



2011

North Star Montessori School April Newsletter



North Star Montessori School
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Administrator's Note

Happy Spring! (sort of)

It has certainly been an interesting start to Spring – rain, sleet, snow, ice. It makes me think that we must be getting it all out of the way early to make room for some warmer Spring weather and a hot & sunny Summer!

We have many fun events and activities planned over the next few months so please remember to read your Weekly Memo and check out the calendar below for further details and information.

Wishing everyone a Happy Easter, a fun long weekend and an opportunity to relax in some sunshine!

Jeanne

Upcoming Events - Mark Your Calendar!

- April 18** Parent Education Evening (6:00-7:30pm)
- April 21** Earth Day Swap
- April 22** Good Friday – no classes
- April 25** Easter Monday – no classes
- April 29** Out of Uniform Day – Jeans Day
- May 16** Parent Education Evening (6:00-7:30pm)
- May 20** Pro D Day – no classes
- May 23** Victoria Day – no classes
- May 28** Lynn Valley Days
- June 2** Celebration of Learning
- June 10** Third Term Report Cards
- June 17** Last Day of Classes
- June 17** Year End Picnic (1:00-3:00pm)

Congratulations to Lunapads!!!!

Congratulations to Suzanne Siemens and her company Lunapads International Products for being named by BC Business as one of the Top 20 Most Innovative Organizations!

Lunapads has been recognized as “a triple-bottom-line innovator that is changing the lives of women around the world. The company has been producing a reusable menstrual pad since 1993, each one able to replace 140 tampons or disposable pads. The company counts about 100,000 customers in 40 countries, which (by estimates) keeps one million disposable products out of landfills every month.”



In addition, “Since 2004 Lunapads has teamed up with NGOs to provide menstrual products to women and girls in the developing world who would otherwise have none. The lack of these products is a serious barrier to education because it can force girls to stay home from school for several days every month.”

“Lunapads make perhaps an even bigger impact by mentoring and sharing its proprietary trade practices with menstrual pad makers in developing countries, such as ArfiPads in Kenya, a social enterprise that makes and distributes pads while employing local women.”

Congratulations Suzanne!!!

You can pick up a copy of the April 2011 issue of BC Business to read the complete article.

Oak Room

Role of the Adult 3: The Prepared Environment

It is almost possible to say that there is a mathematical relationship between the beauty of his surroundings and the activity of the child; he will make discoveries rather more voluntarily in a gracious setting more than in an ugly one

Dr. Montessori

There is something to be said for a bright, beautiful and clean environment. Around this time of year we go through the ritual of “spring cleaning” to dust of the cobwebs and welcome back the sunshine and a renewed sense of energy. It is with this inspiration and energy in mind that we as Montessori educators carefully and purposefully prepare an environment year round that is not only welcoming and comforting to the student, but one that entices the child to explore independently and create enthusiastically. What the child is exploring is the path to individual knowledge and preparation. What they are creating is the adult they are going to be.

There is quite a bit of organic biology to Dr. Montessori’s method. She believed that, like young animals, the environment must meet the needs of the child. If the child’s surroundings are carefully prepared with the tools and opportunities they will need at each stage of their development then the child will be able to work towards and achieve their fullest potential at that plane. They will successfully graduate into the next plane of development operating at their best. If their needs are not met through their environment or opportunities are not offered to them to aid them in their self construction they will move on to the next stage with gaps needing to be filled.

Dr. Montessori believed that the adult in the environment needs to be well prepared to work with the child. We talked about developing **awareness**, **respect** and **humility** within ourselves and approaching the child similarly. In the last newsletter I spoke about utilizing **patience** to **observe** and then offer **support**. In the context of the prepared environment the adult acts as the key or the bridge that the child uses to connect to the environment. We help them to use and understand what is around them. We also help them to appreciate, respect and

enjoy what they do in their setting. A prepared environment should be **beautiful** and **meaningful**. It should offer opportunities of **exploration**, **discovery**, **freedom** and **independence**.

Beauty is not only inspiring but sensorially inviting. Engaging all of one’s senses in the learning process allows one to fully absorb what is being presented. A beautiful classroom can inspire rich ideas which generate meaningful and aesthetically pleasing work. Exploration and the need to move are two human attributes that Dr. Montessori and her son Mario identified as human tendencies. It is through exploration that we are able to discover. The success of the human race is perpetuated by this. The materials that the classroom provides and the lessons and stories that the guides give invite the child to explore. They explore through manipulation of materials and repetition of task. The children explore through stories and conversations with one another. Having the freedom to do this at their own pace and their own time allows them to appreciate and comprehend what they discover.

The environment we prepare is for the child. It is not our classroom, it is theirs. It is for them to love and learn from. There are three main guidelines for the children to follow: **Do not harm the environment**, **do not harm others in the environment** and **do not harm yourself**. If the child is abiding by these guidelines they have the freedom to explore and use the environment as they choose. A sense of independence will wash over the child as they become more aware of their capabilities to make choices and assert their individual will.

The next issue of the newsletter will conclude how we, as parents and teachers, can facilitate growth and development at each developmental plane, both at school and in the home.



Arbutus Room

Every time that I travel to a new country, I am reminded of what it is like to have a child's view of the world. Experiencing new sights, sounds, tastes, smells and feelings, and always wanting to question everything around me in order to fully understand it. We often lose this sense of wonder and curiosity as adults, unless we push ourselves into new experiences. For the child though, new discoveries abound every day as they try to make sense of the still unfamiliar world around them, full of possibility.

When I travel it is always with only a very loose itinerary. I have experienced many times in my travels the truism that exists in the well known quote, "It is not about the destination but the journey". When I embark on a new journey it is always with the feeling that anything is possible. It is impossible to predict ahead of time what I might discover along the way that may make me head in a new direction not initially apparent. While on my recent trip to Nicaragua, I realized that this way of travelling is very much like how a child in a Montessori environment learns.

By following only a loose itinerary, freedom exists for children to explore deeper into concepts that really interest them. After being introduced to a topic, the choice of how in depth their exploration goes depends on their interest. Like when traveling, there are some places you visit and are ready to leave the next day. Other places, you linger, unable to tear yourself away from something there that has touched you personally. What is appealing to one individual may not be for another. Children in a traditional school, or for comparison sake, those on a typical pre-planned package tour, are forced to move on with the group. For some there is not enough time on a topic or place and for others there is far too much. The only package trip I ever took was one to Beijing and I regret it fully. We were rushed from place to place and spent far too little time on the Great Wall and far too much time in the jade and pearl factory stores! I'm sure that some people on the tour would have been happy to shop all day though.

Another reason why freedom and choice are so important to education and to travel is that it makes the learning process so much more meaningful and memorable. When I am the one responsible for making the decisions instead of a tour guide, I will choose the things that most interest me, and will get more out of the whole experience because of it. Being active in the planning process also means I am better able to remember the places I visited. A student in

a traditional school is like the tourist who has everything decided for him. He will likely not be as engaged in his learning as it is not necessarily of interest to him. A student in a Montessori environment is like the traveler who plans the details of the trip himself. Because he is responsible for making his own choices, the learning outcome is more meaningful and makes a greater long term impact. Planning your own vacation and education also requires great organization, responsibility, independence, and decisiveness. These are traits cultivated in a Montessori environment.

Of course, in conjunction with this responsibility and independence often come obstacles. The road on any journey is not always smooth and there are often wrong turns and roadblocks along the way. I have certainly encountered many in my travels and although they are frustrating and discouraging at the time, I look back on them now as learning experiences, and of course great stories to tell my friends and family! Those on a package tour may not experience these types of detours, but as a result, they have also not learned any new skills that will better prepare them for future travel adventures. The same goes for children in a Montessori environment. As they are expected to be more independent and are often given less support and direction than those in a traditional environment, they will likely encounter more problems and uncertainty along the way. The hope though, is that they will work through these obstacles and come out with skills and strategies that they will be able to use in the real world for the rest of their lives.



From my travels: Taman Negara, Malaysia

Sitka Room

Welcome back Sitka families! Spring is simply jolly – full of the lovely smell of blossoming flowers and the brightness of sunshine.

The children have grown so much since September. They exhibit a sense of pride as a member of the class community by cleaning, helping each other and teaching among themselves. It is beautiful to witness such a unity and that a sense of community encourages the learning process as well. Kindergarten children are playing a significant role as leaders in the classroom. Various projects by these children are always looked up to by younger children. Following through toward the completion of a task is an important part of preparation for the elementary years.

We, as guides, observe growth in children daily. In order to serve the spirit and cater to the needs of each child, precise and detailed observation is essential. As observers we must be humble and not project our pre-conceived ideas and hopes onto the child, but rather accept fully and act upon that which the child reveals to us. Respecting the child means being truthful in our observations. Acknowledging that, in order to be truthful, we as a guide must do more than speak the truth; we must hear truth; receive truth; act upon, and search for truth.

If you have any concerns or have noticed any change in your child, please feel free to talk to us. We welcome you with open hearts.

Thank you for all your love and support. We look forward to working with your children again this term.

Cypress Room

It is great to be back! We hope that your Spring Break was full of joyful, fun and sunny moments.

I would like to welcome Eduardo and his Family to our community. Eduardo started before the Spring Break, and his peers have been of great help to his adaptation in the environment. The support and guidance that the

children give to new students in the classroom is not only a beautiful sign of compassion and mentorship, but of normalization. For the new parents, who have not heard this term, normalization is a state where the class has a continuous flow of work, love of learning and a deep sense of partnership (to mention just some of the characteristics). This level of work and interest in learning comes from within the children and is inclusive of all areas of work: volcanoes, spiders, colouring, drawing on the chalkboard, seeds, sewing, washing hands, etc. Through an individual process of repetition and finding satisfaction and fun in what they do, a flow of work begins. It is an individual process and, as you know in Montessori, we focus on each child rather than focusing on the whole class; therefore, we respect the developmental place children are and work from that point forward in order to assist the child in reaching normalization. It is paramount to say that throughout this 3 year cycle, the Directress (Teacher) constantly offers opportunities of work according to what is observed. Our observation of each child is based on what they are attracted to and what activities bring a deep concentration for each child. Through observation we also recognize where the child is socially and incorporate this aspect in a positive way towards learning. To be able to connect the children to the various materials in the classroom at the correct time, is essential.

Children are different every day, and sometimes looking at them with new eyes is not an easy task, but it is necessary to build and renew this trust based relationship. This relationship with your children starts the first day they come to us and it develops every day until they go to Elementary. I invite you to observe your children and begin your relationship each day without the pre-conceived thoughts from the previous day. If we understand that these children are growing and developing their personalities every day, we can be a better link for them; a link that they can deeply trust. As adults, we are the Guides, the basic connectors who prepare children for the world, and if that connection to the world is fun, loving and understanding the children will have a better experience, perception and attitude towards their own lives.

Community Action Team

Community Action Team Update:

Earth Day celebrations are coming up this week at North Star on Thursday, April 21st. Come and join us on the patio from 11:15am – 12:30pm for our Earth Day Book Swap and Fair. To make every day an Earth Day, here are some suggestions children and families can do to **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle** and help the environment:

- *Pack a litterless lunch using a lunchbox and/or reusable bags.*
- *Bring reusable bags when shopping.*
- *Buy items that have minimal packaging.*
- *Turn off lights and electronics when not in use.*
- *Grow a few fruits and vegetables in your garden or in containers.*
- *Compost organic household waste, such as fruit and vegetable scraps.*
- *Donate clothes, toys and books that you no longer need.*
- *Walk or carpool to school.*
- *Have a car free day at least once a week.*



News from the Aid to Life Education Classroom

It is hard to believe that we are going into the final session of our classes before the school year comes to a close! Sadly, I will be saying goodbye to a number of children (and parents) who have been with me for over a year now. However, I am excited to see them move on to the Primary program at North Star. We are thrilled that these children are prepared in many ways for this transition, and the teachers are eager to see how their time in the Aid to Life classroom has benefitted their development.

Upper Elementary Helpers:

We are pleased to note that the ATLE class has formed a new relationship with the Upper Elementary class. Each week, we will be welcoming one Upper Elementary student in to work with the children in the classroom. They will interact with the children and take part in the various presentations, including Language, Psychosensory Motor Development, and Practical Life.

Last week, all the UE students came into the ATLE classroom to learn about the 4 principles of self-development: Acquisition of Language, Development of Movement, Independence, and Will. They were shown how to present the specific materials to the children and how to respond appropriately to this age group. We had our first UE helper in this week and it proved to be a great success! We look forward to having the others in over the next few months and the benefit that this interaction provides for both age groups.



Montessori Corner

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

By: Karen Schmidt

www.kidstalknews.com

A favorite book is *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey. One habit that I encourage parents to develop is, "Begin with the end in mind." What kind of person do you want your child to become? What qualities of character do you want your child to possess? How can you make it happen?

Becoming a conscious parent was a slow process for me. (And an ongoing process, I must add!) I remember an exhausting day when the enormity of parenting engulfed me, much like the foot of snow that had left us homebound for a week while my husband was out of town. My daughters were one-and-a-half and three, and with my patience almost gone, I thought, "Three years down and rest of our lives to go!" It was a very sobering moment. Since then I've noticed that "parenting reality" sets in during this third year, and a new determination to become a better parent appears.



Around age three, coinciding with our new parenting perspective, children become more expressive and independent. As their curiosity and activity levels increase, we are challenged on how to deal with our children, along with jobs, marriages and everything else. We can meet these challenges more effectively if we have a clear picture of where we are headed. Begin with the end in mind.

Years ago in a group dynamics class, our professor asked us to make a list of our ten most important values in ten minutes. It was a tough exercise.

"How many of you have ever made a values list?" Dr. Ward asked as we compared our lists.

Nobody answered.

"Most of us haven't," he continued. "We wouldn't dream of building a house without blueprints. How can we live a life without knowing what we value and how to develop and protect those qualities?" Now I understand Dr. Ward was telling us that the end depends on the beginning.

Wayne Dyer in his book, *What Do You Really Want For Your Children?*, surveyed parents with surprising results. He expected parents to be concerned about their children becoming rich and famous, but instead discovered these ten desires:

"I want my children to have the ability to enjoy life; to value themselves; to be risk takers; to be self-reliant; to be free from stress and anxiety; to have peaceful lives; to celebrate peaceful moments; to experience a lifetime of wellness; to be creative; to fulfill their higher needs and to feel a sense of purpose."

Once we develop our big picture, we can then focus on the important details to give to our children. We need to begin with the end in mind. Take some time to consider and write down those values you cherish and want to develop in your family. How you are going to ensure that these values and strengths are developed? Focusing on what you consider critical will allow you to make decisions using this question: Does this action support my values? If the answer is no, it should be easier to stop and reconsider goals, habits and behaviors.

Finis origina pendet. The ancient Romans knew it. The end depends on the beginning. Begin with the end in mind. Know the values you'll take with you on this adventure called life.

