

Dear Families,

Other than my family and friends, my two remaining human passions in life are baseball and Montessori. Believe it or not, in my mind, heart, and soul they are very much entwined and so understood by me as an oneness. Watching a baseball game reminds me very much of the learning that goes on within a Montessori school. Let me explain. My beginning in baseball began when I was small boy playing stoopball on our two family brick home in the Bronx. We learned this basic ball game from the “Big Kids” on the block and it required only a pink high bouncer Spalden ball, your front stoop, and a few pals who wanted to play. The game involved developing good eye/hand throwing coordination, for if you were “up” you had to throw the ball at one of the steps of the stoop so that it would bounce behind you onto the sidewalk and hopefully the street. If the ball bounced once before it was caught by a player out there (called an “infielder”) you got a “single” – if twice, a double, etc., four bounces or over the head of the outfielder in the street and you were awarded a homerun. Fielders of course were perfecting their eye/hand coordination in practicing good catching skills. So stoopball for us little kids was very much like what a Primary Montessori learning environment is to three to six year olds: a real, concrete, simple introduction to the development of some exciting human skills. It is natural, communal, very experiential, dynamic, and very fun.

Next came my move out into the street to play punch ball – much advanced for not only was it played on a “baseball field” (the street with a sewer cover as home base and car fenders as first and third bases – someone’s crumpled shirt would be second!) but my fist became the imaginary bat that punched the Spalden ball as best I could and I ran ‘round the bases as fast as I could – no sliding -- but there were teams and score was rigidly kept by marking runs with white chalk on the edge of the street. And just so I find the Lower Elementary Montessori (six to nine year olds) program to be truly an advancement -- more mature with its abstract materials firing a child’s imagination and where learning begins to become much more a small group thing mixing individuality with team play – each giving one’s all with great enthusiasm and joy.

When I as a kid turned nine and ten I was ready to play ball like the big kids – with a stickball bat! What a step up and away from mere punch ball – now I swung with gusto a wooden broom stick with the whiskers cut off! The fact that it was much skinnier than a real baseball bat did not matter because when I whacked a Spalden ball with that stickball bat and saw that sphere fly high and away like a rocket I truly felt like Joe DiMaggio, and Glover Street became in a brilliant burst of light Yankee Stadium! And so too, even though the Upper Elementary (nine to twelve year olds) learning environments still look familiar, the academic work therein becomes suddenly more grown-up for it is more creative and broad – and with computer assisted research goes out of sight. The room for learning is no longer a walled enclosure but magically with the speed of light wide open to the real world.

And then when I became at last a Big Kid (teenager) I left playing street ball and began to play real baseball on a diamond of dirt and grass with real bases and a Louisville Slugger bat to belt a horsehide white baseball with a CRACK! that made my very heart/mind/soul soar! Now I was in the “major leagues” of sandlot baseball – and it seemed I had the world in my back pocket. The Montessori Middle School I observe today is purposed to be (with its real life learning laboratories and authentic contracts of mature academic work to be accomplished) just such a real move up into authentic scholarship – to exercise and challenge the teenage learner in ways not different than what goes on in the big league academia of senior high and college. It is sophisticated learning, and yet it still smacks of the same experiential dynamic fun of long ago when I was playing stoop ball. Learning to love playing ball is just like learning to love learning. Yes, baseball and Montessori -- both superabundant blessings for the human child!

Peace,  
Paul