

Santa Cruz Montessori: Educating for Peace

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Santa Cruz Montessori Parent



You may have seen the bumper sticker: "Educating for Peace." It is a common enough sentiment, but how, exactly, is a child educated for peace? If you're a parent of a school-aged child in the Santa Cruz area, you might be interested to know Santa Cruz Montessori's answer to that question.

What Is "Peace"?

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition defines peace as "freedom from quarrels and disagreement; harmonious relations." Santa Cruz Montessori teachers educate for peace in a number of ways, including focusing on the child, teaching and practicing grace and courtesy, delighting in Montessori's international roots, and following Montessori's Cosmic Education curriculum, to name a few methods.

Focus On the Child

SCM's classrooms are organized around the developmental needs of the child. The children are intrinsically motivated. They develop self-discipline in choosing from the specifically designed and available learning activities. The classroom is a respectful community of mixed-age learners. So, from the very earliest age, the children are in an environment of peace.

"Montessori... gave the children freedom in their social relations, limiting their

actions only when they interfered with the rights of others. Through this freedom the child's natural interest in others and desire to help them grow spontaneously," wrote Paula Polk Lillard in "Montessori—A Modern Approach."

Grace and Courtesy

Beginning as early as 18 months, in the Young Children's Community, children learn grace and courtesy. This includes everyday kindness and courtesy, like how to greet someone graciously. Even the youngest child is treated by her teachers and classmates with dignity and respect.

When you visit the school's younger classrooms, see if you can find the Peace Flower. In one classroom, you might see a single fresh rose, in another a silk flower. The children use the peace flower as part of a specific process where first one child then the next states how he feels and how he wants to resolve the conflict.

"The school and its teachers are focused on teaching our children how to be more tolerant and how to get along with all kinds of people. I think that's important and getting more important as the world gets more crowded," says Brion Sprinsock, parent of a SCM Wavecrest Junior High student.

In the Silence Game, the teacher gains the children's attention by ringing a small bell, for example. The children stop where they are, close their eyes, and try to remain perfect-

ly still. Gradually, the children develop the ability to relax, listen, and appreciate the perfectly calm environment.

"The core experience the students gain from these procedures is that it is necessary to solve disturbances honestly and with good will to maintain a harmonious and cooperative atmosphere in the community," wrote Tim Seldin and Paul Epstein Ph.D. in "The Montessori Way."

"I think Montessori's emphasis on conflict resolution, teaching the kids how to express their feelings, how to listen respectfully to other people's thoughts, and building on that throughout their education, leads to a more peaceful world," says Kalai Herrick, parent of two Primary students.

International Roots

The Montessori method has international roots and many of the teachers at SCM received their Montessori training outside the United States. Different cultures and world views exist in the classroom. The diversity is welcomed and celebrated.

"Peace is celebrating diversity. Not just tolerating diversity, but celebrating diversity," says Michael Gerald-Yamasaki, parent of an Upper Elementary student.

Cosmic Education

A component of Dr. Montessori's curriculum is Cosmic Education. According

to Montessori trainer Phyllis Pottish-Lewis, Cosmic Education is a way to show the child how everything in the universe is interrelated and interdependent, no matter whether it is the tiniest molecule or the largest organism ever created. Every single thing has a part to play, a contribution to make to the maintenance of harmony in the whole. In understanding this network of relationships, the child finds that he or she also is a part of the whole, and has a part to play, a contribution to make.

The teachers use various time lines to give the children a sense of the grand scheme of things. Starting in the lower elementary classes (ages six to nine), children work with the Time Line of Life on Earth, the Time Line of Humanity I and II, the Time Line of Ancient Civilizations, and others.

"It is between six and twelve that conscience begins to function, and the child is able to visualize the problems of good and evil," said founder Maria Montessori.

Another learning activity in the Cosmic Curriculum is the chart of fundamental human needs.

"Elementary students study the customs, housing, diet, government, industry, arts, history, and dress of countries around the world. They also study the emergence of the first civilizations and the universal needs of humankind," write Tim

Seldin and Paul Epstein Ph.D. in "The Montessori Way."

Santa Cruz Montessori students were recognized recently by UNICEF for collecting more than \$1,700 for the Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF campaign. During October of last year, students from the elementary classrooms used the UNICEF boxes to collect funds for fundamental human needs.

"I felt like when I did it, it was a mixture of happiness for kids that are living and will stay living," said Andrew, 10.

Tim Seldin and Paul Epstein Ph.D. write in "The Montessori Way," "Montessori proposed that we could accomplish world peace by healing the wounds of the human heart and by producing a child who is independent, at peace with herself, and secure.

"The child is endowed with unknown powers, which can guide us to a radiant future. If what we really want is a new world, then education must take as its aim the development of these hidden possibilities," said Maria Montessori.

For more than 45 years, Santa Cruz Montessori has been the California Central Coast's only Montessori school serving students from preschool through ninth grade. With teachers certified by both the American Montessori Society (AMS) and the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), the school offers a rich curriculum encompassing arts, sciences, mathematics, literature, language, social studies, and music. Santa Cruz Montessori is founded on the methods and philosophy developed by Dr. Maria Montessori who recognized the potential of each child to become a force for good in creating a better world for all. For more information about Santa Cruz Montessori, please visit www.scms.org. ■