Thanksgiving Reflections

The classrooms are settled. To Montessorians this means that the children are moving about the classrooms with ease, making appropriate and challenging work choices, and working diligently and purposefully at completing them. Friendships are deepening and the rooms are joyfully buzzing.

This time of year brings with it a slower pace and for me, and it brings a time to reflect and refocus. I feel such gratitude to this school and to everyone who is a part of it. This gratitude I feel is not only in knowing what this school has done for my own children, but also for what this school has done for me. I can quite honestly say that there is no place that I would rather be than here now, in this school, working, observing, stretching and growing.

Sue Angelides, Head of School

A Montessori Vocabulary Lesson

The pedagogical principles of Montessori education come directly from on-going scientific observation of children. Dr. Montessori did not have a ready-made vocabulary to describe the behaviors that she observed and the developmental stages to which they pointed. In order to share her knowledge and teach her scientific methods of observation and analysis, Dr. Montessori coined the necessary terms. Here are a few terms defined. For some of you, this is old news, but for others, it may help to understand some of the nuances of our classrooms.

Absorbent Mind: Dr. Montessori used the term absorbent mind to express a concept of education being a "natural process which develops spontaneously in the human beings." The absorbent mind is a "special force at work, helping the little child to develop." This natural process that children possess helps them to absorb and learn from the world around them.

Apparatus (didactic materials, Montessori materials): Montessori materials are a variety of hands on lessons that are either manufactured or teacher made. These materials were specifically designed and incorporated into the work with the children by Dr. Montessori, her son Mario and the original Montessori adherents.

Four Planes of Development: Dr. Montessori saw the human being going through four planes, or stages of development with each plane having a unique characteristic and opportunities for learning.
Four Planes of Development:
First Plane - from birth to six years
Second plane - from six to twelve years
Third plane - from twelve to eighteen years
Fourth plane - from eighteen to twenty four years

Sensitive Periods: Before the age of six, human beings are in a unique period of learning and development. At this time in our lives, we absorb certain information without conscious effort. Young children learn to walk, talk, and do hundreds of things without formal instruction or being aware of learning. Montessori described these stages as sensitive periods of development. There are five basic sensitive periods of development from birth to age six: language, order, refinement of the senses, movement, and social relations. In the older child, these unique learning periods are called psychological characteristics.

Freedom & Responsibility: The idea that freedom follows responsible behavior is an important concept in Montessori philosophy. We give opportunities to "respond with ability" and corresponding freedoms are given. For example, if you remember to bring your coat, then you will be given the freedom to go outside when it is cold.

Going Out: The idea of going out is very different than the typical field trip that traditional elementary students take. Students in a Montessori elementary classroom will go out in small groups of two to perhaps six students into the community to gather information or experiences in an area of interest.

Practical Life: The prepared environment of the primary classroom (3-6 room) contains activities that help the child learn dozens of practical self-care skills such as hand washing, dusting, sweeping, clothes washing, and more. The child around the age of three years is extremely interested in these activities. Doing the work with the practical life materials, the child learns to work independently in the classroom and develops concentration. Practical life activities form the foundation for later work with reading and math materials for the four- and five-year-olds.

Prepared Environment: We live in a world of prepared environments. Stores, theaters, and restaurants are examples of places that have been prepared to meet the specific needs of the user. The prepared environments in a Montessori school are created to meet the developmental needs of children based on observable behaviors; in many ways it is like a restaurant that is prepared to serve its customers. Each Montessori environment is prepared our Montessori-trained head teacher who understand the developmental needs of that age group.

Normalization: The natural or normal state for a human being is characterized by four attributes:
1. A love of work or activity
2. Concentration on an activity
3. Self-discipline
4. Sociability or joyful work

Point of Interest: As the child is learning new skills, the Montessori teacher will repeat a lesson to emphasis a movement or a sensorial experience that will help in acquiring that skill.
**Work:** Purposeful activity is called work. Dr. Montessori observed that children learn by engaging in purposeful activity of their own choosing. When children can choose what they do, they do not differentiate between work and play.

**Work Cycle:** A basic work cycle begins with choosing an activity, doing that activity, returning that activity to order, and then experiencing a sense of satisfaction. That defines one unit or cycle of work. This sense of satisfaction, which may last a few seconds to a few minutes, helps to motivate the child (and the adult) to choose the next activity, in turn creating another work cycle. The development of a work cycle is an important component in the idea of normalization for the child.

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**Happenings Around the Grove**

The entire school enjoyed a morning of puppets with Folklore Puppets. What a fun and truly creative event to be a part of!

The Upper Elementary Class - trust, balance, PE class all in one! And a few laughs along the way!

3-6 Classroom spend a beautiful fall morning at Riverview Farm in Glastonbury.