

November 2010

Hello everyone,

With the parent teacher conferences at the beginning of November the October news is a bit delayed, but here goes....

It was my pleasure meeting with many of you on conference day and seeing many observers in and out of the classroom this past month. I always relish having parents, grandparents and visitors observe to witness the great capabilities of the young child. I have heard many fun comments from parents, but the most striking comments to me have been in regard to the ability for children to control themselves and act independently from adults in the Montessori environment. If you have yet to observe, please do. If you have observed, I hope you, too, noticed the children's independence. Many comments were made regarding the fact that the children were given few directions and nobody had to raise their voices to get children to do what they were doing! The design of the Montessori classroom is such that children are given **purposeful, real, interesting** activities to do with their hands that require movement, and that is what prompts their normalization. Let me end this thought with a direct quote from Doctor Montessori's writings that may give you some insight to the term normalization and prompt you to learn more about her theories and practices:

Among the revelation the child has brought to us, there is one of fundamental importance, the phenomenon of normalization through work. . . . It is certain that the child's aptitude for work represents a vital instinct; for without work his personality cannot organize itself and deviates from the normal lines of its construction. Man builds himself through working.

And work we do! Keep in mind the work of the young child is different than what we adults perceive as work: buttoning a jacket, manipulating clay to build the muscles of the hand and create a model of something, writing, counting, preparing snack, arranging a flower, etc. During the morning we are a large multi-aged group. It is a pleasure seeing the children interact both socially and academically. One of the grace and courtesies we have been working toward is walking over the very-long mats the older children use for counting number chains. Our grace and courtesy lesson begins with the opportunity to practice the art of walking over a string and walking around a string. It brings to life the prepositions over and around. We then all have opportunity to walk around the long number-chain mat together. I have actually witnessed three-year-olds spontaneously practicing walking around the thousand chain mat after receiving this grace and courtesy lesson. At that point the child's movement to achieve bodily control is their work. Note: I also witness three-year-olds purposefully jumping over the chain mats occasionally and how the five-year-olds handle that situation.... That observation often inspires future grace and courtesy lessons.... In our environment all children are working on their individual construction while learning to be part of a functioning community.

This past week a five-year-old and I had reason to visit Ms. Semmes class. We had to wait a moment for the person we needed to speak to. During that brief moment two girls who had just finished a science experiment asked if they could come to my class to present the lesson to some kids there. I mentioned that we were waiting and would they like to present the lesson to the girl who was visiting with me. After a lovely invitation I observed them get started. It began, "This is a lesson about the properties of solids..." It proceeded with examples of a rigid material, a plastic material that could be manipulated but reverted back to its original shape, and an elastic material which, when manipulated, stayed in the shape it was manipulated into. At that point I left my student in the capable hands of these two older girls and they explored properties of materials in the elementary class. My student returned with a chart of items organized by property and was then inspired to make a "schedule" of her activities similar to the elementary work journal. All this, spontaneously, done with joy.

To the volunteer bakers, thank you. We have had many lovely treats including ingredients appropriate for the season and some culturally inspired treats. Parents have been very conscientious about the fact that we have a young student with severe peanut allergies so are unable to have anything served with

peanuts or made from products made in a factory where peanuts or peanut products are manufactured. Please also keep this allergy in mind when it is your child's snack week and join in our diligence to keep peanut products out of the classroom.

We concentrated on Monet and Impressionism with our volunteer art teacher, Sandy Gray Murray. She provided great consultation and several simple, yet lovely lessons to present to the kids and offer as an independent activity. The day I asked a five-year-old if he was available for a new lesson and he replied, "No, not right now, I am making an impression of this flower," I knew we had been successful in getting this information across. With the afternoon students she gave a beautiful lesson prior to Halloween bringing to consciousness the Mexican tradition of the Day of the Dead. The art lesson centered around point and line and the children had such fun creating their art work. They also got to share a particular bread specific to the tradition. Thank you, Sandy, and we look forward to future lessons.

Also in the afternoon we have learned the words of the Pledge of Allegiance, America the Beautiful and The Star Spangled Banner. The children love to sing and take their civic responsibility very seriously in regard to the American Flag. They have been learning much about the history of the flag, the White House, many monuments and some early American history. We are now learning about the first colonists in America in preparation for Thanksgiving.

We are looking forward to welcoming grandparents to Grandparents Day on November 23rd prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. In preparation we will be doing some special domestic chores regarding edible treats and cleaning, if anyone is interested in helping out. This is a great way to build up some Community Service Hours and be a part of a special celebration.

Remember that the scheduled observation period is designed to prompt you to come in to observe twice a year. That does not mean you are limited to those times if you would still like to schedule an observation. There is no better way to learn about the Montessori classroom than to observe. You are not limited to your child's class, though. If you would like to observe in an elementary class to begin familiarizing yourself with the later phases of the Montessori experience, please do not hesitate to call the office to schedule. I also had some inquiries about the observation window in my class and whether it is okay to use it. That is what it is there for, so please feel free to use it. I will let you know that often times children sense your presence, so if you don't want them to see you, then be discreet!

Thank you for the opportunity to work with your children. They are what makes our classroom the special place it is. Have a happy Thanksgiving and enjoy time with your families.

Carrie Irre