



Montessori Education at SJL Academy

The early childhood program (infant-toddler and Pre-K3-K) at SJL Academy will be grounded in the beautiful Montessori learning method developed by devout Catholic Maria Montessori. The following short essay is from parishioner Nancy Johnson who is a highly trained and experienced Montessori educator.

“Education cannot be neutral. It is either positive or negative; either it enriches or it impoverishes; either it enables a person to grow or it lessens, even corrupts him. The mission of schools is to develop a sense of truth, of what is good and beautiful.” ~ Pope Francis

As a parent, I try to remember that I am working not only to raise children, but also to grow adults who think critically, behave independently and love the Lord and His Church. That doesn't feel easy when I'm fielding yet another “Why?” question, or waiting ages for my toddler to figure out what limb goes in what clothing hole, or wrestling a child into a pew during Mass. It's a lot easier to say, “Because I said so,” than to research the “Why,” much faster to stick those chubby feet into the right pant legs by myself, and less stressful to sit at home. I know, though, that a patient, loving response helps my children develop essential skills that will carry them into adulthood.

Unfortunately, “easier” and “faster” seem to be core standards in our current educational system. Children are treated as commodities rather than young saints with unique gifts and abilities since the system depends on the ease of maintaining acceptable averages. While there are many incredible teachers in all schools, most eventually succumb to the pressure of teaching to the test, speeding through facts and figures in hopes that enough sticks to keep their school funding. Motivators are fleetingly extrinsic, based on good grades and prizes instead of an intrinsic love of learning and innate respect for self and others. This is especially tragic when you consider that the institutionalization of learning often begins in early childhood. Most schools churn out a roster of test scores and worksheets, unable (or unwilling) to focus on individuals who are not just students, but children growing into adults.

At its heart, the Montessori method responds to Pope Benedict XVI's reminder that “A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints.” In an authentic Catholic Montessori school, teachers approach children as individuals, nurturing their God-given interests and abilities to cultivate a lifelong love of learning. Hands-on, developmentally appropriate learning occurs in a carefully prepared environment. Respectful movement is unlimited, teaching children coordination and self-regulation as part of the normal school day. Children can take their time, concentrating on those things that they enjoy under gentle guidance, without the artificial interruptions of a traditional school schedule.

*“The goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child's own natural desire to learn.”
~ Maria Montessori*

There's no fast-and-easy because all work is done with intention and purpose. That purpose is reflected in a sense of responsibility for oneself, for each other and for the shared environment. Children don't sit at desks with individual pencil boxes. They learn to coexist in a community working together for the success of its many unique members. Sounds a lot like adulthood, right? While I could go on about the impressive scientifically-based academic methods and beautiful materials the Montessori method employs, these intangible holistic skills support our children into adulthood beyond academia. The approach values the human spirit and the development of the whole child — physical, social, emotional, and cognitive — growing saints with a soul purpose to serve the Lord.