

11/4/10

Mentor Transcript: Elementary (Work Journals, Class Meetings, Current Events)

wendyc(A)	Hi, K. Do you want to submit questions or listen to those of others?
K(Q)	I think just listening for a while will be fine tonight!
wendyc(A)	Good enough. Feel free to comment or ask questions about the posts as they come out.
m(C)	Hi Wendy:
m(C)	I have two questions for you. I don't have internet at home so it is difficult to join in the live chats, but I always read your transcripts after the fact.
m(Q)	1. I would like to have a discussion with our Elementary Guides about how to use the work journal. I am not elementary trained, but am in the administration and am in the position of supporting the teachers, but also challenging them to rethink things from time to time. Can you speak more about using the work journal to plan work for the day, versus record work that is done? What are your thoughts about required work being done each morning (math, writing, etc.).
wendyc(P)	The work journal is really an excellent tool for the elementary aged child. It offers many things to the developing mind. One benefit is that it is a way for a child to organize himself. Through the recording of the work that he does, the child can nurture within

	himself an awareness of time and how he uses it...or doesn't use it.
wendyc(P)	When the children first join the elementary class, the keeping of the journal is a time consuming and inconsistent activity. But it should be considered, actually, as a work in itself. When the work journal is considered something to do before and after a work, it just becomes an interruption to what the teacher has in mind to accomplish. When this mindset takes root, putting in the necessary effort to establish the keeping of work journals falls by the wayside.
wendyc(P)	So, to start, go ahead and embrace the keeping of a work journal as a legitimate work in and of itself. To start, on the very first day, the children should be gathered in small groups and instructed how to write the date with the day and the numeric date as well.
wendyc(P)	Following this, the teacher should be prepared to write the starting time and the name of the lesson that she will give next. The children should skip a line and copy this from the board as well.
wendyc(P)	The teacher then goes on to present the lesson, and when finished writes the ending time on the board. I have seen teachers organize this in different ways. I have always written it this way:  9:45 - _____ The Noun  So I write the starting time, a hyphen, an underlined space for the ending time, and the name of the lesson.
K(Q)	I have found that the children enjoy numbering up

	<p>into the 20s and 30s with their plans for the day. I try to get them to think about right now. I have tried really hard this week not to let it fall by the wayside, and I have found it to be a good time to get closer to them, check if they are telling time well, etc.</p>
wendyc(A)	<p>Hey, great to hear that you are digging in. It takes determination, patience, and as I mentioned, a willingness to commit time.</p>
K(Q)	<p>They skip pages and are very disorganized about it, but....therein lies the work!</p>
wendyc(A)	<p>Really, you are spot on here. This is the work of a 6 year old child. Where am I in my journal? Do I just open it to any page? Should it be a jumble of entries that I cannot even read?</p>
wendyc(P)	<p>I would caution the use of the work journal, though, as a tool for planning the day. This was mentioned in the question. The work journal is a record of new lessons or work that has been initiated and then accomplished. Not even necessarily finished, but taken to a logical stopping place.</p>
wendyc(P)	<p>A Montessori class is organized around the precept that children should have the freedom (within limits) to follow their interests. But it is not reasonable to expect a child to be able to predict the natural course of his interest as a day unfolds. This is a dynamic experience. He will be influenced by lessons, by invitations to work with other children, and by his observations. If a work plan is established, it becomes the chain around his ankle that prevents the child from spontaneously following that which inspires him.</p>

K(Q)	I saw someone hot glue ribbons to the binding to help keep them organized and was considering trying this - perhaps with a string of finger knitting?
wendyc(A)	I have never tried this. I have always just talked about finding the page that the child is on. I use folders with tangs (little tabs to attach lined notebook paper) in the center. I then put just ten to twelve pieces of paper in. No more. If you limit the number of sheets, this in itself supports organization. If a child wanted to put some kind of a marker, I might let him. But if you institutionalize it, it can often become a distraction.
K(Q)	What do we do when parents ask for work plans, or when students who formerly had them beg for them?
wendyc(A)	I would assure the parents that even without a work plan you will be expecting time to be spent well. This is what they are most concerned with. I would also assure them that each child will be afforded only the amount of freedom with which he can be successful. So some children may have to check in with you frequently to verify what it is that they are doing and how much they are accomplishing. Others will be better able to guide themselves.
wendyc(P)	As for the children who ask for them, I would simply sit down and explain to them that you had an epiphany, complete with explanation of what an epiphany is. "I realized while thinking about class last night how silly it is that I would be making a plan for you to work on. How would I know what it is that you want to do on any day? Who would really best know this? Starting today, you are going

	<p>to have the privilege of setting the course of your own day. What a joy. I can hardly wait to see what it is that you want to do."</p>
KB(Q)	<p>Yes - the pressure comes from parents who don't have faith in their children and have for some reason chosen Montessori. I don't know what to make of these situations. I am now getting pressure from above to have a neater and quieter class as well. And to write more on the board about what's happening for each child so they know when they'll have lessons. To a point I'm fine with this. But I've also seen the excessive lists on blackboards that deaden the child's interest.</p>
wendyc(P)	<p>Needless to say, I can't comment on the state of your class. But in general, we have to be careful in Montessori classes that we don't follow the child willy-nilly. A Montessori classroom should be lively but orderly as well. In fact, it should be more orderly than many traditional classes are because it is a room full of children who are engaged in purposeful activity.</p> <p>So if you are being called to rein in your class in some way, be sure that you are observing. What do you see when you look around? Are the children engaged? Just talking is not engaged. Do they have out the Montessori materials? Are they using them or just shuffling them around? I am not suggesting that you have an issue to deal with, because obviously I have no idea. But these are the questions that all Montessori teachers should be asking themselves. We can't just give lessons. We have to observe and respond to what see.</p>

K(Q)	I'm walking that line of pulling in the reins - this week went better but it is a battle - 4 third years, 1 of which is showing leadership, and then there are 10 first years who seem to have no idea how to choose work. Well, most of them - some are doing great. The older children are used to being taught in a more traditional manner, so they are somewhat lost and mistrustful of me.
wendyc(A)	With a class of this make-up, you have to respond differently. You may need to slowly wean away from that traditional approach. Inviting the children to take advantage of freedom little by little. Only as much as you observe they can handle successfully. Remember to spend a good deal of your time pulling up a chair to work tables where children have congregated and help them to re-engage in the work they have out or make other choices.
wendyc(P)	Hi G.
wendyc(P)	I am prattling on about work journals. So in conclusion, I would emphasize that the work journal is a record of what has been done not a list of what will be done. The only role it plays in making work choices is that the children also keep a record of the new lessons they receive as they receive them on the back pages. They can then browse through these pages when they are unsure what it is that they want to do.
G(Q)	Hi Wendy. I'm just reading at the moment.
wendyc(A)	I will go on to another pre-submitted. Jump in whenever, as usual.
B(C)	Hi Wendy, I have a question about whole class

	<p>meetings. There is usually something to talk about with all the children on the first day of our week (Wednesday since the children home school on Monday and Tuesday), and often on other days as well. On the other hand, children arrive at different times in the morning, and by the time the last ones come in, others have already started to work. Any other time of the day, of course, I would have to interrupt their work as well. Also, it makes our 3 hour work period in the morning "not quite 3 hours", and in the afternoon we only have 2 hours to begin with, so if we did it in the afternoon, we would be left with this bit of time that's hard for anybody to get into serious work. How do you go about this? Do you have meetings regularly, and when? Thank you!</p>
wendyc(P)	<p>We always gather as a matter of organization just before lunch. We have 45 children and four sinks. Probably more sinks than most, but still a bottleneck. One of the older children is often responsible to keep track of when we meet. On many days there is nothing to discuss at all. Be careful not to make a class meeting a mandatory experience. We only meet earlier than the time needed to have an orderly washing of hands if children have reported to the child responsible for determining when to meet that they have an announcement or something to present or if the teacher has indicated that s/he needs some time.</p>
K(Q)	<p>The children in my class gather every morning on the rug, and always have. I'm happy to see this question as it helps me think about ways to make this part of the day more fluid.</p>

wendyc(A)	Absolutely. And consider carefully whether there is some legitimate purpose for the gathering. Even if there is, make it short. A group of ten first graders amidst 15 other children, all who are modestly interested at best, is not a good recipe and probably not the best use of time. Don't let these meetings drag on.
wendyc(P)	OK, ten minutes left. Any questions you would like to pose or should I choose one more pre-submitted? I'll give you a minute.
K(Q)	I have converted the morning meeting to doing the date, writing it in work journals, and writing down the first work of the day.
wendyc(A)	This sounds like a reasonable structure to use until the children are able to work with more independence. But think carefully about whether you have a few already who could do this on their own. Just invite them one morning to get their day started the same way they have been, but at their own table rather than in the group setting.
d(C)	I know it is getting to the end of our time. Maybe this can be for next week. I'm wondering if you do anything special with current events. If so, do you use the newspaper and/or other news magazines for students?
wendyc(P)	I have approached this subject in many different ways over the course of ten years. And I have devoted more time to it some years than others. But what I found when I did address current events is that the children were desperate to understand the things that they heard on the radio or the things that their parents were talking about. We subscribe to "Time for Kids". There are different editions for



	different reading levels. And the stories include some of those that are in the adult version of the magazine.
wendyc(P)	I think if I were to do it now, I would consider asking the children what things they have been hearing about. Presently, it would most likely be the elections. And then I would invite children to read or talk to their parents about it and share in a small group what they heard. I would also have a few choice ideas that I would want to expose them to also.
wendyc(P)	Invite children to bring in magazines or newspapers with something related. I think helping the children to navigate through a newspaper or magazine is a skill in and of itself. I realize that they will all be gone soon, but there is still an organizational structure to the news content on line. Even if the organization is nothing more than the level of salaciousness. : (
	j joined.
wendyc(P)	Oh, come on Jim. It's 9:00. How am I supposed to say hello and good night in the same breath? : ( Got a question? Or are you just reading previous posts?
j(Q)	Hi Wendy, I guess I'm just late.
wendyc(A)	Hatin' it.
wendyc(P)	Believe it or not, tomorrow afternoon I have to make a presentation to over 100 teachers and HOS's about Montessori at the Annual Conference of our regional independent school accrediting organization. And I am not quite finished. So I am going to have to sign off for tonight. I am so

	encouraged by the regular sessions.
leinbachj(Q)	We don't have daylight savings time here in AZ. So I'll just read and talk next week,
wendyc(A)	Next week I have to skip because I will be at a conference offered by Independent School Management. <b>So there will not be an Elementary Session on next week on the 11<sup>th</sup>.</b>