**The Benefits of Being the Oldest Student in a Montessori Classroom**

In our adult world, we continuously interact with people of different ages and abilities. This creates the rich texture of our professional (and possibly personal) lives. The information below is highly simplified, but helps us understand the value of each age for each child within a set developmental group.

The initiates (sometimes youngest) or beginners are the learners. They watch and observe. They learn where the resources are, who does what and what is to be done. They ask a lot of questions!

The middle participants (middle management) are the workers. They understand the expectations and produce much in way of product and sustain relationships. Both the youngest (initiates or beginners) and the more experienced or advanced participants aspire to become the leaders.

In all classrooms and in all schools in every country in this world, there is an oldest student. Being the oldest child in an American school will sometimes have negative connotations: the student had to repeat or was held back.

In Montessori classrooms, the position of the oldest child is one of pride and benefit to the child.

The oldest, most experienced students are the leaders, possibly for a period of years. They are responsible for helping the younger students and for providing them with information and teaching them. They define much of the culture and set priorities. They teach others and act as mentors to the youngest/less experience participants. They are the CEOs of the classroom.

In exchange for their many contributions, the oldest students are truly admired and respected. They are provided unique opportunities to lead. They develop strong self-esteem. They also have a unique relationship with their teachers.

Our oldest students are the first students to receive lessons and their specific academic and social needs are considered the most advanced and fully addressed by the teachers. The teachers become true mentors to these oldest students. It is a unique and meaningful relationship that will benefit the oldest student in a profound way, and found only in gifted programs in most schools.

Their position within this social construct may serve the rising adolescent well. We know that as children move through puberty, that small classroom sizes tend to meet their needs in a seamless way. Their teachers know they well and can provide the emotional support and positive social constructs as they move through one of the most socially challenging times of their lives.

The youngest student can only become the oldest student if the parents are deeply committed to a Montessori program. It is often the oldest students and their families that contribute in such meaningful ways to the well-being of our entire school community.

We recognize the contributions you and your family have made to this school and want to take a moment to thank you for all you and your child have given to our community.