

Montessori Pathways' News

December, 2010

Notes from Ms. Alena

The month of December found us in a very festive mood. The children were extremely excited to prepare for the **Winter Celebration**. We would like to thank everyone for attending—although we were a bit crowded, the more the merrier! It was great to see the parents singing and dancing along; the children definitely felt more comfortable in their own school and full heartedly enjoyed spending the evening with their family and friends. Hopefully everyone enjoyed the evening!



The donations for **Make-a-Wish** have been coming in and we would like to thank everyone who has participated thus far. Even the teachers from Jacob's school have joined and sent a generous contribution! *Please remember that we will be collecting contributions for Jacob's wish through January 5th, so there is still a chance to help and show your child community spirit in action.*

Winter Wonder Camp



While some of our students are enjoying their break at home, others have been enjoying the wonderful weather in the company of friends in our Winter Wonder Camp. Winter has been very gentle to us and the first week found us enjoying many sunny days outside. With the snow just the right consistency for molding, the kids have created a snow village, snow people and many snowballs to be thrown at a target. One of our smaller pools served as a great target that we swung and rolled. Also popular is the creation of our very own sledding hill. It's been taking a while, but the children are determined to finish it.

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We've also spent plenty of time in the comfort of our warm school. *It would be quite uncommon to see a child in a public school asking to do some homework or look over a textbook during break. On the other hand, Montessori students strive to continue working with their materials not only in the art and practical life area, but math, language and science too.*



The art area saw the children preparing for the holidays. Many of our students created Christmas cards and drawing for their family, as well as a bas relief sculpture from model clay, a handprint wreath, an intricate ornament, Suzy Snowflake's portrait, and a paper craft of a Christmas tree branch decorated

with ornaments. The metal insets were also popular as a means of creating various drawings such as Santa, peppermint candies and the ornaments for our Christmas tree paper craft. Some kids have even created designs from the plastic pattern pieces. One of our students built up a large hexagon by creating hexagons from other shapes.



In the math area the **Teen beads**, which show “-teen” number is formed through the use of a ten and single digits, were popular among our older students. Our younger students took an interest in the **colored beads**, which demonstrate the relation between the numeral and its amount and the sequence of numbers. The **Hundred board** was also quite popular; our older students tried their hand at some extensions, such as laying out every other row of the hundred board. Although the task seems easy to us adults, it requires

precise knowledge of the sequence of numbers as well as the board itself. We also tried the **Bank game**, which proved to be very interesting for the kids even during winter break. We even had some students venture to **fractions** and **addition**, completing both works with much concentration and success.



In the language area, some of the kids perfected their knowledge of **antonyms**. We also saw kids working on their **rhyming words** and even creating a **rhyming book**. As always, books were extremely popular among our students. Not only did we look over holiday related books, we also explored the winter solstice. One of our older students created a challenge for herself—to write 20 sentences!



Word building caught on in the second week. The more experienced students not only challenged themselves by thinking of adjectives to write with the objects they chose, but also assisted the newcomers to word building by guiding them through the steps and helping with the spelling.

The sensorimotor area

found children mastering the **Trinomial cube**, which prepares their mind to eventually understand the $(a+b+c)^3$ equation and visualize its meaning. The older kids also created a spiral maze from the **Red rods** and found that walking in the narrow space is more difficult than they thought. The younger students wanted to follow in their classmates' footsteps and also created a maze from the red and blue rods, with the help of their older friends. We've also seen the children use the **Brown stairs** and **Pink tower** in a creative manner, discovering the correlation between the two materials. Another great discovery was rolling a marble down the brown stairs, which result in a beautiful melody.



In the science area, the most popular book was definitely the big **"Body Facts"** book, which our students earnestly studied to become educated doctors while doing the doctor work. After learning more about the blood cells, bacteria and organs, our students have taken to creating a doctor's office with a waiting area and are now applying their knowledge to their regular check-ups. Those who aspire to become vets are improving their knowledge of the parts of the animal using the three part cards and puzzles.

The evenings found us finishing our works and playing **board games** such as *Monopoly Junior*. We also continued our **gym classes** throughout the week. Very popular were the *Reindeer and Santa* game, as well as the *obstacle courses*. Our students continue to ask for something more challenging and help each other master the course. They've had to crawl on a balance beam



while avoiding an arch, jump over hurdles, crab crawl under the spider arches, fit through the lollipop and teardrop, slalom on scooters, and jump on and over the balance beam and hula hoop. Overall, it's been a very trying gym class, but we've succeeded in trying every possible obstacle!





The week has been filled with many new tasks and problems to solve. An especially intriguing problem was a snack that included yogurt. After the children asked for seconds, they set out to invent ways in which to make the yogurt last longer. Among the ideas were to spread out the yogurt, to take many small bites or to eat very slowly.

Throughout the activity filled week, our older students have been helping our younger students in daily tasks such as dressing, hand washing and even table setting. As the younger children stumble to master the multi-step processes, the older kids reinforce their own knowledge in helping them.

It seems the kids had a wonderful and relaxing break while still discovering, learning and improving many of their skills. We hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and enjoyed time with their family!

Coming School Events

Montessori Evening for the Parents: Wednesday, January 12th at 7:00 PM

We would like to invite you to our Parent Evening on *Wednesday, January 12th at 7:00 PM* with the topic of *“Sensorimotor and art activities as a preparation for writing and developing thinking skills”* presented by Ms. Terri and Ms. Karen.

Ms. Alena

Notes from the classroom: Ms. Jocelyn and Ms. Christine

It's hard to believe that the school year is nearly half over and that winter break is now upon us. December is always a month that seems to fly by in the classroom as the children are alternating between busily working indoors and exuberantly playing in the snow outdoors! While indoor work is important, **the practical life skills** associated with preparing for winter outdoors are equally valued. The time and focused concentration involved with every child getting his/herself prepared to go outside and play is immense. The organizational skills needed to learn the process of getting ready (yes, there is a process!) are the building blocks for every child to become organized, focused and orderly in all other aspects of their lives.



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The 10+ step process is carefully planned and demonstrated so that every child is successful and independent. Want to try it at home? Here are the steps:

1. Take off inside shoes
2. Remove snow pants from hanger
3. Sit down to put snow pants on and fasten
4. Remove coat from hanger
5. Remove mittens, hat and scarf from sleeve of coat
6. Stand up to put coat on and zip
7. Put on hat and scarf
8. Carry inside shoes and mittens to where boots are kept
9. Trade inside shoes for boots and put boots on
10. Pull snow pants over boots
11. Put on mittens



It may surprise some of you to know that every child, **yes, every child** in our class is able to navigate these steps independently. We give them the time to proceed at their own pace, with the goal of playing outside as their internal motivation. The beauty of the organized process is that if a child forgets a step, the natural consequence helps him to correct it independently. For example, if a child puts his mittens on before he zips his coat, he realizes that he cannot zip his coat and will correct his process on his own. As adults we have all mastered this cause and effect of actions, however the children are learning this through exploring and doing independently.



To balance the natural excitement of the holidays all around us, we try to maintain a predictable routine and calm sameness to our days inside the classroom, while adding fun activities to our morning work time.

In December, the children were all introduced to a very popular **tasting activity**: homemade cranberry sauce vs. dried cranberries. Some of the children helped to make fresh cranberry sauce by measuring the raw berries, water and sugar into a crock pot. As the cranberries slowly cooked for 2 morning sessions, the aromas and anticipation of trying the cranberries was building all around the classroom. On the third morning, a special tasting activity was set up and the children were invited to look, smell and taste. It was so popular that our lunch children clamored to have the remaining cranberry sauce with lunch and dried cranberries have now become one of our most popular snack items in the morning.



Thanks to Ms. Alena, our classroom now has a new set of engaging high interest **beginning and emergent reader books**. While the phonetic based Bob books will still remain on the shelf, these new books offer variety and incorporate sight words for our children who are moving on from individual letter sounds to combining sounds and reading words in books.

Some of the books are specifically written so children can use the visual clues of the pictures in combination with the repetitive text to experience success in reading an entire book independently.



If you read with your child every day, you may notice that at sometime during the ages of 2-6, he or she will begin to memorize favorite books and “read” them independently. This is wonderful and encouraged; it builds confidence, interest and exploration with language skills. As your child begins to read, be sure to continue to read aloud taking turns and enjoying reading together.

Speaking of reading, the children’s favorite group book this month was Do Unto Otters: A Book about Manners by Laurie Keller. It’s a lively book about Mr. Rabbit who has new neighbors that are otters. He is worried whether they will be friends and get along because they are different. It covers the ideas of saying please, thank you and excuse me, being honest,

apologizing, and forgiving others in a fun and meaningful way that kept every child interested and listening every time we read the book.

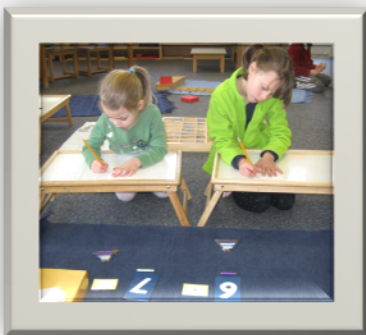
After the excitement of our Thanksgiving feast and celebration, we charged forward into December and preparations for everyone’s favorite time of year, Christmas!!



Our class enjoyed the beautiful holiday decorations at the school as well as putting up our Christmas tree in the classroom. Each child selected an ornament to place on the tree and were excited at the outcome..... (okay.....all the ornaments were in one place on the tree but the children thought it was wonderful!)

They continued to make paper chains, gluing and making multi colored loops together with such teamwork and enthusiasm. In addition, we stamped Christmas trees and used our fine motor skills to create snowmen, bells, trees and snowflakes.

Our classroom tree was totally decked out with your children’s most heartfelt and creative ideas.



Our classroom was abuzz with the sounds of Christmas music and there was excitement and energy (!) in the air; it was truly magical. In preparation for our parents visiting to make crafts, we cooked, cleaned and practiced our songs which hopefully you all enjoyed.

Thank you all so much for the delicious treats and gifts; what a tremendous turnout and our most sincere thanks to all our families. What a great teaching moment of

community and spirit we enjoyed this Christmas.

Finally, it was wonderful to see so many of you at our winter celebration, we feel lucky to have such dedicated and caring families as our school community. We wish you all a safe and peaceful holiday season with friends and family. See you in 2011!

Next month we will enjoy exploring the anatomy of snowflakes as well as making soup, learning about Martin Luther King, and getting reacquainted with our daily school routine.

Happy 2011 to our Montessori Pathways families!

Ms. Jocelyn and Ms. Christine

Notes from the classroom: Ms. Karen and Ms. Ambreen

Preparation for the Celebration:



The children were once again delighted to have their parents as guests at their school. This celebration was particularly festive with the wonderful, spirited family participation. It was a pleasure to see so many moms, dads, grandparents and even alumni singing, playing instruments, and dancing. A good time was had by all making ornaments for the school trees and for your home trees. And the hot chocolate and cookies were welcome treats.

The Gifts of Montessori (Continued from November newsletter)

Last month we looked at the gift of respect that Montessori offers. That respect provides the foundation of the program. We also recognized the importance of a prepared environment. To elaborate a little on that gift, the adults in the child's life need to set up and organize an environment that meets the child's developmental needs: physically, intellectually and emotionally--- a daunting task no doubt. See some ideas under the bringing "it home" section.



Finally comes the recognition of the child's natural desire to learn. The child does not need to be "motivated" or rewarded with stickers and gold stars. In fact, those can be a distraction from the learning process itself. Instead, it is through absorption in work that a child finally matures. We have all recognized the insatiable curiosity which drives the activity of the infant/toddler in exploring their environment. They are unstoppable!

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This drive continues as the child grows older unless it is frustrated or obstacles are put in the way.

And what are some of the obstacles? In our culture, one of the most common is giving gold stars and other extrinsic rewards for targeted behavior.

This is an obstacle because it shifts the focus from the interior to the exterior, from the intrinsic self-motivation to the extrinsic, external motivation. The satisfaction from doing the actual activity is no longer there, but the attention instead shifts to the reward the child receives.



The child who has never learned to work by himself, to set goals for his own acts or to be the master of his own force of will is recognizable in the adult who lets others guide him and feels a constant need for the approval of others.”

Maria Montessori: Education and Peace

Our speech pattern for January is:

“A place for everything and everything in its place.”

The child is often willing to put things away if he knows clearly where they go. That is why the shelving and baskets are essential. The adult must provide a workable structure.

Our author of the month for January is:

Ezra Jack Keats. He is such a favorite of the children. The illustrations are beautiful and the story simple but interesting. One of the favorites is A Snowy Day. So that is just right for this time of year.

Direct from Atlanta, Georgia: (continued from last month)



Go find something without a name. That is one of the first lessons in the elementary language program. A challenge, isn't it? Can you find "something" without a name? Actually, is there something without a name? Do we fully understand something that "we just can't explain?"

Babies begin learning language by learning names of things: nouns. Naming the environment begins with orientation. This is the window, door, table, bathroom, etc

By age 2 ½ - 3, we add adjectives. Some adjectives are descriptive (red, big, heavy).



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Some adjectives denote function: tooth brush, scrub brush, paint brush, and nail brush.

Adjectives include the comparative (bigger, longer, shorter, etc.) and the superlative (biggest, longest, shortest, etc).

Language also demonstrates part/whole. For example a door has hinges, a knob, a latch, a lock.

Language indicates relationship: next to, above, far, near, under



It is crucial to build the child's vocabulary. Language is literally his base for thinking. Language calls attention what is in the environment. It anchors the concept (or object) in his memory.

Language allows the child to classify, a skill that is crucial for intelligent comprehension of his world. It allows him to communicate ideas and concepts with others.

Language is critical in helping the child to **build order out of the world**. For the child age 0 – 6, this is his primary need ----to understand the world and therefore build security, competence and increased confidence. So much of it depends upon his language skill!!!



“Off the Shelf”

Basic to understanding math is the understanding of the decimal system. This seems obvious, yet children frequently struggle with this concept all the way into the upper elementary level. If we can present the young child with a sensorial, three-dimensional experience, research informs us that the experience is richer and more lasting. Consider the contrast of the Montessori materials with a flat 2-dimensionioal picture of the concept.

The first material presented in the category of decimal system is the introduction tray. It consists of a unit, a ten bar, a hundred square and a thousand cube. Simply in the vocabulary, we realize the geometry and the dimensionality of the decimal system. The children also experience the equivalencies. The materials allow them to construct their own hundreds from tens, thousands from hundreds, etc. They can see, feel (ex. big weight difference between one and one thousand), turn it over to look at every side, etc. All of the math materials have these advantages. They are concrete and multi-sensory. We are so fortunate to have these illustrations for our children to “work” with, thus building an experiential understanding of numbers.

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“Taking It Home”



What are some common and relatively simple ways we prepare the environment for our child? Some suggestions are listed below:

Replace a toy box with shelving. It is not possible for a child to organize his belongings in a large box. And frequently the toys are “tossed in” leading to broken or missing pieces.

1. Have individual baskets on the shelf to contain each type of toy separately.

2. Simplify. Most of us err on the side of excess. If we stand back and look, we often discover that there is too much available for the child to manage. If you store several items, they can be brought out at a later date and will be “new toys”.

3. Have a small tray with a sponge and dry washcloth available for the child to use to clean up small spills.

4. Have a small stool the child can move around to give accessibility to the sink, counter top, etc. Have a child-size table in the kitchen for the child to use as an art center while an adult is cooking or the child can cut vegetables and fruits as the parent are preparing the rest of the meal.

5. Have a caddy available with art materials such as scissors, glue, hole punch, colored pencils.



6. Food preparation activities such as cutting, spreading, and slicing are a wonderful source of activity. It can be simple. Buy a package of cookie dough your child can slice and decorate and present the “homemade cookies” to neighbors.

Often our most satisfying and memorable moments are the simple pleasures we share with our children. It builds memories, not only for the child, but for us to reflect back on and enjoy when they are even more independent and spend much of their time with their peers. I hope Santa brought some child-size cooking tools. Did he leave a food dehydrator under anyone’s tree????

Miss Karen and Miss Ambreen

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Kindergarten Extended Day

Field Trips

We all enjoyed our trip to the **Crystal Lake library**. What a resource we have in our community. It is interesting the diverse services and materials they offer. We began with a tour which included sections for : easy reading, puzzles and games, Spanish books, books for people who are not English speaking and are just learning English, CD's and DVD's, "backpacks" which have multiple materials on a given subject and resource books which are not to be checked out. I am sure that I still forgot something. We look forward to going back again. The children had a great time working with the Lego (predictably).

Curriculum



We began with an art lesson from Miss Terri. Probably you are enjoying your child's winter tree even as you read this. What is exciting is to watch some of the parts of the art lessons be repeated by the children spontaneously as they are drawing or painting at the art easel. The children are **LOVING** both water color and art easel painting. Their products have become more and more satisfying to them as they have mastered the procedure and can therefore obtain the results they strive for. What budding artists they are!

This month we will study the **artist Monet** who will provide us with inspiration.

Some of the "off the shelf" activities the children are choosing include the *addition memorization materials*, *writing stories to make books*, *extensions of the 100 board*, and *making of the maps of various continents and countries*. As the children make maps, we study *the names of the countries and other geographical features*. We have added *land forms* to the geography shelves including *system of lakes and archipelago*.



Mathematical Thinking

Math is always a part of the curriculum. Sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. We have enjoyed **Bingo** together and some **math guessing games**. One we have just introduced to the group is "*Guess my Rule*". From the group of children, I choose set of the children who have something in common that the remaining children do not share. An easy introduction would be to choose all the boys to be a set. Thus every child in the set shares a characteristic that no one else (in the "non-set" group shares). Another example was to choose only those children wearing a particular color or only those with dark hair, etc.

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It is interesting how logically the children can think and how they love coming up with the rule. When they guess wrong (example the children all chosen have blue eyes), they can figure out that while true, it was not the rule because one of the remaining children also has blue eyes. It's a fun exercise in logical thinking and observation.

Three dimensional works have become popular. **The trinomial cube** is a puzzle consisting of 27 pieces that when correctly reconstructed, will form a cube. The cube contains patterns and relationships by color and size.



Creating 3 dimensional solids from 2 dimensional paper has also taken off.

Construction has included cubes, pyramids and rectangular prisms. The children have to trace around each side of the object, establish which lines are fold lines and which are cutting lines. They then precisely cut out the shape traced from the paper and fold it into the 3 dimensional shape they are making and tape it together.

Many of the children chose **weaving holiday placemats**. It required skill and concentration to maintain the pattern of over and under along with keeping in mind the sequence of the steps.

Enjoy your vacation and Happy New Year to All.

Ms. Karen

Notes from the afternoon classroom:

Ms. Terri and Ms. Donna

The afternoon class has really gotten into the winter season with enthusiasm. We have been making kinds of winter projects that you hopefully noticed at the winter celebration.

Our first project was inspired by our winter clothing. We noticed how our mittens or gloves matched and had decorative patterns. We decided to make our own **paper mittens** out of construction paper.

I, Miss Terri, helped the children trace around their hands on folded paper colored paper of their choice. We then cut out the “pair” of mittens which we then decorated. Our challenge was folding the paper corner to corner cutting two pieces of paper on the line and making a repeating pattern on both mittens and both sides of the mittens that matched. We punched a hole in the corner and attached yarn to hang them up on our clothes line in the classroom.



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Our bare walls then became a **winter forest of evergreens with red cardinals**. We spent several days on this project. Each could draw a tall triangle with a center line on poster board. First we drew branches with a pencil starting at the top, getting longer and longer at the bottom. We went over these lines with brown marker for the bark. Next, we mixed yellow and blue to make a pine green for the needles. We practiced painting with the end of the brushes to make it look like pine needles. This took a lot of control by the children. They were asked to stand so their whole body could be used, holding the poster board with one hand and painting with the tip of the brush with the other. We made small dapping motions many, many times till all the branches were covered. The results were amazing and the children were very pleased.

The cardinals were cut out of red construction paper in two pieces. Cutting on curves was a challenge for some and they needed a lot of control to cut the center line through which we inserted the wing of the bird. The red bird looked great against the green of the evergreens.



Many of the children made **the snowmen cards** that were decorating our cabinets. We each cut out two circles practicing turning the paper while we cut it. After gluing white circles down we decorated them with buttons and fabric squares. Outlining, drawing stick arms and a hat was done with assorted colors of puffy paints. They looked great.

Our **baking** this month included **banana bread, carrot cake and apple sauce**. We practiced cutting with banana slicing for dehydrating, apple chunks for apple sauce and carrot shredding for carrot cake. We also peeled clementines and cut up oranges for snack which was fun and challenging for small fingers.

The afternoon children helped to make our **hot chocolate** for the winter celebration – no instant mix for us. Many children were able to taste unsweetened cocoa powder and we were surprised to find out it smelled like chocolate but didn't taste sweet until we added sugar. Here is the recipe, which we handed out at the celebration. For those of you who wished they grabbed a copy – here it is.

Creamy Hot Cocoa

Ingredients:

- 1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3/4 cup white sugar
- 1 pinch salt
- 1/3 cup boiling water
- 3 ½ cups milk
- 3/4 t. vanilla extract
- 1/2 c half-and-half cream

Directions:

Combine the cocoa, sugar and pinch of salt in a saucepan. Blend in the boiling water. Bring this mixture to an easy boil while you stir. Simmer and stir for about 2 minutes. Watch that it doesn't scorch. Stir in 3 ½ cups of milk and heat until very hot, but do not boil. Remove from heat and add vanilla. Divide between 4 mugs. Add the cream to the mugs of cocoa to cool it to drinking temperature.



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In gym, we have been practicing some of our reindeer skills. Crawling on the balance beams so we will not be falling off of the roof. Pulling Santa on a sleigh and then having Santa pull a reindeer. It appears that being the Santa is a harder challenge than one would think. Our sleigh was a scooter and Santa kept falling off when the reindeer went too fast. The reindeer run was another fun event where the reindeer ran following a special reindeer route.

We also worked on our building snowmen skills. The teams had to work together to earn a piece to be placed on their snowman. Different locomotor movements were given and when each member of the team had completed their part they were able to add a hat, face, jacket, pants and boots to their team snowman.

Enjoy – Hope this helps keep you warm and enjoy the holiday season even more. See you in 2011!

Ms. Terri and Ms. Donna

Happy New Year!

