



Montessori Matters



“The whole world in the palm of their hands!” Children’s House students made and then painted their models of the globe.

Save the Dates!

May 3 Meet Emily Hill Lewis, middle school teacher, at 3 PM

May 7 *Spring Round Up*

4 pm National Eagle Center program and activities

5 pm Bring your own picnic and/or a catered BBQ Dinner with a Vegetarian Option. Cost: \$10 adult, \$6.50 for a child.

6 pm Americana-themed entertainment by the RMS K-6 children, string and band students, and square dancing!

May 10 *Montessori Monday* 8:45 AM

June 3 *Year End Picnic/Carnival* 5 PM

June 8 *Ribbon Ceremony/Graduation*

RMS

Because how children learn influences who they will become.

Caring for the Prepared Environment

By Paul Epstein, Ph.D.

The prepared environment, the developmental nature of the child, and the preparation of the teacher are three of the pillars of Montessori educational philosophy. There is considerable interaction between these; for example, the developmental nature of the child informs teachers as to how to properly prepare the environment. This environment should contain opportunities with which the child can satisfy her or his interests and needs. The environment must, as Montessori discovered, empower a child to satisfy her or his drive for self-perfection. As the child grows, she or he should also learn to be responsible for the prepared environment; the child should learn how to prepare and care for the environment.

What exactly do Montessori children learn? Today we celebrate the 41st anniversary of Earth Day. I believe my education was not adequate. I was not taught how to prepare and care for the environment. Sure, I completed my school years of classroom job rotations; I straightened books or watered plants when it was my turn to do so. But I was never given opportunities to make real decisions about the environment. And while I learned about real and pressing environmental issues with the planet, I did not learn how to effect consensus and engineer change. A Montessori educa-



Learning is happening here! (left) A kindergarten student computes $6789 + 1189$ using the Stamp Game. In this problem, she must understand the concept of place value in order to accurately exchange units for tens and tens for hundreds. Place value is first introduced to the children as young as three. (right) EI children practice for their research project presentations.

tion about environmental responsibility intends to empower children.

The Principle of Freedom Beginning in the Toddler Program, children freely choose their own work. When they are older, they learn to manage their time and complete their work plans. Freedom is not, however, a free-for-all. The Montessori principle is “freedom within limits.” For young children, freedom is actually an accomplishment of becoming self-disciplined and self-reliant. Discipline does not mean punishment; it refers instead to the ability to succeed on one’s own and in partnerships with others. Freedom involves, in other words, the ability to anticipate the consequences of choice.

Children require many years of practice, of making choices and observing what happens afterwards, if they are to develop the long-term perspective. This kind of perspective also requires developing several habits of mind such as persistence and patience.

Beauty A Montessori classroom offers a large variety of activities and materials. Each presents the child with an abstract idea in a physical form. Everything that is needed to explore and investigate that idea is present and in good repair. The materials are pristine. This is because children respond positively to beauty. When materials are elegant and attractive, children will re-

spond with concentration and with a desire to “do it again.” Having freely chosen the activity, a child may repeat the same activity fifteen, twenty, or more times in one sitting.

Respect A Montessori child knows that there is only one set of the material. A Montessori child also knows she or he is responsible for returning the material to its place on a shelf and in a condition of readiness for the next child who chooses to engage with it. Respect is an abstract concept; but it is so easily taught when a child can observe that the materials are placed in exactly the same way as when she or he first came to the shelf.

Contact with Nature and Reality The ideas of one-of-a-kind and respect mimic the realities of nature. In real life, everyone does not have the same thing at the same time; in the classroom, there is only one piece of material instead of multiple sets. Dr. Montessori discovered that a child’s direct contact with nature results with understanding and appreciating order and harmony. The Montessori prepared environment is a place of life. Children learn to take care of plants, animals, and fish. Magnifying glasses, microscopes and simple experiments are available for children to observe and learn from nature. The child learns then to respect not only the material objects; she or he learns



to respect life itself.

There are many pressing challenges, issues, arguments, and more surrounding Earth Day. For example, competing economic and political agendas seem insurmountable. But I am optimistic. What will happen, however, when a generation of children have learned a care of the environment curriculum that is as natural to them as is learning a mathematics or history curriculum? What will happen when a generation of children have learned how to make responsible decisions and to anticipate consequences of their decisions with the long-term perspective? I imagine a generation of caring and loving adult citizens who will have learned how to empower themselves and others.

In the spirit of today's Earth Day, I share with you Dr. Montessori's observation:

"I would now like to pose a question: does not man also have a cosmic mission to fulfill on earth? Is it conceivable that this being who has such great intelligence, who is the worker *par excellence*, has no part to play in the labor of the cosmos? ... The first thing that must be done is to construct an environment that answers the needs of young people ... to offer young people the means necessary for their development and the enhancement of their personalities."

Preparing the environment means, then, far more than what we put into a room. A prepared environment is our commitment to give children the means with which they may satisfy their desires for a self-perfection that also includes stewardship. This is what each child is meant to do.



Honors Choir. This week began with a performance by the Rochester area fifth and sixth grade Honors Choir which includes three RMS students.