

Montessori Pathways School

February 18, 2010
Teachers' mini-news

Notes from the Classroom: from Ms. Christine and Ms. Cindy

For such a short month, February is becoming very busy. And we're only halfway through!

As the children mature, they take on the responsibility of more challenging works, often finding ways to challenge themselves. This time of year we experience visitors into our classrooms. It is so exciting to see your children greet the interested families. They are confident, gracious and helpful. Some of the children have even given presentations to the families.

We welcomed a new student, Sophie to our class. The children so graciously welcomed her and have been so helpful to make sure that she feels at home.

The beginning of February we celebrated and discussed the tradition of Groundhog Day. The groundhog is another name for a woodchuck. The woodchuck is a solitary mammal that hibernates in burrows. Groundhogs are found in North America in forests and fields. On Groundhog Day we enjoyed a special visit into the south classroom to listen to a story about the Groundhog. After the story we talked about what happens on the day of the celebration and that the largest Groundhog celebration is in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania (the children enjoyed saying "Punxsutawney"). But most recently Groundhog Day is also celebrated in Woodstock, Illinois. We discussed that if the groundhog see his shadow and retreats into its burrow, winter will continue for six more weeks. And if the groundhog doesn't see his shadow, it signifies that winter will soon end. Hooray! He didn't see his shadow!

The classroom has been taken over by map making. Once one person decides to work on a map it always sparks the interest in other children. The map work initially introduces the child to the relative positioning of the continents, and moves on to the correct names. There are children just being introduced to the World map (using it as a puzzle) and others who are working on the United States map. It takes a lot of time and concentration to poke out fifty states.

We have recently had many children interested in the Solar System. It all began when two of the children discovered the Solar System puzzle. They began working to construct the planets by drawing, cutting, painting and gluing the planets. After a couple days of work, the beautiful display of planets are hanging in the classroom. This work helps develop vocabulary of common as well as uncommon objects. The children enjoy saying the names and learning about each of the planets.

In the math area, some of the children are being introduced to the Fraction Boards. The boards look like puzzles, but vocabulary is also a big part of fractions. We talk about the denominator (how many parts are there?) and the numerator (how many are

we going to take?). The visual part of the board helps the child see the equivalencies. Fractions 1/1 to 1/10 are represented.

Keep in mind that the end of February or the beginning of March we will be scheduling conferences. We can't wait to spend time with you to talk about your wonderful children.

We would like to thank Mackenzie and family for the boxes of pasta. Thank you for cleaning out you cabinets, we have already used them to create beautiful Valentine hearts.

A special thanks to Julie, Christopher's mom, who spent the day in the classroom helping us prepare for the Valentine's Day. The children enjoyed the time you spent with each of them. Thanks.

And last but not least, a BIG thanks to all the parents for purchasing items for our Valentine's party. The children are so happy to bring things to the class; it really forms a sense of community.

Notes from the Classroom: from Ms. Laurie and Ms. Terri

The kindergartner's interest in birds has continued to be an exciting subject of study. As it turns out, Ben Toby, one of our kindergartners is the proud owner of some beautiful, exotic birds from several different continents. We were lucky and privileged to see a macaw, lovebirds, a cockatoo, parakeets, a white canary and the most entertaining of all the African Grey, Carmen.

The birds were our guests in the office in the morning and were presented



by Ms. Sharlan, Ben's mom in the afternoon.

We have continued our language and word studies and handwriting in conjunction with our bird studies and Valentine's Day.

In math we have continued with the "chains" the concepts of "more and less" as well as addition, subtraction and division.

The Kindergartners will be stepping up their math and reading in this second semester of kindergarten. Look for short evaluation sheets at the end of each week to help keep track of your kindergarten child's progress.

The afternoon group has created some beautiful "Cardinal and Evergreen" work. We have been mixing our colors to make both brown and green. We added snow and cardinals, winter birds, to our evergreens. Finally we have been able to enjoy some time outside in the beautiful snow and sunshine.



Thank you to all the parents who have sent in all the fruit for the dehydration project. We have enjoyed the pineapples, strawberries, apples, bananas, grapes and pears. The children have been able to taste them fresh as well as dehydrated. We have talked about the advantages of having dried fruit, as opposed to fresh that spoils quicker and is often only seasonal. Laura Ingalls would understand. (Little House on the Prairie reference)

The kids loved the Cheesy potato pancakes that they made and had for snack. They also enjoyed the vegetable soup! Carrot cake is another favorite! Thank you Ethan Diaz for shredding three cups of carrots. That's a lot of work!

The two weeks culminated in a wonderful Valentine celebration. Thank you everyone for the beautiful valentines and snacks.

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

Little Celebrations

So we have just celebrated Ground Hog Day and Valentine's Day (a favorite) and will be celebrating Chinese New Year. Busy! But it's good to take time out to celebrate, recognize customs from other cultures and simply have a good time. For Valentine's Day, the children helped prepare the special snack: cutting strawberries, pound cake, pouring the juice and arranging the food on the plates for serving. We then were able to personally pass out our Valentines to each child. The Chinese New Year celebration will be this Friday with little tasting activities and special art.

Another event we thoroughly enjoyed was the music performance on Friday by Kush Gupta (former Pathways student) and his friend. They brought their instruments and played several short songs just for us. And they had audience participation opportunities for us too! It is so good for our children to be able to see other young people performing. Inspiration is made of such things.

Big Celebrations

The trip to Slovenia was simply wonderful. All the people were friendly and so hospitable. I spent a week with the future Montessori teachers at the Montessori Institute in Slovenia teaching mathematical thinking. Very special. And I was able to observe several Montessori schools that have been founded there over the past few years. Such dedication and hard work. Beautiful environments with happy, busy children.

An historic event: the day after I arrived, Melita Kordes obtained permission from the government to open the first Montessori elementary classroom. The process she went through was truly a labor of love: over 400 pages of forms to fill out, several committee meetings during the past 1 ½ years, and numerous details. Last Thursday,

Feb. 5th, she went before the final committee of government officials, heads of education departments and the University professors for the vote. They unanimously approved her request to begin an elementary class ---the first in Slovenia. It was history in the making. The event made the newspapers, radio and television. It is the continuation of the work of a strong and caring Montessori pioneer which will impact even state education in the country of Slovenia. I was privileged to be there.

Grace and Courtesy

In the Montessori classroom, grace and courtesy are the ground, the framework in which children learn and social relationships develop. It is the foundational principal of Montessori, a fundamental construct of the classroom.

But what exactly is it? There are many definitions, among them: grace is the harmony between body and mind. Courtesy is the harmony between self and others. Grace is achieved through practice and courtesy is achieved through etiquette, through forms and rituals we have established. Courtesy says, "I have your consideration in mind". When social harmony pervades the classroom, it allows the children to relax and be themselves.

To relate this to a practical, daily level, there are many elements of the environment which allow the children and adults to practice grace and courtesy in the classroom: walking around the rug of another child, getting dry towels for the next child after using the hand washing stand, waiting until all children have been served before eating, carrying materials and furniture in such a way that no one is hurt, waiting for adult help without interrupting the lesson of another, zipping the coat of a little child who is unable to do so, offering help without imposing, etc. The idea is there are many opportunities to practice courtesy as part of the regular on-going classroom life. One needs to have a community to practice grace and courtesy, a community which will provide appropriate challenges. The classroom is just that community.

An essential component of the classroom to develop grace and courtesy is the multi-age composition. Another is consistency. Children are missed when absent. Ground rules are in place daily to provide stability and safety. Community can then develop.

Ultimately, grace and courtesy lead to compassion and caring. To live a fully human life, we must be able to extend ourselves, to reach out to others, to see another point of view. We will grow in grace with time.