

# September 2004

## News Letter



# Nature's Classroom Montessori

Dear Parents,

The following is an excerpt from "A Close Examination of The Montessori Curriculum" by Margaret Loeffler. It was published in Vol. 16/No. 3 of *Montessori Life* (Summer 2004). We think it will be both interesting and informative.

We all have heard the perennial question, "What exactly is Montessori, anyway?" In answering, we must describe meticulously this complex mix of thought and practice that we know as Montessori education. Is it a philosophy? Is it a set of unique learning materials? Is it a way of observing? Is it a curriculum? Is it none of the above or all of the above?

Thoughtful Montessorians have been asking these questions of themselves for nearly 100 years and will probably continue to ponder them for the next 100. Like any insights that have been passed along to others through lectures and writing, the meanings we now derive from Montessori's thoughts may not be exactly what was intended. The environment that has produced us is not the same one in which Montessori lived in the early 1900s. The contexts of our daily thinking and understanding are different, as are those of the children we teach.

If we start our quest for understanding with the child, our primary interest, we can examine the universal characteristics that Montessori described in *The Absorbent Mind* (1949/1995) as being the underlying foundation of the child's personality. Can we find these same characteristics - the ability to concentrate, an interest and pleasure in meaningful work, self-discipline, and sociability (the desire to be a contributing member of a community) - still present in the children of 2004? I believe that we can.

Montessori's concept of normalization is based on this belief, and the classroom environment provides a setting that is conducive to optimal development and growth. It is important to understand that normalization - the development and integration of the four characteristics - is not a one-time occurrence but happens anew at each stage of a child's development. In the adolescent years, Montessori provides a new term for this process, valorization, but it, too,

is a continuation of this same integration similar to that at earlier stages.

And it is in supporting this process at each new stage that the curriculum and environment play such vital roles. The curriculum must be a skillful blend of content that is appropriate to meet the goals of the society in which the child is a part, presented in ways that support the continuing development of the four characteristics of the child's personality.

The classroom setup can assist and enhance the student's habits of work and cooperation, and these should be coupled with materials that support the child's growing understanding of math concepts and goals. This combination creates a learning environment of possibilities that supports both intellectual and emotional development.

Think of the curriculum as having two important components, one the enhancement of content knowledge and understanding, the second, the enhancement of emotional and social development. These two threads must be carefully intertwined at each age level for optimal growth to take place.

One of the main challenges for Montessori educators is achieving a balance between these two threads that allows both cognitive and social development to occur. There is constant pressure by school districts, parents, and by teachers, themselves, toward a major focus on academic achievement. Montessori students will succeed academically if the child's developing psyche is also supported and nurtured. In fact, the chance of students being successful academically is closely tied to their emotional and social well-being.

So how is this balance between academic and social/emotional development to be achieved? Primarily through an understanding by adults of the various elements involved in both threads at a particular age level. Adults must be knowledgeable about all aspects of children's development at each age and stage. What are the primary motivations at this age level? How can these be tapped in the service of the academic curriculum?

For instance, if we understand that 4-year-olds desire to be involved with other children most of the time (the beginning of a very social phase of development), then educators can plan activities incorporating cognitive work within a social setting. For instance, "more-than, less-than" games for a pair of children or simple games with dice where counting becomes important. I have seen the whole tenor of a 3-to-6-classroom change when the social aspects of 4-year-olds are recognized and addressed.

The same certainly applies to the elementary age levels. Helping children find activities that allow a blending of developing skills so that, for instance, those who have artistic skills, but may not be fluent readers and writers can make important contribution to group projects. We all can recognize the importance of the peer group to adolescents. Meaningful cooperation rather than competition among peers is certainly a desired outcome. Discussion groups on issues that are important to adolescents provide a channel through which the more mature and thoughtful can influence the thinking of others in a non-competitive atmosphere. Such discussion formats also encourage participation from those who are less likely to be involved in other forms of

social interaction. It is often surprising to discover the deep and meaningful insights of quiet and usually reticent adolescents, through these discussion, leading to a new respect from peers.

Confirmation of these general views from such contemporary thinkers and writers as Alfie Kohn (1999), Howard Gardner (1991), William Crain (2003), and Stephen Pinker (2002) lend credence to Montessori's understanding and practices. Seeing curriculum as more than a catalog of content goals is essential if we are to be successful in meeting Montessori's desired outcomes for each child to become a competent and considerate citizen of this planet.

### **Dates to Remember**

**Friday, October 15th - Primary Students Visit the Farm**

**Monday, October 18th - Classrooms are Open for Observation  
(Sign-up at the Office)**

**Thursday, October 21st - Parent Education Evening 6:30 - 8:00 pm**  
**Primary Students: "Practical Life & Sensorial"**  
**Elementary Students: "Elementary Math Curriculum"**

### **Materials Night for 6 - 9**

The most popular response for a Materials Night to help the 6 - 9 parents understand "the work behind the work" has been Thursday, October 21st. The evening will begin around 6:30 pm and go until around 8:00 pm. We will be focusing on the math curriculum and, if time permits, move into an indepth look at our spelling program. We hope to see you there.

### **A Special Visitor: Tanpe Nyima Rinpoche**

The students welcomed a special visitor to NCM during the first week of October. Tanpe Nyima Rinpoche is the resident teacher at the Mahayana Dharma Center in Spring Green, WI. He was born in Amdo, Tibet. His father, Ngakchange Dorjee Thar, is a well-known teacher, and his grandfather, Younglun Rinpoche, was the local ruler in Karinshung.

Rinpoche studied the five Treatises of Buddhist Philosophy, sutra, mantrayana, poetry, astrology, and history at the Maksar Tantric Monastery. After completing his study of Dzogchen, he went on two three-year retreats, the second of which was completed in the total isolation of a cave in the Holy Mountain in the Kongpo region of Tibet. He then left for India to study Gelug tradition under the Dalai Lama. In 2002 he came to the United States to teach Buddhism to western students.

Rinpoche was gracious enough to do presentations to each classroom in which he introduced the students to the Tibetan culture and answered their many questions, such as "How do children in Tibet celebrate birthdays?" The children had a wonderful time and were very excited to meet someone from a place so different, and so far away, from the United States. To learn more about Rinpoche and the Dharma Center in Spring Green, go to [www.dharmacenter.globalview-intl.com](http://www.dharmacenter.globalview-intl.com).

## **A Special Note of Thanks**

Thank you to everyone who participated in our first Scholastic Book Fair! The fair was a wonderful success. Thanks to the generous donations of our Montessori parents, the Teacher Gift Wish list was fulfilled and our school now has the foundation for excellent classroom libraries. In addition, Scholastic has already presented the school over \$200 of reading books and will be providing us with additional vouchers within the next two weeks. These vouchers will be used to purchase some of the classic children's literature that no school library should be without!

Once again, thank you to all of our Montessori families for their generosity and for their continued support. I hope you enjoyed the Book Fair as much as I did! If you'd like to know more about the books we are planning to add to the school library, you can take a look at the recommended reading lists at the end of this newsletter. Mr. David included these lists as a sample of enduring favorites and current "hot reads" among elementary students. Many of these books will eventually be part of our school library. Don't be surprised if you recognize several of your own childhood favorites on the lists!

## **News from NCM's Children's House**

The children are really starting to settle into their routines. In the morning I watch as they walk in with more confidence, put on their slippers, and anxiously join their friends within the class. Inside is a whirlwind of activity. A sand garden and sand tray have been added to the environment and the children are raking and writing letters everyday. The children are also becoming more comfortable with our outdoor environments, such as the farm, where they are bravely picking up chickens, picking tomatoes, raspberries, and flowers, observing new baby chicks, and making our new baby goats feel safe. Both classes continue to review the ground rules of using kind words and always making sure we and our friends are using safe hands. We are also helping the children find the best words to use in confrontational situations (i.e. sharing). The kindergarten group has now started rock climbing on the bouldering wall and has enjoyed time walking on the balance beams and tightropes! In class we are doing living and nonliving experiments, learning the C-scale on the bells, and working on our rote counting and multiplication.

On Tuesday, October 6th we had a wonder visit from a Tibetan monk and learned about Tibetan culture. On Friday, October 15th both classes will be taking a field trip to the Henderson's farm. If any parents would like to volunteer to drive, that would be greatly appreciated. If you are interested, please let one of the 3-6 teachers know.

I encourage everyone to take a look at this month's issue of Montessori Life Magazines (available at the front desk). There are several articles about the benefits of practical life, the Montessori reading/language curriculum, and incorporating yoga into the Montessori curriculum.

Miss Stacey

## A Few Words About the Full-Day Primary Program

“**Peace.** It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work.

It means to be in the midst of those things and still **be calm in your heart.** Unknown

These words hold great familiarity when thinking of our full-day afternoon environment. Although our time in the afternoon space seems short, it feels as though we all seem to leave a bit rejuvenated from the day. The opportunity for each child to rest not only encourages, but likewise, reinforces the overall importance of quiet, peaceful time set aside during our busy days. At the same time, we feel so fortunate to be given the extra bit of hours to further explore what Nature’s Classroom has to offer. Whether that be taking a trip to the farm, spending some time on our rock wall, or simply going to pick some apples, all of these activities allow each child to develop a more personal, intimate relationship with his or her school environment. Just as Maria Montessori says, “... the more the children know the more they will see and then the further they will walk. To explore one needs to be filled with intellectual interests, and these it is *our* business to give.”

One particular focus that we will be emphasizing during this time will be community building activities and experiences. Just as it is so very important for children to become familiar with his or her own personal physical and emotional needs, so it is equally beneficial for them to begin to recognize as well as empathize with the needs of others. This task is a large one at such an independent stage in a child’s life. However, like anything, the more it is practiced the less foreign it becomes. Needless to say, we are excited for our afternoon community to build. It is a unique time and space for different relationships to grow, to strengthen each child’s intellectual foundation, as well allowing the children freedom to further explore personal interests of one’s own. This in turn fosters the Montessori concept that, “... education is not something which the teacher does, but that is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being.” (Maria Montessori).



- Miss Stacey



## **More News from NCM's Children's House**

The autumnal equinox has brought with it many wonderful harvest-time activities that we have been lucky enough to experience in our Children's House. The sunflowers that gave us such beautiful color in the summer are now offering their seeds to be harvested. Whether it be hand harvesting sunflower seeds, soy beans, or feed corn, all offer exceptional opportunity for refining fine motor skills while simultaneously allowing the children to be naturally immersed within the season. We have also brought a table-top flour mill into the classroom to grind wheat for flour. The 6 - 9 year olds will then be using this flour as an ingredient for whatever might be prepared for the weekly Coffee 'n Scram. As another discussion regarding the season we have been , with the help of our friend compass, learning and practicing our directions. As we play or hike outside the geese continually remind us of their destination of south as they go honking over our heads. Our morning group times have allowed us the chance to greet each day together, as well as stretch the muscles of our tired mind when we find our *earth buttons*, *balance buttons*, *energy yawn*, and *thinking cap*. Everyday I am humbled when I see how the children are more and more independently capable of taking care of their physical environment while they simultaneously work to build a strong community of friends.

- Miss Erin

## **The 6 - 9 Classroom: A Community of Peers**

This excerpt is taken from *Together with Montessori* by Cam Gordon:

The Montessori classroom provides ample opportunities for social interaction, making friends, developing consideration for others, learning how to cooperate and fostering a sense of interdependence.

In the prepared environment, cooperation and a sense of community are stressed. Individual differences are easily accepted and appreciated while each child is treated and taught as an individual. Students also move from one age group to another within a school to read with younger students, present material, share information or give performances. These kinds of cross-age teaching help create a sense of family. Everyone contributes and takes responsibility for the functioning and maintenance of the environment. Students are encouraged to collaborate on projects and assist one another. Regular times for large-group activities, community meetings, discussions and activities are provided. Cooperation is emphasized. Students learn how to work together and accept each person as an individual with unique strengths and potentials.

Because of the multi-age grouping, the classroom has a heritage. The older students provide leadership and guidance and act as models for the younger ones. The older students also benefit when they help younger students, by reinforcing previous skills and knowledge, developing self-confidence and getting the satisfaction of knowing they helped others. The mix of ages offers opportunities for a variety of safe, lasting and meaningful friendships.

## News from the 6 - 9 Classroom

Dear Parents,

Since our last newsletter, much has happened in the 6 - 9 classroom. It's amazing to think that we've only been together for 5 weeks now as much has been accomplished. During Ecolab on Mondays and Wednesdays, we have been getting lost in the woods while extending our plant knowledge that began in the classroom. We also wrapped up our creel study on Rice Lake with the catching of 55 fish, including a 10" plus blue gill. Wow!

Thanks to Mrs. Roberts, our Spanish program is up and running. Every Wednesday, for an hour in the morning, the students practice the basic letters and numbers, and simple names of objects.

Our spelling and handwriting are also into full swing. Three times a week new words are introduced based on a given phonogram which enhances vocabulary, spelling, and reading. Twice a week they practice much needed handwriting skills by properly forming the letters on special paper.

A special thank you to all who donated books to the classroom from our book fair. The book fair was a huge success and has energized the children's passion to continue to read. They are all accomplished readers for their age and we must continue to foster this positive trend.

We are on the big wall, with ropes and all, for climbing on Fridays. Come join us in the excitement and see what it is all about. We are making special routes on the walls by having the children use only certain holds. For example, pictures of invertebrates and vertebrates are taped to the wall by the handholds, but the children are only allowed to use the invertebrates to traverse the wall. The key is that they must first identify the invertebrates.

Remember the room is always open for you to spend time with the children, excite them with your talents or career, or join us on our afternoon adventures. We promise you'll enjoy it.

Thanks again for all your support with Coffee n' Scram. The children really enjoy running their business and baking those delicious treats on Thursday, so keep eating them!

- Meghan and David



## NCM Reading List

Many of our parents have been asking about recommended reading books. We are happy to present this list as a wonderful way to introduce your child to wonderful children's literature. Though the books have been divided by grade level, please remember that everyone reads at a different speed and level of comprehension. Some books in the appropriate grade group may be difficult for some students and quite simple for others. Currently, everyone in our Elementary class is reading at the second grade level and above. These books may, however, be of interest to some of our Primary students (or fun, "easy" reads for the Elementary students).

### First Grade Books

By the age of five, children have learned a great deal of language. They enjoy adding more words to their vocabulary, experimenting with complex sentences, and using language in more sophisticated ways. They are very imaginative and enjoy books with fun rhyme and rhythm! Bright colorful pictures, pop-up books, stories that teach lessons or ask questions, and fantasy stories are usually very appealing. Popular series include the Arthur books by Marc Brown and the Berenstain Bears by Stan and Jan Berenstain.

*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day!* by Judith Viorst

*The Bears Picnic* by Russell Hoban

*Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin

*Franklin Rides a Bike* by Paulette Bourgeois

*If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Joffe Numeroff

*The Listening Walk* by Paul Showers

*Make Way for Ducklings* by Robert McCloskey

*Play Ball, Amelia Bedelia* by Peggy Parish

*Quick as a Cricket* by Audrey Wood

*Ten Apples Up on Top!* by Dr. Seuss

*There's an Alligator Under My Bed* by Mercer Mayer

*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka

*Owl Moon* Jane Yolen

*The Little Engine That Could* Watty Piper

*Q is for Duck: An Alphabet Guessing Game* Mary Elting

*Town Mouse, Country Mouse* by Jan Brett

*Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak

*Winnie the Pooh* by A.A. Milne

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter

*Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown

*In Tall, Tall Grass* by Denise Fleming

*Something BIG Has Been Here* by Jack Prelutsky

*"Stand Back," Said the Elephant, "I'm Going to Sneeze"* by Patricia Thomas & Wallace Tripp

## Second Grade Books

Second grade students can set their own purpose for reading and maintain concentration when reading silently. They start to identify favorite authors or series. Students start to read about real-world topics such as math, science, social studies and geology. They especially tend to enjoy books about animals and friendship.

*The Adventures of Taxi Dog* by Debra Barracca and Sal Barracca

*Amelia Bedelia (I Can Read Book Series)* by Peggy Parish

*Chicken Soup with Rice, A Book of Months* by Maurice Sendak

*Flat Stanley* by Jeff Brown

*The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein

*The Great Kapok Tree: A Tale of the Amazon Rain Forest* by Lynne Cherry

*Is Your Mama a Llama?* by Deborah Guarino

*Junie B. Jones Smells Something Fishy* by Barbara Park

*Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes

*Martha Blah Blah* by Susan Meddaugh

*Mrs. Katz and Tush* Patricia Polacco

*Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon

*You Can't Eat Your Chicken Pox, Amber Brown* by Paula Danziger

*Zelda and Ivy* by Laura McGee Kvasnosky

*The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash* Trinka Hakes Nobel

*The Art Lesson* by Tomie DePaola

*Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney

*Ramona Quimby, Age 8* by Beverly Cleary

*Fudge-A-Mania* by Judy Blume

*Where the Sidewalk Ends* by Shel Silverstein

*Freckle Juice* by Judy Blume



## Third Grade Books

These students are better able to alter their reading rate and strategies to their reading purpose and material. They are also becoming better able to monitor their own understanding of what they're reading. They are often interested in books with lessons about good and evil. They may also be interested in exploring books about their own interests and hobbies.

*The Best School Year Ever* by Barbara Robinson

*The BFG* by Roald Dahl

*Brother Eagle, Sister Sky: A Message from Chief Seattle* by Susan Jeffers

*Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White

*Encyclopedia Brown: Boy Detective* by Donald Sobol

*Go Free or Die: A Story About Harriet Tubman* by Jeri Ferris

*How to Eat Fried Worms* by Thomas Rockwell

*Miss Nelson is Missing!* by Harry Allard

*Mr. Popper's Penguins* by Richard Atwater

*Poppy* by Avi

*Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan

*Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* by Judy Blume

*What Are You Figuring Now? A Story of Benjamin Banneker* by Jeri Ferris

*Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt

*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl

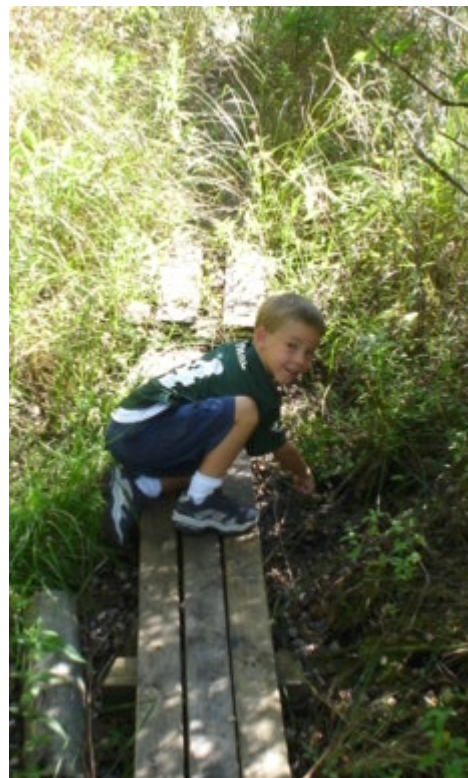
*Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder

*Dear Mr. Henshaw* by Beverly Cleary

*James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl

*Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh

*Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor



## Fourth Grade Books

These students are on their way to using reading and writing effectively to meet their school and real-world needs. Many students have favorite authors whose works they read voraciously. Many may also become very interested in current events. They are developing opinions about issues and arguing their own views. They often enjoy reading realistic fiction and books about people their own age. They are also usually very interested in reading interesting biographies or books about the natural world and the creatures that inhabit it.

*Claudia and the Phantom Phone Calls* by Ann Martin  
*The Cricket in Times Square* by George Selden  
*Fudge-a-Mania* by Judy Blume  
*The Indian in the Cupboard* by Lynne Reid Banks  
*Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* by Mordecai Richler  
*The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary  
*Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* by Robert C. O'Brien  
*My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George  
*Nothing's Fair in Fifth Grade* by Barthe DeClements  
*The Original Adventures of Hank the Cowdog* by John R. Erickson  
*Owls in the Family* by Farley Mowat  
*Search for the Shadowman* by Joan Lowery Nixon  
*A Share of Freedom* by June Rae Wood  
*Sideways Stories from Wayside School* by Louis Sachar  
*Stuart Little* by E.B. White  
*Time for Andrew, A Ghost Story* Mary Downing Hahn  
*A Wrinkle in Time* Madeleine L'Engle  
*The Secret Garden* Frances Hodgson Burnett  
*Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell  
*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis  
*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor

