

March, April/2014

Mentor Transcript: Primary (Evaluations and Tutoring, State Licensing, Elementary Transition)

wendyc(P)	Let me start with an apology for getting so far behind on transcripts. It has been a particularly busy time at our school. So this transcript is long because it is from several weeks and has questions that were submitted via email. If I missed anyone's questions please submit them on line or via email again.
	Summer Institute Registration is open. Primary Sessions: Class Management, Language, and All Year Montessori. Dates: July 31 - August 5 http://www.mtips.org/summer-institute-2014-july-31-august-5
R(Q)	I have had a few parents ask for suggestions for tutors for their children outside of school. One child (5) who speaks English as a third language, and another child who is just overall behind and resistant to working (will be six in June). I am really worried about the idea of sending the children to a traditional tutor or learning resource (Kumon, Mathnasium, etc) because of the probability of rewards and extrinsic motivation as well as the likelihood that the curriculum just will not match up to Montessori (neither in subject matter, nor in quality of materials). What are your thoughts on children who are having difficulty with academic subjects and the best way to help them (in or out of the classroom)?
wendyc(A)	Well I agree with you about the chain stores like Kumon and Mathnasium. What a waste of time and money.
wendyc(P)	But you do need to be realistic about how far behind children are and whether they have a genuine need for additional support.
wendyc(A)	The child who speaks three languages can easily just be experiencing the normal delay in expressive language that often accompanies multilingualism in the early years. Are there any signs of cognitive difficulty?
R(Q)	For the one who is learning English 3rd, no, there aren't signs of cognitive difficulty - it all seems language related. The mom in that case is quite worried, however, and he's the 4th child in the family, and the older brother is still having difficulty in lower el - which intensifies her worry, even though the other two siblings are doing fine.
wendyc(A)	Do you have a consulting speech pathologist that works with your school?
R(Q)	I'm not as worried about him, but feeling that pressure from the parent, and the request for tutoring recommendations leads me to believe that she will be going

	to get tutoring whether or not it is something I endorse, which makes me wonder if I should offer to tutor him after school for the sake of consistency.
wendyc(A)	<p>I would not get in to offering tutoring as his teacher. This puts you in a very vulnerable position as the only one assisting him if he indeed has difficulties.</p> <p>You could suggest a speech evaluation, but you want to be careful to be clear about whether you are recommending this based on what you see or just responding to her inquiry. The reason that I say this is if you do not think the child has a problem and the speech evaluation indicates this, the parent may feel that you unnecessarily had her child get an evaluation.</p>
R(Q)	We do not have a speech pathologist on staff, but I will ask my principal about it.
wendyc(A)	Definitely. The reason I suggest this is that a language evaluation is much more reasonable than any full psycho-educational evaluation, which does not sound in order in this case. But the speech evaluator will give you some independent professional feedback about whether the significance of the delay is typical for second language learners or his perhaps more significant.
R(Q)	Good thought; I will follow up on that (I guess there must be some multi-lingual speech pathologists around...).
wendyc(A)	Have you asked mom how his speech is in his native tongue? Is he speaking at an appropriate level in that language?
wendyc(P)	I always make it clear to parents if I am recommending an evaluation, or if I am just saying this is something to keep an eye on. If families want to be proactive and get an evaluation even if I have not recommended it, I am most often supportive of this. It is hard to tell which issues will resolve with time and which will persist.
wendyc(P)	You might not even recommend an evaluation necessarily. But you can suggest that she go speak to a speech pathologis to share the info and see if he or she recommends an evaluation.
wendyc(P)	It is so important to have specialists that know you and know your school. Otherwise you can get some real losers, just as in any field. We have worked long and hard to find a psychologist, speech pathologist, and OT so that we have people that we can consult with even if we are not asking a child to get an evaluation.
wendyc(P)	It feels to us like there are so many tweeners now: children who fall right in the gray area. And often times we just describe the child to the professional and get an opinion about how to proceed.
R(C)	I will follow up with her on that. He seems great with Spanish to me - she has expressed some concern that he doesn't know the colors, but in working with the color tablets, he DOES seem to know them, even if he is confusing the names (we did matching colors to items in the environment this week).
R(Q)	She's also said that he is better at German than his siblings - and he communicates without too much trouble to me in English (some uncertainties,

	but overall, I'm not worried). I will follow up with her on that. This is the second time she's brought up tutoring, so I think it will be a good way to take some pressure off of ME, and either get some affirmation that he's age appropriate or some other feedback for ways to help him out. I think that is excellent feedback regarding specialists as well.
wendyc(A)	Exactly. Finding good therapists is a challenge though. And one distinct problem for us in Montessori schools is that professionals overall hold Montessori in low regard. Possibly because they have been to bad Montessori schools or from just ignorance. But oftentimes, the first thing that they do is question if the child should be in a different educational environment. So this is one of the questions I now ask therapists before I refer them to our parents.
wendyc(P)	We are almost out of time for tonight. Any additional questions?
wendyc(P)	I will get last week's chats posted in the next day or two.
R(Q)	The other child whose parent mentioned an interest in outside tutoring is going to be 6 in June, and is still struggling with developing a work habit (second year in the class), most work that isn't sidewalk chalk or clay is like pulling teeth for her; she's at addition with golden beads for math and she's still struggling with moveable alphabet, though she is ok with phonetic reading using object box 1. She is more than a year behind where she should be age-wise, and without a strong work habit, I am really concerned. I've recommended that she get an evaluation (she seems to have either some auditory issues; possibly memory issues).
wendyc(A)	Hmmm. I would spend some time with her trying to establish some more details about her struggles.
wendyc(P)	For example, working with moveable alphabet, can she not hear the sounds in words or can she not associate the symbols? Can she hear at least the initial sound?
wendyc(P)	It is always very helpful to the evaluator if you can describe in some detail and clarity what the specifics of the struggles are. Can she count to ten? Is it just verbal mimicking or does she understand the one to one correspondence?
wendyc(P)	Dig in with her a little each day in order to clarify your understanding of how she learns and where she is challenged.
RQ)	With golden beads I realized after a few months of struggle requesting numbers for formation of numbers (not remembering the categories even moments after I requested them), that she was perfectly capable of counting the numbers to me if she created the number on her own. At times she seems like she is totally oblivious and confused when I ask her to repeat an instruction from just a minute before - like she is unaware that I'd asked her to put away xyz to get out another work.
R(Q)	For moveable alphabet she seems to struggle in the second period for most of the sounds, even with repeated work with a few at the time. She can articulate most sounds in words phonetically, but cannot pick out the symbol for the sounds (this is improving, but VERY slowly).

wendyc(A)	This is just what you need to know. Try to approach the work in lots of different ways so that you understand as much as you can.
wendyc(A)	So these kinds of details are so helpful to evaluators. It can help them distinguish that she may have a receptive language issue rather than a cognitive one for example. I am just seeing that I have someone in the elementary chat room. Have to switch over. Thanks for logging on tonight.
R(Q)	Thanks so much! I'll be back next week!
wendyc(A)	Hope so!
R(Q)	Have a great one, Wendy, g'night!
C(Q)	<p>Our school is extending our Primary Program next year to include extended day for 3 and 4-year-olds and is in the process of applying for either a facility or daycare license in the state of WV in order to be able to offer the extended day.</p> <p>Both licenses do not allow students to bring a packed lunch. Our contact to help us through the interpretation of the licensing requirements is not the most helpful.</p> <p>How have other Montessori Schools overcome these requirements? I realize it could differ widely from state to state.</p> <p>Any counsel/advice would be so helpful.</p>
wendyc(A)	Oh, the state. This can be a real challenge. One thing that I have learned is that more depends on the character of your particular state representative than on the actual regulations.
wendyc(A)	<p>I used to be very gracious to our representative, but I found that she just mistook it for an opportunity to try to intimidate me. Now when she comes, I just leave her in an office and supply her with the files she requests. As a result, our visits are much shorter and there are fewer silly demands.</p> <p>You also need to verify what your rep is saying you have to do. She may also just start insisting you do things because <i>she</i> thinks it is right. You have to ask that she indicate which regulation she is citing. And you have to read the wording carefully to be sure that the things she is asking you to do are really required.</p> <p>And finally, find out if there are any accreditations in your state which exempt you from state oversight. In Illinois, AMS or AMI accreditation accomplishes this. Wish that I could be more helpful.</p>

	Transcript: April 2, 2014
R(Q)	<p>I have some questions about a child who is "scheduled" to be moving on to Elementary (6yo in June). The child is still working a whole year behind where she should be with the materials (struggling to complete even one problem with golden beads addition). Her parent has agreed to an evaluation for focus/auditory concerns, and I have a few recommendations for that from the developmental specialist who has observed her.</p> <p>She has very little work habit. This is only her second year in the class, so she started at 4. I know the materials she is working with don't indicate her developmental stage, but it is so challenging to read what will be best for this child next year. What are your thoughts? I could see benefit to another year of primary, but I also cringe at the possibility of her being the oldest child setting a poor example for the younger ones (two years in a row).</p>
wendyc(A)	<p>We have faced this challenging question many times over the years. Ultimately, we have found that it is where the child is socially that guides our decision far more than where she is academically. If she has bonded to the group of students that are going to elementary next year, she should stay with them. The loss of her social group and figuring out how to bond to a group that is a year younger is rarely worth what is gained with an extra year of primary for academic reasons.</p>
wendyc(A)	<p>Hope the answer is helpful.</p>
R(Q)	<p>That makes sense. It is especially tricky because my oldest group is really only 3 children this year (despite having 28 children in the class). Many of the 3rd year students will not turn six until the fall, and so far will be staying in primary for the fall.</p>
R(Q)	<p>The child in question isn't really bonded to any of the children in a positive way; recently she's started working positively with one of the children who will likely stay another year in primary. Three will turn 6 this summer; she is one of the three.</p>
wendyc(A)	<p>So those three are technically in kindergarten. The question is not so much if the bonding is positive or negative, but who she considers her peer group and if the peer group considers her a part of them.</p>
R(Q)	<p>My class typically loses its oldest group to public/traditional Kindergarten.</p>
wendyc(A)	<p>That is discouraging. You might consider talking directly about this year before you accept students into the class. We require a commitment to the kindergarten year if families are to be accepted.</p>
R(Q)	<p>That's a great suggestion. I think some families think they've "finished" primary after 3 years, despite having started before their child turned 3 and leaving before their child actually has a leadership year in the classroom.</p>
R(Q)	<p>I don't get a sense that she is really part of a peer group - she gets into a lot of trouble with the kindergarteners, and the younger "oldest group" who will stick around next year have just recently started working with her.</p>

wendyc(A)	But your school has an elementary program where she would go in June?
R(Q)	Yes, we do have an elementary program, and I am hopeful that one of the elementary guides could come observe her.
wendyc(A)	That is always the best choice. Get more input and different perspectives about her. Don't try to make the decision unilaterally.
R(Q)	She has had zero work habit all year, and in the past week has discovered handwriting work, and she is taking off with that.
wendyc(A)	Well that is certainly a positive. You probably need to be much stronger with direction for her giving her some choices from which to pick but not the choice to do nothing.
R(Q)	Right. That is what has been going on all year - I've been fighting the "choose one" battle, and she tends to sneak off to hide in the restroom area or disappear outside to use sidewalk chalk (even after making a choice to do something inside... and as soon as I turn around...). So I've been largely directing her work all year. I meant to say that she does not have an independent/self-motivated work habit, and when given choices she still goofs off much of the time.
wendyc(A)	This is really not all that unusual, even for older children.
R(Q)	Right. One family recently said "but we thought it was only a 3-year program" in talking to me about moving their child to public Kindergarten, and my jaw about dropped because their child had started in the class before he was 3.
wendyc(A)	Well, you really have to consider your admission process and how much information and what information your families are getting before they enroll.
R(Q)	What do you share during admissions regarding those younger ones being admitted?
wendyc(A)	Families that enroll in our primary program have to make a commitment to the kindergarten year. They also attend two prospective parent classes as well.
wendyc(A)	Most people honor their commitment. If they do not honor it and they have siblings in the school, I do not keep the younger sibling either. But once you start expecting that people are going to stay, you will find that you even start talking about it differently.
wendyc(P)	We are already close to out of time. Any last questions?
R(Q)	I'd love some information on those prospective parent classes, too!
wendyc(A)	I will try to post info about them when I post this transcript. Time to switch over to elementary.