

## **Fostering A Love of Learning at Clanmore Montessori School: Pre-K through Grade Six**

by: Michael Goldstein

Like all good sceptics, my mother taught me that you can't have your cake, and eat it too. So you can imagine how surprised I was to discover a school that understands not only the need to master the "academics" and the "advanced learning", but also the vital importance of creating self confident, joyful, creative young learners with a love of learning that surpasses all expectations. And you can't help notice that all their grade six graduates have gone to their first choice of middle school.

The school operates from a beautifully renovated historic Lakeshore building adjoining Joshua's Creek Conservation Area in Oakville. The main entrance leads into the heart of the school, where despite the constant activity of both the teachers and children, you can't help but notice how calm everything is. The children seem self-propelled. When you peek into the classrooms you won't find a teacher standing before their students dictating the work of the day. It's clear that the children know what they need to do and move independently throughout the space. The teachers are seen, quietly sitting with small groups of children, doing their work to motivate the young minds through a sophisticated and purposeful methodology that encourages children to search for their own solutions - a process which the child innately craves. They want to learn, they yearn to be capable. Clanmore believes it is their duty to create the environment that fosters this drive.

Like anything that runs this seamlessly, there is a tendency to underestimate the importance of Clanmore's recipe for success: the vision, dedication, hard work and years of training that creates this type of environment. To start, the brilliant teachings of Maria Montessori a visionary in the field of child development and a champion of children. Montessori understood the awesome potential of the young mind and developed teaching tools to support and nurture that growth. The other ingredient, which makes Clanmore unique is the calibre of the teachers led by Grace Kidney, a thought leader and visionary in the field of elementary education. Ms. Kidney and her staff share the belief that before a child can learn they must feel safe from ridicule and safe from judgment. They believe, as Montessori did, that it is the duty of the teacher to be the advocate for the child and to provide the children with a fertile landscape which allows for the discovery and nurturing of self. With their keen comprehension of child development the teachers know that children learn at different rates and by various methods. Ms. Kidney believes that the teacher's traditional role as the judge or scorekeeper of a child often leaves the child with feelings of low self-esteem and inadequacy. A clear failure, not of the child, but of the teacher.

Clanmore understands the vital importance of balance in the developing mind of a child. A sanctuary of free time allows a child to immerse him or her self in a rich

imaginary world; a world which allows for crucial mind development that is intricately linked with the creative process, problem solving and higher thought. So many of the stresses of school life don't exist at Clanmore. All this leads to a joyful sort of learning that surpasses all expectations as seen in the self possessed, capable and intelligent young adults that graduate from the school. There is the realization that the feeling of calm which immediately strikes you when you enter the school is created by something that is right and working and in the end, represents learning at its best.