



Montessori Matters



The incredible confidence of kindergarten students. Shown above, constructing a map of Canada (left) and practicing building numbers from 11 - 99.

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Current Events

Many thanks for your Annual Fund contributions. We've now raised \$6000 towards our goal of \$25,000!

On the Calendar

The Annual Fund Continues

December

- 13 E1 Parents' Morning Visit
7:45 – 9:00 AM
- 14 Board Meeting 7:00 PM
- 15 Priority Enrollment Application Deadline for Siblings
- 16 Band Performance, 8 AM
Oaks Parents' Morning Visit,
10:30-11:30 AM
- 23-30 *School Closed: Winter Break.*

January

- 2 *School Closed: Winter Break*
- 3 School Resumes
- 11 Children Moving to E2 Parents' Meeting 6:00 – 7:00 PM

Act Three!

By Paul Epstein, Ph.D., Head of School

A number of analogies quickly come to mind: The final act; the last quarter of a playoff game; the concluding chapter; the 3rd year.

The 3rd year at Rochester Montessori School refers to kindergarten, third grade, and sixth grade. By design, the 3rd year in a Montessori program is a year of culmination, a year when earlier lessons and experiences now come together. During the 3rd year, children naturally integrate, build upon, and benefit from those earlier experiences and lessons.

The focus of this article is on the kindergarten 3rd year.

Many parents say they initially bring their children for childcare. The plan calls for their children to then go on to traditional schooling. For many parents, however, something wondrous happens instead. Their children demonstrate incredible accomplishments in language, mathematics, geography, and science. The children have become amazingly independent and self-reliant; they can do so much for themselves. They have begun to learn how to learn. It's natural, then, to question the original plan and to ask, how much more will children grow and learn during the 3rd year?

The kindergarten or 3rd year is a special time in a child's Montessori education. During this year, children make impressive academic progress, build confidence and self-esteem, take on leadership roles, and further their enthusiasm for learning. This occurs because we have set high expectations, and our instructional approaches are designed to further children's cognitive, emotional, and social development.

Our kindergarten curriculum is designed for the 3rd year child to integrate the activities and experiences they enjoyed as toddlers, three- or four-year-olds. Younger chil-



E1-West, an elementary first-third grades classroom, is led by Andy and Ann. A first grade lesson on identifying geometric shapes in the classroom (right).

Children engage in a style of thinking known as congruency and similarity. For example, when they were younger they combined and sequenced a variety of objects based on identical shape, color, and size. Or, they arranged objects based on similar sizes. The ability to think in terms of congruence and similarity enable children to relate counted quantities to numerals and phonetic sounds to printed letters.

The 3rd year is a time when children engage in deeper learning and further their abilities to read, write, and think mathematically. Kindergarten children are beginning to think in terms of equivalence. If their school's curriculum does not offer these experiences, children will not develop this ability fully.

By design, the 3rd year kindergarten curriculum offers children lessons in which they more fully understand scientific concepts, recognize geographical locations, and explore cultural traditions. Kindergartners also take classes in art, music, physical education, and Spanish.

3rd year children combine and blend phonetic sounds, read and write words, sentences, and even entire books. 3rd year children enjoy writing the names of animals, plants, insects, and the names of nations or states. They like to

classify pictures of animals or insects based on habitat. Children will also investigate the process of arithmetic. They are interested in knowing addition math facts such as $5 + 3$. They are also drawn to study place value using materials. They may, for example, add $5,621 + 3,945$ or subtract $5,462 - 3,913$. This typical kindergarten year work is possible because of their emerging ability to think equivalently. The children use other materials for multiplication and skip count (*ten, twenty, thirty...*) to 1,000.

As five-year-olds mature, they apply the concept of equivalence to geometry. When they were younger, they learned, to identify a right triangle. As kindergartners, this lesson is now "boring." Instead, they are ready to discover that two scalene right triangles are equivalent to a rectangle. Three equilateral triangles are equivalent to a trapezoid.

As they discern equivalence, children enjoy comparing the many different ways cultures satisfy human needs for food, shelter, transportation, and clothing. Studies of culture may include a variety of art forms and music. They also investigate a variety of land forms including archipelagoes, peninsulas, and isthmuses. These are but a few of the many challenging learning activities found in the Children's House classrooms at RMS.

The kindergarten 3rd year is a dynamic year, a year of integrating and making cognitive connections. It should not be a time for starting a different way of schooling. It is, instead, a year of extraordinary learning and completing the first half of childhood.

An outline of the kindergarten curriculum can be found online at <http://rmschool.org/publications/index.html>

Meet E1-West

By Shannon McRaith

E1-West is led by Andy Saunders, guide, and Ann Moberg, assistant.

When did you first hear about the Montessori Philosophy?

Andy-I recall hearing about it in college during my elementary education classes; however, it was not really focused on. Only when I started here as an assistant did I really learn about the philosophy and materials.

Ann- I first heard of Montessori education when I was in elementary school and had friends that attended RMS. I then learned of Montessori philosophy in college as I was earning my Elementary Education degree. I even worked at





Gabriela Wilcox, a Montessori guide and originator of the “Touch Spanish” curriculum gave lessons last week to E1 and E2 children. RMS has now adopted her program and we will begin using it in the Children’s House, Elementary, and Middle School classrooms.

RMS ten years ago (as a summer job during college) just to learn more about the Montessori program.

What made you decide to teach in a Montessori school?

Andy-I worked at RMS as an assistant the first year I was employed, and I was just so impressed by the elementary children and what they were capable of doing. I vividly remember my first few weeks in the classroom, not knowing how to use any of the materials. One instance really sticks out in my mind in which I asked a third year child how to use the division test tubes. That child was so incredibly patient with me as she walked me through using the division test tubes material. After that one experience, I knew I wanted to further my knowledge of the Montessori philosophy and curriculum.

Ann- Ever since my elementary school friends attended RMS long ago, I knew that Montessori education was somehow different and special, and I always wanted to be a part of that. Maria Montessori left behind an incredible legacy. My husband and I wanted this kind of an education for our children, and I am so blessed to be able to be with them.

What is it about Montessori that you can relate to you the most?

Andy-While academics are important, I also really believe that it is important that children learn time management, organization, and inner discipline which are really inter-woven into the curriculum.

Ann- I appreciate the individualized instruction that occurs in a Montessori environment where students can be at various levels and work within the same classroom and still be respectful of each other.

Why do you feel elementary aged children benefit from a Montessori education versus a “traditional” one?

Andy-Having gone to school in a “traditional” setting, and having taught at a “traditional” school, it is hard to even compare how much better a Montessori education is. Having a spiral curriculum really helps children in their ability to move to abstraction in their minds.

Ann- As a former first grade teacher in a traditional setting, I can honestly say that I could not give students there what they can get in a Montessori environment. The combination of the trained, observant guide and the materials that were so carefully crafted to illustrate very specific and specialized concepts is unmatched anywhere else. Small class sizes are immensely important because it allows for the individualized instruc-

tion and attention given each student that a traditional setting cannot provide.

If you could choose one thing, what do you feel makes the biggest difference in a child’s Montessori education versus a traditional one?

Andy- I think the availability of so many “hands-on” materials in order to understand a concept.

Ann- The materials! in combination with the trained guide.

What’s your favorite part of the school day?

Andy-When the children arrive in the morning. It feels really good to see that the children are excited to be at school, are eager to learn, and want to work.

Ann- My favorite part of the day is the morning work period when I can see all of the Montessori pieces fitting together and students are engaged in amazing work.

What do you like about working with this particular age group?

Andy- I like the eagerness that almost every child has for learning new things.

Ann- Students in grades 1-3 love life and everything about it! They love school, their teachers, and they are ex-





Winter brings new challenges in practical life - independently dressing, undressing, and hanging up clothing “all by myself!”

cited about their work! There is an amazing amount of knowledge that students gain in this period of life, and I love being a part of helping them achieve that growth.

Where did you grow up and what/who made you want to become a teacher?

Andy-I grew up in Rochester and was fortunate enough for both my wife and me to find work here in Rochester. I remember in high school not knowing exactly what I wanted to focus on at college. A teacher suggested a program called “Mentorship in the Community” in which students do work experience in community. She suggested I try working at a local elementary school. Through that experience I fell in love with teaching.

Ann- I grew up here in Rochester, MN. I had a wonderful educational experience and loved being in school. I always knew I would become a teacher.

Who is in your family?

Andy-My wife Melissa is an attorney here in town and my daughter Isabel is four and is in the Oaks classroom here at RMS.

Ann- My husband and my three children

What do you like to do outside of

school?

Andy-Spending time with my family and running.

Ann-I like to bake, go bike riding with my family, draw, and I am very involved in my congregation.

From the RMS Picture Gallery

Works of art by children in the Children’s House program.

