

## “Educating for Peace – The Essence of Montessori”

(Disclaimer: The Montessori peace curriculum is practiced in many ways. This program shares many of the most common activities).

### The Montessori peace curri

We see various shots of children of all ages in slow motion from the video as Maria Montessori’s quote is being read.

*We must lay the foundation for peace ourselves... “*

*We need to construct the social environment, a new world for the child and adolescent, so that their individual consciences may develop.*

Taken from Education and Peace Pages 72-84

Narration:

What is educating for Peace? Can small children learn to resolve their conflicts with honesty and with words? How do we build a community of respect and courtesy in a classroom? Can we find a way to extend this sense of community and peace to the world outside the classroom?



These objectives are inherent in the Montessori philosophy of education. Dr. Maria Montessori recognized the spirit of love within all children and emphasized the need to educate children

about themselves, their community, other cultures and the environment. This concept can be represented by the “Flower of Peace” model.



In this program we will visit six Montessori schools both public and private. We will see children from ages 20 months to 18 years. They come from all backgrounds and many cultures, and they are all Montessori students. They share a common culture of peace education.



**Self-Awareness** – By studying the relationship of body, mind, emotions and spirit, children develop a greater sense of self-confidence and well-being. Through these activities they develop a sense of peace within themselves.

*We benefit so much from being able to do the hands-on stuff and working with other students, because you get this sense of working together and trusting in your own selves and that independence from adults but interdependence with the community. It really helps us to grow and be responsible (Clark Senior Katy Love)*

### Self-Awareness

In the first three years of life, self-awareness is just beginning.

Montessori infant and toddler programs help the child to become more self-aware. Mirrors are placed around the classroom assisting the child in exploring who she is.



In all Montessori classrooms, there is an emphasis on beauty. The environment and materials are pleasant to see and touch. Soft music is often in the background providing a sense of security and peace. The environment is child safe. There are no barriers to exploration.

During these years, the child takes the first steps towards independence and developing a sense of self.

All children strive for independence. The adults in the Montessori classroom have a deep respect for children and encourage them to learn basic life skills. If they are able to dress themselves, they are given the time to do it, only being assisted when the adult observes the toddler is having difficulty.

The adults are consistent in the classroom, providing a sense of security. The daily schedule is routine, reassuring the child that life within the classroom will be predictable. These elements are essential to developing a sense of self-confidence for a small child.



In the Early Childhood classroom, the materials begin at the concrete level and gradually move to the more abstract. Most materials have a control of error, allowing the children to discover and correct their own mistakes. Children have a sense that they can teach themselves and subsequently develop a strong sense of self-confidence.

In order to nurture peace, the early childhood environment provides children with opportunities to experience calmness, peace and joy.

*Lori: The peace corner offers a sacred space. I tried to make it inviting. It's kind of like a little cubby hole. They can get into it if they need quiet space you know, pillows and comforting things inside. I have a noise machine that does natural nature sounds. We have a finger labyrinth the kids do.*

Labryriths are often used for centering and walking meditation. The red rods, a traditional Montessori material, are sometimes used to create a path for the children to walk through. Here several children enjoy watching each other thoughtfully walk the path and patiently wait for their turn. This helps develop focus and concentration and an opportunity to center.

A peace shelf is set up that displays activities the children can choose. Each activity promotes a consciousness of calmness, caring and peace.

Mindy: Now when we light out love light – does anybody remember what would make our love light shine?

A “Love Light” activity introduces the concept that every one has a “love light”, or spirit of love inside him or herself. This girl

chooses to wear a love light to show she is feeling this sense of love.

In this class a sunflower represents the love light and it is passed around the circle once a week as each child wishes peace for the child next to him or her.

This girl enjoys sitting in the peace garden at her school. Making silence each day gives children opportunity to experience their essential nature of love and peace.

Similar to the Infant Toddler and Early Childhood Montessori classes, this elementary school has found ways to use music to help the students feel a sense of peace throughout the day.

*We found a song several years ago called “A Time for Peace” and it became a school song and we played it during assemblies and at different times and so we decided to begin to use it for dismissal. So the song begins to play five minutes before dismissal on the intercom and the children know that that is a sign to prepare for dismissal and put their work away and to leave this building peacefully.*

(Melinda Harris)

*It is a very peaceful school, so we try and not have conflicts, but when we do, we try to settle down and not fight – just try and talk.*

Middle school students keep a journal of their activities as a means to reflect on the rapid growth that occurs during this period of life. This girl organized her journal around letters in the alphabet.

*I did helping hands, like we all learn to help each other out because we are all part of one big community, we can't be in competition with each other, we need to help everyone out and keep everyone moving.*

*We have these stereotypes that everyone from Asia is exactly the same and it's not true. (Student speaking in high school seminar).*

In high school students are constantly challenged to think of their role within the world community.

*And then we have these seminars all the time and they are always asking us (in Montessori) you know, "who are you in your society?" and "what is your role here?" And so that does a lot even though you don't realize it when it's happening, later when you are talking to people you know you are referring to something that happened in the classroom to relate to somebody else. I think that a lot of that goes into developing self and our place in this world – in society.*

LaTonya Maley



## Community Awareness

Within the classroom, children learn courtesy and respect for others. They learn to cooperate, take responsibility for their actions and resolve differences peacefully.

Montessori classes are multiage, usually encompassing three-year age spans – infant/toddler, 3-6, 6-9, 9-12, 12-15 and high school. This approach creates a community of learners where the older members learn to become leaders and nurturers of their younger classmates.

Toddlers are just beginning to become aware of other children. They begin to learn the concept of sharing and responsibility.

With guidance, even toddlers can learn to resolve conflicts.

Courtesy and patience is practiced at all levels in Montessori.

In early childhood classrooms, children learn that when they want an adult's attention, they should touch the adult on the shoulder without interrupting. The adult acknowledges the touch and the child waits politely until the adult is ready to give this child her attention.

Early childhood students learn to use a peace flower to resolve conflicts.

*Lori: The peace rose is something concrete. It gives the child something to do with their hands which is important at this time and it gives them a space and so giving a space where they can start talking about how they are feeling and know there is a system of taking turns – that it is not just going to be this kid that talks the whole time, I am going to get a chance to talk too. I think it makes people active listeners and they have to work out a*

*solution. And a lot of times they will come up with a solution that I would never pick, but it works for them and I have to take my hands out of it and say this is not about me.*

*My momma, she got a fake rose and we call it the peace rose.*



Many students' families have adopted the conflict resolution at home and with their friends.

*We tell each other how we feel. We mostly do the same thing here. Then we give each other a hug. Does that make it better? Uh huh.*

*(Students doing peer mediation). Me and Brady were talking about you. I think it was wrong to talk about you behind your back. I feel you should treat people the way you want to be treated.*

In middle school and high school programs, the conflict resolution process moves from this simple approach to peer mediation. This process helps children to respect others and to appreciate that there are multiple perspectives within any community.

*Like if you ever get into a conflict you have to stop and think about what you are doing and you have to put everything in the "I" terms like "I did this, I felt this." They are really adamant about that kind of thing. They don't really bring the teachers into it so much. The students have to work it out for themselves. (Katie Love)*

This seventh grade builds community through a camping trip early in the year. This trip gives students a chance to strengthen bonds with old friends and to make new ones.

*Montessori for me was more of a family thing. It wasn't just that I was coming to school with regular kids and I feel bad because my hair might not have been done today. I was accepted regardless of how I looked or anything, so this is my family.*  
*LeTonya*

As children grow older they develop a sense of responsibility to the community outside the classroom. Community service becomes a significant part of the learning experience.

*I've done probably over 300/400 hours of community service and that's another thing at Clark Montessori I wasn't used to was giving back to the community. Not only do we do the required amount which is 200 hours throughout the whole school year but we have intercessions where we do community service and after school we do community service. (Clark Senior Kenton Davis).*



## Cultural Awareness

*What are the effects of Apartheid? How has Apartheid affected South Africa?*

From an early age, the Montessori curriculum focuses on building an understanding of and compassion for other people. A respect for basic human rights is integrated into the study of diverse cultures.

*We just respect each other and everybody has views and everybody has ideas and stuff to contribute. I don't know what it is exactly about the Montessori atmosphere but it works.*  
(Clark Senior Kelly Wolf).

The Montessori curriculum introduces world cultures in many ways. In early childhood classrooms, children create flags from all over the world, learning the names of many countries.

Puzzle maps and tracing of countries and continents give pre-school Montessori students a deep sensorial understanding of world geography.

Songs, projects and celebrations often focus on world cultures. Learning about other cultures gives children appreciation and respect for the unique differences and similarities of people of the world. Special celebrations-- that include guest speakers, shared folklore, and traditional foods provide culminating experiences for the cultural studies.

*Boy: Well the biggest animal on the island is the rock iguana.*

A cultural fair provides these elementary students with opportunities to research cultures from around the world and to share their knowledge with everyone in the building.

*Girl: The aborigines were the first people to ever live in Australia.*

*Each year, Parkview celebrates multicultural market and we always do it on October 31<sup>st</sup> in lieu of any Halloween celebrations. Each classroom community will choose a country and they will begin studying mid-September and they will go through their studies through October and they will set up their booth in the gym on October 31<sup>st</sup>. Every child dresses in the attire of that country. Also each class prepares a page and they compile this into a book that every child can take home. So the pages may be information, they may be activities based on that country, but they do have things that they can take home and also they will have this throughout the market that they can take notes as they are visiting each country.*

*We decided several years ago to do it on Halloween because children came to school wanting to be dressed up on that day wanting to celebrate in some way so we combined the two days and it has become an annual event. Our parents know about it. Most of our parents take off work to come. So it is a big event in our cultural studies.*



Cultural studies take on a deeper meaning, as the students grow older. Intercessions, which are two-week periods twice a year, provide students with opportunities to get involved in community projects and to research other cultures. As a year long senior project, this high school senior studied the life of illegal Latino

immigrants in the community, immersing herself in the local Latino culture and learning first hand what their lives entail.

*And I began to make friends. I realized that the Latino community in Cincinnati is so small that one person knows another person knows another person. So I immediately started to make connections and be in their little network. By doing that, I became their friend and I found out all this stuff about how this community worked. That's the thing about the Latino life. You never know what the next day is going to bring because who knows if you are going to get into a car accident, you'll get deported. There are so many different risks. It is a life of sadness and risk.*

*Adrienne Day*

Margo Pace



## Environmental Awareness

Through the many activities in a Montessori classroom, students learn how to be stewards of the environment. This is done by encouraging children to take care of the environment both inside and outside the classroom. Environmental science focuses on the connectedness of the earth's elements and gives the students deep respect for all life.

Caring for the environment begins in the classroom. In the early years, children learn to wash tables, polish silver, sweep the floor, water and care for the plants. Children at this school have a composter that they delight in turning while learning about the chemical process of decomposition. They plant gardens outside and learn the botanical names of plants.

Some Montessori schools develop peace gardens on the school's campus.

*This is an area of our school that is completely enclosed by our building and a chain link fence and this is our proposed peace garden. This whole area will be covered in mulch and we will have rock paths for the children. We will have a butterfly garden and a peace serenity area. We will have the actual garden sites where they can grow and harvest vegetables. There will be an amphitheater area where teachers can come and do outdoor classes. We have used our botany curriculum with the 9-12 teachers to prepare what we need. The trees which are in this courtyard now have been planted by the students at Parkview. So they are really excited about maintaining a garden and being responsible for this area of their campus.*

As children get older, both public and private school students have the opportunity to take more extensive trips to deepen their environmental awareness. This group of eighth grade students

traveled to the Andros Island. This travel provided an extraordinary opportunity to learn about Bahamian culture, to sail and to study sea life by snorkeling. The students worked to raise the money to make the trip possible.



*Eighth grade is the remarkable Andros trip where we have some kids trying to transfer in at the last minute. It is not a vacation at all. We get to learn first hand from the different fish to the different coral. By the time we get there when we are snorkeling we are actually able to identify the coral and fish. The atmosphere and the culture of Jamaica we learned first hand right after we got off the plane through the security and getting into the taxi with the crazy taxi drivers and trying to interview them as they speed down the road. Sailing is amazing. We actually get to, I was fortunate on my boat we had a captain and we were the first mates so we really got to really direct the sailboat pull it in and tie it up.*

*Adrienne Day*

*High students take active responsibility for the environment both inside and outside the classroom.*

*I think environmental awareness is a huge thing at Clark. We have a huge recycling program and it is something that a lot of the students really advocate themselves. It was a group of students who wrote the grant to get that. We also have our woods. We have a nature trail that they just cleared out, set that out and they are going to build an amphitheater back there so we can have classes outside.*

*(Clark Senior Katy Love).*

“A Time for Peace” gradually comes in as Katy finishes and we begin to see images from the video.

## Conclusion

I have become a very studious person, I feel very intelligent when it comes to books and when it comes to my subjects but beyond that, just becoming a caring person about things that are going on that we sincerely care about issues that are beyond our education and beyond getting into a good college, but what is happening around the world and what is happening in different cultures is huge in Montessori children and I see that growing up in Montessori. I think Montessori kids really have that desire to want to make the world a better place.

Rachel Martina, Clark Senior

As self-awareness, community awareness, cultural awareness and environmental awareness intersect, we see a quatrefoil, which symbolizes the interrelationship of each area of awareness. Where they all connect in the center, we find the spirit of love -- which is the essence of peace.

Through conscious implementation of peace education at all levels of development, each child's spirit can flower and naturally emanate peaceful behavior.

A calmness, a centeredness and a determination grows within each child allowing him or her to meet the challenges of adulthood, knowing that diverse peoples have much in common. The students develop a belief in, and a commitment to the potential for a peaceful world. For the individual and the community to flourish, activities in self, community, cultural and environmental awareness need to be consciously implemented in

each of the major levels of development- infant/toddler, early childhood, elementary, adolescence and adult.

*Picture of quatrefoils landing on top of each other*

The foundation of peace education is a strong respect for basic human rights—which is symbolized by the lily pad.

*(Place lily pad at base of quatrefoils and open into full lotus flower.)*

Through conscious implementation of peace education at all levels of development, each child's spirit can flower and naturally emanate peaceful behavior. Just as the beautiful lotus flower gets its nutrients from the mud, the child gets its nutrients from a thoughtfully prepared environment.

Extras:

Ghandi Prayer

A reflection on peace, which was written by Mahatma Gandhi, is used in this early childhood classroom. The children sometimes do the reflection silently using hand signs, expressing its meaning

Black Elk Activity (With Mindy's description)

Clark Senior Project (Students describe)

Clark Middle School Journal

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