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## Upper Elementary Classroom Newsletter

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### Upper Elementary Spring News Letter - Wellbank

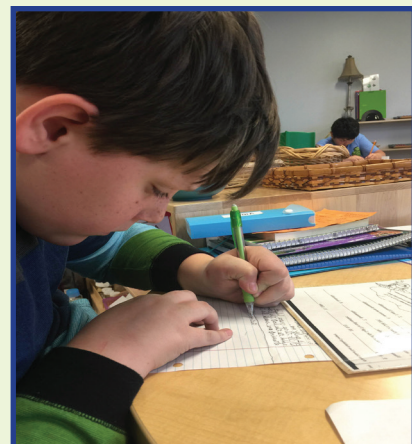
Growing up, math was always the most difficult area of the classroom for me. I struggled with math in every grade, even though I excelled in all other areas. When other students were able to memorize all of their math facts and finish a timed test in under a minute, I was still trying to work them out on my fingers. And let me tell you, it takes a long time to count on your fingers!

When I was in fifth grade, our school began dividing classes into specialized groups. I knew I was in the "gifted" groups for reading, science and social studies, but I was assigned to the "low" group for math. Right away I jumped to a very sad conclusion: I must not be very good at math. I was embarrassed, my already shaky math confidence dropped to nothing, and I felt like a failure. So, it is safe to say I thoroughly hated math.

When I began working at a Montessori school, I did not have any previous knowledge of the Montessori method, aside from what I had studied in my Child Development courses. However, once I began to gain more classroom experience, I decided I was robbed of an amazing education – why didn't I go to a Montessori school? After I had gotten a chance to work with the materials and observe the children learning with them, I realized how much more I would have enjoyed math, if I'd been taught with Montessori materials and allowed to learn at my own pace, gaining mastery before moving on to the next lesson.

My first ah-ha moment came when I was giving a presentation on fractions to a kindergartener; she was using the giant skittles, and we were simply manipulating the pieces to see how many ways we could make a whole. Something clicked in my head, and because of that very visual, concrete example of the fraction, I filled in that gap of information (I'd always had trouble with fractions) that had been missing since I was introduced to fractions in elementary school.

When I worked in a 6-9 classroom, I was floored when I observed my directress giving a presentation with the checkerboard – it was the coolest thing I'd ever seen! The child was given a long multiplication problem. He laid the number representation tiles out and used the beads from the bead box to create a visual of the entire equation. I watched him work out the problem, following along with every step. When he finished and calculated the total I was so enthralled I wanted to do the work myself! It made so much sense to me... and I finally understood why you need the zero in the addends.



During my Montessori training, I really enjoyed Decanomial, which is a visual way of laying out the multiplication tables. Part of this presentation involves turning the table into squares of the numbers, then cubes of the numbers. The most fascinating part, though, is all the cubes we created could be stacked up to resemble the Pink Tower from Early Childhood!

What I love the most about Montessori math is the way the materials are used not only to solve equations through manipulation, but also to grab the child's attention and spark the imagination. Something so cut and dry as math is made fun and exciting through stories, role-playing, and intriguing materials, resulting in a completely engaged child.

