W S L E T T E R

Good Luck Mrs. Thames-Bell!

With your grace, talent and gift for teaching you leave an indelible mark here at Meher Montessori School.

Good Luck on your journey onto your new chapter in life.

You will be greatly missed and thank you very much once again for your loving service to the students and families at Meher Montessori School.



NEWS

Summer School updates: We still have a few openings available for our summer school session, so we hope you will sign up as soon as possible if you haven't already done so. We have lined up great field trips for all the children this year. Summer school starts on June 16th and ends July 25th.



Summer Camp / Day Care

Our School will be open for our annual Summer Day Care / Summer Camp between the end of summer school and the beginning of our regular school session in the fall. It will operate for 5 weeks beginning July 28th and ending August 29th. Our first day of school is Tuesday, September 2nd.

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO
TAKE HOME YOUR CHILD'S
EXTRA CLOTHES AND
BLANKETS.**



Look for more information from your child's class to see what events are happening at the end of the year and for graduation.

Graduation 2008

Mrs. Thomas' Class	Thurs., June 12 at 10:30 a.m.
Mrs. Weerakkody's Class	Wed., June 11 at 10:00 a.m.
Mr. Page & Ms. Peña's Class	Thurs., June 12 at 1:00 p.m.
Mr. George's Class	Wed., June 11 at 1:00 p.m.
Mr. Harrod's Class	Thurs., June 12 at 10:00 a.m.

Mrs. Thomas' Class

We are almost at the end of our school year with graduation around the corner.

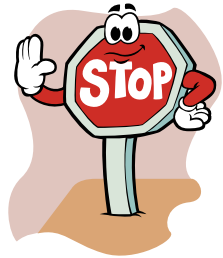
The graduation program and events will take place in the church next door on Thursday, June 12th at 10:30 a.m. An invitation for our graduation and details concerning, have already been sent to our parents. I hope every one can attend this program, later followed by a pot luck lunch at Elder Park. A sign up sheet for the pot luck will be posted on the sign in and sign out book in due course. We kindly ask our parents to bring the food items to the park and not to the classroom, for we will not have the time to prepare or warm up the food that morning. Sorry for the inconvenience. We have had pot luck lunches at the park after graduation over the years and it has worked out very well without any problems.

This year's proud graduates are
Tiffany Louie
Bryanna Lopez
Julia Bañuelos
Jennifer Luy
Jessica Basallo
Lia Ramos
Kanan Yu
Victor-Manuel Puente



We are proud of every graduate who accomplished so much over the past three years. Now, they are academically, socially and emotionally ready to move on to the next level.

On the 2nd of June we had police officers from the Monterey Park Police Department visit our school to talk to the children and demonstrate the traffic safety rules. The children practiced crossing the street and learned the importance of wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle. Our sincere "Thanks" to the officers for taking the time to come over to our school, for the valuable lessons the children learned and the demonstrations given. They also gave our children a variety of gifts.



We must admit the fact that Mrs. Suh, Ms. Muñoz, Ms. Avila and I deemed it a pleasure to work with your children and also our wonderful parents. Every day was challenging, fruitful and rewarding working with them. Every end of the school year seems to be the same and our feelings the same. Glad that we worked with them and shared their academic growth with them and

also the mutual love we shared. The time arrives every year whether we like it or not when we have to say good bye to the graduates with lots of pride, happiness and a bit of sadness. I'm very proud of every single graduate, and wish every one of them the very best in the future.



We like to thank you dear parents for your complete trust in us and your support for all the help given to us through the past few years.

I will be teaching this summer

as usual and also with Mrs. Suh. I wish to thank Mrs. Suh, Ms. Muñoz and Ms. Avila for their untiring help in every way in the classroom, and their kindness and love shown towards our children. Our thanks to Mrs. Ruvalcaba for all the interesting cultural learning and stories. God bless you all. Thank you again and have a wonderful summer.

Love,
Mrs. Thomas
Mrs. Suh
Ms. Muñoz
Ms. Avila

We wish to thank all our parents for making it possible for us to work with your children, to love them and be loved by them. It has been a special and fruitful year for all of us. Thank you again and God bless all of you. Have a great summer.

Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Suh, Ms. Muñoz & Ms. Avila

Mrs. Weerakkody's Class

Dear Parents,

The month of June is here and so is the end of the school year. Before we know it Spring will be over and the long summer will be upon us.

At this time we are getting ready to prepare my eight graduates for the ceremony and the program for Graduation. Our graduating students are Nathan Martinez, Venus Chan, Naolin Croswaithe-Gonzalez, David Treto, Brandon Oh, Nishtha Bhakta, Erica Ordaz and Isaac Arroyo. I am very proud of all of them and will miss them very much, yet it is time to move on. Naolin and David will stay with me and move up after December of 2008.

The month of May was busy. I had a day to do my progress reports and also had parent conferences on the 15th of May. I had very generous parents helping me. Thank you Stacy's mom (Mrs. Yang) for helping in the classroom while I was writing reports. Thank you also to Nishtha's mom (Mrs. Bhakta) and Zoe's mom (Mrs. Kim) for helping in the classroom while it was conference day.

It was very exciting to speak with the parents and to show the work the children had done to share the materials. I had to do a few more make ups to give everyone a chance

to speak with me.

We celebrated Memorial Day a special American holiday on Monday, May the 26th. We colored an American flag and made a red, white and blue cake. The children enjoyed eating it.

Our Graduation is on Wednesday, June 11th at 10:00 a.m. at the church sanctuary. Following will be lunch in our classroom. The last day of school for the children is Thursday, June 12th.

The Open House for the Parent and students was quite fun. There were a lot of families that came. The children were busy showing their work and activities to their parents. They were quite surprised with all the various learning materials they were able to do. The Public Open House was well attended also.

The first day for summer school is Monday, June 16th. I wish all our Dads and Grandads a very happy and fun Father's Day.

Thank you Mrs. Ruvalcaba for teaching the children about the various community helpers this month. She read books and did a few projects with the children. Have a great fun filled summer. Thank you to all the parents and for all the support throughout the year on various projects, parties, gifts sent for us and book donations.

With All My Love,
Mrs. Weerakkody, Ms. Martinez, Ms. Mills, Ms. Avila and Mrs. Ruvalcaba



Mr. Page & Ms. Peña's Class

Dear Parents,

Our classroom is a bubbling cauldron of activity. We have a classroom full of excited, passionate, busy children who love to work with the Montessori materials. Our older children write, write and write some more. They love to write words of any sort: names of states, countries, continents, animals, plants, any words and all words. It seems like they've been born with a pencil in their hands! And then of course they illustrate their writing with lovely drawings. Their fine motor control is just outstanding! We are all very proud of their abilities.

Plus their self-confidence is exceptional. They are so proud of what they can do. It must be noted though, that their pride is not the pride that comes from being told by others that they are wonderful or have accomplished a lot. The pride comes from within – from real self-chosen activities that drive further goals and accomplishments.

The younger children are intently working with early reading and writing work. They are loving some initial cursive writing and many are working with the moveable alphabet in preparation for reading words. The ones who aren't reading yet should

OUR CLASSROOM IS A BUBBLING CAULDRON OF ACTIVITY.

all explode into reading next year.

Our recent Open House was a big hit. On Thursday evening May 29th, our classroom was filled with excited parents and children. The children took their parents around the room and proudly showed them their favorite activities. They also dutifully showed them papers from their folders as well as papers that were on display on the walls. It was interesting to note that the children were extremely busy – yet the teachers were just watching. Parents noticed how independent the children are in the classroom and how happy and busy they are. Such self-directed and capable children are a joy to have.

We had a special party celebrating our classroom's 100% School Shirt participation each and every School Shirt Day all year. The children loved their party and the special accompanying feeling of team spirit brought on by our unique achievement! We are the only class to have ever achieved this award!

We will be having our graduation on Thursday afternoon, June 12th at 1:00 p.m. All our nine graduates have worked hard all year and are now proud to stand in front of their fellow classmates, parents and relatives and graduate! Each will give a speech and recite some poems.

Our graduates: Emma, Catherine,





Leilani, Ethan, Noah,
Emiliano, Noelle, Celeste
and Celine. We are so
proud of them!

Did you know
that this summer
three of our teaching assistants
will be in the second summer of their
3-summer AMI Montessori Teacher
Training course in San Diego? They
are Ms. Muñoz, Mrs. Rivera and
(from our Altadena School) Althea
Wildhaber.

Our thanks go each and every
month to our talented team Ms. Peña,
Mrs. Rivera, and Mrs. Ruvalcaba

Mr. Page

John Brown's Baby

John Brown's baby had a cold upon his chest

John Brown's baby had a cold upon his chest

John Brown's baby had a cold upon his chests

And they rubbed it with camphorated oil.

John Brown's XXX had a cold upon his chest

John Brown's XXX had a cold upon his chest

John Brown's XXX had a cold upon his chest

And they rubbed it with camphorated oil.

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his chest

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his chest

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his chest

And they rubbed it with camphorated oil.

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his XXX

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his XXX

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his XXX

And they rubbed it with camphorated oil.

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his XXX

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his XXX

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his XXX

And they XXX with camphorated oil.

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his XXX

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his XXX

John Brown's XXX had a XXX upon his XXX

And they XXX with XXX.

MOTIONS (not done on Verse 1):

baby - rock baby in arms

cold - sneeze

chest - slap chest

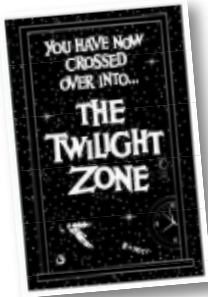
rubbed - rub chest

camphorated oil - hold nose and make a face

**THIS SUMMER THREE
OF OUR TEACHING
ASSISTANTS WILL BE IN
THE SECOND SUMMER OF
THEIR AMI MONTESSORI
TEACHER TRAINING**

Mr. George's Class

We are gearing up for our Graduation Program on Wednesday, June 11th. A pot luck meal will precede the program. We have been spending most of our time on the play, "The Time Machine." It is an offshoot of an imaginary scene from the Twilight Zone of the early 1960's. All of our 3rd graders and 4 of our 2nd graders have "speaking" parts. Although a lot of music is heard, the children will not be singing. However, there is a dance scene from 2 of our students.



Much thanks goes to Mr. and Mrs. Tamura for offering their electric piano for the Graduation Program. It will be used year round, ideal for a music program.

We have just laminated a 5 yard X 6 inch history time line. We will be using it as history material. The children can write the inventions onto their composition book.

Our graduates have enjoyed the field trips this year and their Friday afternoons with Mr. Harrod. I will miss them and I hope I prepared them for the next level of work. Their big day will be on Wednesday, June 11th.



Our graduates are:
Isabella Alvarez
Roxanne Fariñas
Sofia Huh
Ernesto Lopez
Juan-Antonio Sanchez
Renae Tamura
Livette Vazquez
Taylor Yoshida

Mrs. Thames-Bell, who has been with us since 1985, will be retiring. She has been a great help to me, correcting my flaws, observing the children, and guiding them towards positive behavior in class. She will be greatly missed. We hope she will enjoy her retirement with her newly wedded husband.

Sincerely,
Mr. George



**HAPPY FATHER'S DAY
SUNDAY, JUNE 15, 2008**

Mr. Harrod's Class

We had two great field trips: the Observatory in Griffith Park and the Arboretum in Arcadia. At the Observatory we saw beautiful projections of the universe and learned about how astronomers go about looking for the possibility of life on different worlds. At the Arboretum we saw ducks, squirrels, plants and Canadian geese among many other things. We brought papyrus back to school. The kids were not successful at making paper, though.

The 4th-graders have studied California history up to World War II. The 5th-graders just went over Jim Crow and the Industrial Revolution. The 6th-graders are on the Industrial Revolution, also.

This summer we will do different things:

Samuel - be with my family

Eli - summer school here, road trip, birthday party on Sunday after summer school is out

Michael - summer school at Meher, maybe go to Florida or the Philippines

Adan - go to San Francisco, attend summer school at San Marino Montessori

Jessica - week of robotics and summer school at Ramona Convent

Desiree - week of robotics and summer school at Ramona Convent

Antonio - Yosemite, summer school at St. Benedicts

Gabriella - go to Taiwan

Sophie - go to Spain

Tommie - summer school at Meher

Annais - Six Flags Magic Mountain

Xavier - go to Sacramento

Vicente - might go to tennis camp

Miles - go to two camps and maybe Hawaii

Adriel - stay home and have fun

Dana - summer school and day camp at Meher

Jordan - summer school and day camp at Meher

Soul - go to Hawaii maybe

Daniel - go to Las Vegas and Disneyland



Michael Magdangal, Adan Franco, Eli Chavez, Desiree Delgado, Jessica Carranza, Samuel Alvarez, Sophie Gonzalez, Gabriella Foreman, and Dave Harrod

A fond farewell to our graduates:

Samuel Alvarado

Jessica Carranza

Elias Chavez

Desiree Delgado

Adan Franco

Michael Magdangal

I will miss you. You gave a good example to the others in class. You will all do well in the schools you are going to. Thanks for 3 great years. (In one case 4 great years)

Dave Harrod



Primary Daycare

Hello everyone! We have reached the end of the school year and we are finishing up our Community Worker Unit. If you would like to come in and talk to the group about your occupation see Mrs. Ruvalcaba.

We will be celebrating Flag Day with a little parade of Flags.

During story time we will listen to stories about Father's Day, Flag Day, and community workers.

Thank you Mrs. Puente (Victor's mom) for coming in to read to the group!

Have a wonderful summer vacation! See you in September.

Daycare Staff

Ms. Mills, Ms. Martinez, Mrs. Suh, Mrs. Rivera and Mrs. Ruvalcaba



School Cents Program

We want to thank everyone for their efforts in turning in receipts and participating in our School Cents Program. Our final total from September 15, 2007 to May 15, 2008 was 247,095 points. We received a \$350 gift card good at the Montebello Town Center as our reward for coming in 12th place out of the 20 schools. Congratulations Meher Montessori!

We expect to participate in the School Cents Program next school year. We are excited to continue this fundraiser. So please, keep this in mind for next fall if you have any old computer monitors, televisions, laptops, plasma screens and LCD screens for donations. Meher Montessori will be credited for the monitors you bring.

Thank you again for supporting our school.

Mrs. Chavez and Mrs. Yoshida

Elementary Daycare

The end of the year is here and I hope everyone has a wonderful summer vacation. I'm looking forward to summer school and summer daycare. It's going to be fun. I also would like to congratulate all the graduates and wish them the best for next year.

Ms. Avila



A Note from a Parent about Camp Surf

My oldest daughter Renae was three years old when she first began at Meher Montessori. One early Monday morning during that first school year, we witnessed an intriguing sight - a group of older students lugging sleeping bags and suitcases toward a jovial looking man. They looked excited, ready to embark on an adventure. I wondered, would Renae have the same opportunity to go on an overnight trip when she was older?

Eventually, we learned that the older students make an annual trek with Mr. Harrod (the jovial looking man) to Pathfinder Ranch and to Camp Surf for outdoor education. And as it turned out, not only did Renae participate in this year's programs, but my husband Steve and I served as chaperones on the recent trip to Camp Surf, he at the beginning of the week and I at the end.

This year's Camp Surf attendees set off early in the morning April 28. After a long drive south past San Diego, the group finally arrived at Camp Surf, where the students promptly set about cleaning the smallest specks of dust and sand from the cabins. While cleaning, Mr. Harrod explained that the paint on the outside of the cabins would chip off, posing a choking or poisoning threat to local wildlife, and so the students diligently picked paint chips out of the sand and shrubs surrounding the cabins.

During the first few days, the students learned about the local wetlands, marshes, native plants and animals. They also had great fun, romping in the waves and creating sand sculptures at the beach. When the next wave of chaperones began arriving Wednesday afternoon, the students were chattering about their activities and singing "YMCA" and "The Lion Sleeps Tonight," which they had learned the night before.

Over the balance of the week, the students had a taste of archery and wall climbing, lessons about sea kelp and solar electricity, more beach time, and ways to build shelter on a deserted island. Each day also included an hour of rigorous cleaning, motivated in part by a competition between the boys' cabin and the girls' cabin. (Note to self for future trips - bring a Dust Buster!)

On its face, the week at Camp Surf was fun, interesting, educational, and enjoyable. On reflection, however, what I valued most from the trip was time spent with Mr. Harrod, Mrs. Chavez, and the students. Mr. Harrod is a passionate teacher who strives to instill profound, life-long lessons to his students. Anyone attending Camp Surf with Mr. Harrod will never look at chipping paint, wasted food, or dust bunnies under the bed in quite the same way. Mrs. Chavez, who purportedly has chaperoned her last Camp Surf trip, did an amazing job keeping students, chaperones, and Mr. Harrod in line. Mrs. Chavez shared stories of her years as chaperone, witnessing so many students transform and blossom.

I look forward to sharing similar stories of students that I experience in the years to come. Of course, those stories begin with the students that I spent time with during this year's Camp Surf. Though I've known many of the students for years, spending time with them in this unique environment brought new appreciation and fondness for their individual personalities. My time at Camp Surf instilled a sincere respect for all the Meher students, who demonstrated self-sufficiency, responsibility, and an eagerness to learn, all of which have been cultivated by their Montessori education. I anxiously await next year's Camp Surf, to see who finds new courage to climb the rock wall, who comes up with a crazy skit for campfire, who develops into the new leaders of the group. I also encourage other parents to experience this unique opportunity to spend time with an amazing group of students - but I've got dibs on the bottom bunk!

Jadene Tamura

After School Art Class

After School Art Classes began its 2008 Art Exhibit. All are invited to enjoy this beautiful exhibit of the childrens creative expressions.

The Exhibit took a full two days to mount and I want to take a moment to give special thanks to all those who helped with this huge endeavor.

The very first person I want to thank is Linda Yoshida. She is a tremendous asset and resource to the Art Classes in general. Her expertise and professional approach has brought our school art exhibit to a new level. Linda Yoshida, thank you from my heart for your wonderful contributions to

our art program.

I also want to thank Michelle and Art Gonzales, Carol Cadena, Meredith Lepe and Susan Foreman. These parents took time from their busy schedules to help with the preparation involved in hanging the art work.

The last class of this six week cycle will be Tuesday, June 10th. It has been a great year. the childrens art work is more beautiful than ever. See for yourselves check out the exhibit that graces the hallways.

Have a great summer and I look forward to seeing all of you in September 2008!

Love,
Gail Shaeffer

Have you seen the beautiful art work displayed around the school?



Library News

News from the Library...

Happily, we had another great year in the library.

Thanks to Mr. Yee and Mrs. Gonzalez the library was open two additional days during the week. Having the library open more often was great because more students and their parents were able visit the library!



In addition to having the library open every other Monday and every Wednesday and Friday afternoon, we celebrated National Library Week with librarian classroom visits. Ms. Piñuelas visited each classroom to read to the children, talk about visiting the library and explain the Turn Off the TV and Read Challenge. The children enjoyed the special storytime and were excited to visit the library later that afternoon.

During National TV Turnoff Week, the library held Meher's Second Annual Turn Off the TV and Read Challenge. We are very happy to announce that it was a great success. Thank you to all the students who participated in the challenge! We had over half our students participate in the challenge with the majority accomplishing the ultimate goal of going 5 days without TV. We also had a significant increase in the number of students who took part in the challenge this year. We look forward to this trend continuing with the hope of having even more students participate next year.

Thank you to all the children who visited the library this year. It's been a pleasure having you in the library!

Have a great summer!

Ms. Piñuelas, Mrs. Gonzalez, Mr. Yee
School Librarians

The library will be closed as of Thursday, June 12th! Please return any borrowed library books ASAP! Any books not returned by Wednesday, June 11th will be subject to late fees which will accrue over the summer. If you have lost any of your borrowed books please contact Ms. Pinuelas at rpinuelas@mehermontessori.org so the matter can be taken care of before the school year ends to avoid additional late fees.

Thank you!



ALTADENA NEWS

JUNE EVENTS

FATHER'S DAY BREAKFAST —

The children had a wonderful time entertaining their Dad, Grandpa, or Uncle. They made darling baseball caps which all of the dad's wore with pride. Thank you Miss McCray for your creativity with the presents.



JUNE BIRTHDAYS —

Nicolas Doutt 5yrs., Walter Kennedy 4yrs., Sophia Ospina 4yrs., Rui Saenz 5yrs., Eden Wright 5yrs. and Mrs. Hyde ?yrs.



GRADUATES —

We are so proud of our ten graduates – Lilly Babcock, Shayna Farrar, Manny Gimenez, Maggie Graff, Chloe Obeyesekere, Krishnan Pablo, Rui Saenz, Eden Wright, Zachary Wright and Niko Lawrence.

MRS. HYDE'S CLASS — The year has quickly come to an end and the children have all blossomed into wonderful little citizens. Many children will be here for summer school and some will be doing other adventures such as different summer camps.

Summer School Activities

— Friday, June 20th is Pajama Day! Friday, June 27th – jumper at school. Thursday, June 3rd – 4th of July parade and picnic. Friday, July 11th luau (wear something Hawaiian). Friday, July 18th Sam Shazam – Mr. Mouse and Magic Show. Friday, July 25th – Lifestyles of the slimy and squishy (the blue submarine).

What does your Father do for a job?

1. Rui – "He makes movies"
2. Angel – "Grandpa makes DVDs"
3. Kerrigan – "My dad goes to work and writes on a piece of paper"
4. Ryan – "Him goes to work and goes to the store so he can work at his job"
5. Manny – "Works on the computer"
6. Lily – "My Dad works at home and he works at his office"
7. Mclain – "My Dad works on the big new house and he works late"
8. Shayna – "My Daddy does removal of houses"
9. Niko – "He works on the computer"

10. Nicolas – “My Dad goes to work and he makes money and he works at a hotel”
11. Ajoin – “He goes to work he works on his paper and computer”
12. Mayze – “My dad he does houses and goes back home”
13. Elliot – “He works on the computer and goes to work”
14. Wynfrey – “He works in the movies”
15. Natalie – “Daddy goes to the computer and works”
16. Walter – “He goes to JPL and works on the computer”
17. Sydney – “He talks on the telephone”
18. Sabrina – “My Grandpa goes to work at the hospital with Mommy”
19. Krishnan – “My Dad writes on paper and sits in a chair and watches the news”
20. Eden – “He use to be a Doctor but he is not a Doctor anymore”
21. Zahra – “He goes to work at Western Credit”
22. Sophia – “He goes to work and takes me somewhere special”
23. Raiah – “He goes to work and he teaches students”
24. Priscilla – “He cooks”
25. Lilian – “He goes to the park”
26. Maggie – “He goes to work and buys groceries and toys for us”
27. Chloe – “He works on a computer”
28. Alexandra – “He builds things”
29. Matthew – “He works at work and plays a game with me”
30. Kailo – “He gives me pancakes”
31. Zachary – “My grandpa works for the city”

CLASS OF 2008



THE POWER OF FAMILY CONVERSATION

Laura Pappano

Harvard Education Letter, May/June 2008

School matters, but literacy starts at home. Teachers armed with reading contracts and carefully worded missives have long urged parents to read aloud to their children. But now there is a second and perhaps more powerful message: Talk to your kids, too.

Mounting research that links language-rich home environments with reading success and school achievement is driving educators and community groups to target families long before children register for school. In addition to Todd Risley and Betty Hart's landmark work correlating verbal home environments with future literacy, Catherine E. Snow

at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and David K. Dickinson, a professor of teaching and learning at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, are assembling data on the impact of early literacy interventions. Their ongoing study of 57 low-income families reveals that home support for literacy markedly influences kindergarten language skills and fourth grade reading comprehension test scores. No wonder those at the leading edge of literacy want to increase the quantity and quality of conversations between parents and children beginning at birth.

"It is really what parents have been doing at home that children have to draw on when they become readers and writers," says Gail Jordan, associate professor of education at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minn., who says children from three to five are "ripe" for engaging in rich language learning.

A decade ago, Jordan created Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education) to help parents and kindergarten teachers work shoulder to shoulder to help children develop literacy skills. The program, now used in 120 Ohio schools and in Minnesota,

invites parents and children to participate in structured evening events that provide education and modeling for parents and offer weekly activities to do at home. Parent-child activities include storybook reading, retelling family narratives, and talking about the world. Retelling family stories, for example, reinforces the sequencing of ideas, emphasizes the value of detail, and sharpens children's narrative skills.

Such approaches are making a difference. A 2000 study that tracked 148 kindergarten students and their families in the White Bear Lake School District in Minnesota (with 77 receiving the intervention

and 71 acting as a control group), showed that Project EASE students made significantly greater gains in language skills than the control group. The Collaborative Language and Literacy Instruction Project, created by Daniel Pallante of the Ohio Education Development Center, also uses Project EASE with teachers and parents in Ohio with similar results. An

outside evaluation showed that students who attended more of the Project EASE literacy nights with their parents and did more of the take-home activities tended to perform better on kindergarten reading tests.

More recently, Jordan has applied this approach to preschools, creating a program called Building Language Together, now used in 32 preschools in Minnesota. (It is offered in both English and Spanish.) The program includes books that go home with parents and "book scripts" that take parents through each story page by page to prompt parent-child discussions.

"The best talk around a story book," says Nonie Lesaux, associate professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, takes

RESEARCH LINKS LANGUAGE-RICH HOME ENVIRONMENTS WITH READING SUCCESS AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT



the story as “a point of departure.” Exploratory, investigative discussions that evolve between parents and children, Lesaux says, are central to higher-level literacy learning. “One of the hallmarks of kids who have a good vocabulary is that they can talk about things that are not in the present,” she adds.

Jordan notes that the social-emotional bond parents have with children amplifies learning. Parents, she says, can tailor explanations to click perfectly (as when a mom explains “variety” to a daughter with a sweet tooth by naming types of candy). They can also provide more extensive opportunities for rich discussion than a teacher attending to a class of 25 children.

“Let’s Talk”—In Any Language

The Let’s Talk—It Makes a Difference campaign, started five years ago by the Agenda for Children in Cambridge, Mass., focuses on helping low-income and non-native English speaking families see the value of conversation in fostering literacy. The campaign, targeting children from birth to age 8, has staffers meet new mothers in maternity wards, make home visits, and hold “talk workshops” and “reading parties” to support parents in their teaching role.

“Parents want to do best by their children,” says Lauren Leikin, literacy coordinator for the Agenda for Children, which is sponsored by the Cambridge Public Schools and various local health and community agencies. “But the talking and reading don’t come as naturally to some parents as to others.” For instance, she says, cultural factors can influence how much parents solicit conversation and ideas from children. In some cultures, standards of good behavior discourage children from speaking up. A “major emphasis” of their work, Leikin says, is encouraging parents to engage children verbally—and in their native language (see The Home Language Advantage). The program has trained home visitors who speak Haitian Creole, Bengali, Amharic, Spanish, and Portuguese in addition to English.

For Karina Gildea, a mother of two young daughters, the home visit from Let’s Talk staffer

Gretta Hardina is a welcome break. Born and raised in Mexico, Gildea speaks fluent Spanish and good—but not perfect—English. But as someone who attends parent-child play programs and library story sessions, Gildea knows her children’s success begins with her.

“I try to talk to her when I am changing her diaper so that she can start understanding,” Gildea says of her four-month-old baby, dressed in fuzzy white pajamas with a baby duck on the front. Her two-year-old, who has long dark hair and wears a bright red plastic watch on her left wrist, alternately sits by her side and scampers back and forth to the far reaches of the second-floor apartment. Her request for “TV! TV!” fades as Hardina unpacks board books from her canvas bag. The books are meant for the infant, but it is the two-year-old who clambers onto the sofa and reaches across her mother’s lap toward Hardina for one after another.

In a typical visit, Hardina may model how to read aloud interactively, using the book as a launching point for dialogue and asking open-ended questions. She also offers guidance about the stages of reading and “normal” child behavior, she says, “like chewing books, grabbing the book, and turning the pages quickly.”

It may seem obvious to educators that reading—and talking—to children from birth can influence school success, but Leikin says survey data gathered from program participants reveals that this is a new message for many parents. For example, only 26 percent of 75 parents reported being “very aware” of the importance of talking to children before attending a “Talk Workshop.” Afterwards, 96 percent “definitely” planned to use the skills they’d learned. Similarly, a follow-up phone survey in 2007 with 33 parents who received home visits found that 70 percent had changed the way they spoke to their children as a result of information they learned during the visit.

“Everybody can talk with their kids, and it makes an enormous difference in their children’s lifelong academic success,” says Leikin.

CHILDREN FROM THREE TO FIVE ARE “RIPE” FOR ENGAGING IN RICH LANGUAGE LEARNING.

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GREAT JOB!

