



MONTESSORI OF MACON

EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD FOR A WHOLE WORLD

NEWSLETTER

Session #1 | July-September 2023



SEPTEMBER 2023

8.....Last Day of Session #1
11-29..... Fall Break Camp

OCTOBER 2023

2..... First Day of Session #2
2-11.... Pansy Sale (School Fundraiser)
21..... Culture Fest

NOVEMBER 2023

TBAClassroom Thanksgiving Celebrations
22-24..... Thanksgiving Holidays
No School

DECEMBER 2023

6..... Winter Performance @ Douglass Theatre
8.....Last Day of Session #2
11-15..... Winter Camp
18-JAN. 1 Winter Holidays
No School



Enjoy a Funny Moment from Lower Elementary!

One of my favorite student comments comes up almost every year, when we're learning about right angles. Someone inevitably asks what a left angle looks like!

This year, when I asked what an angle larger than a right angle is called, someone said, "it's a wrong angle!" And someone mispronounced a scalene triangle as a praline triangle.

They make me laugh every single day! - Ms. Katherine

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Educating the Whole Child Requires A LOT of Practice

by Michele Hartley

Welcome to the new school year and our Montessori of Macon newsletter. We publish this newsletter three times a year and are excited to give you a glimpse into each of our seven classrooms!

This first session of school is an exciting time. We welcome new and returning students into our classrooms, and students of all ages are eager to learn and work. As I have observed in classrooms over the last few weeks, I am continually reminded of our mission to, "Educate the Whole Child for a Whole World." I never have to look hard to see this mission demonstrated countless times daily on our campus.

In a Montessori of Macon classroom, your child will receive as challenging an academic curriculum as they are ready. Truly, the sky is the limit based on their readiness and abilities. We know how valuable your child's academic learning is to allow them to reach their fullest potential. What we also know is academic content is not the ONLY important area for your child to have lots of practice in. Imagine your child as a young adult, as a 30-year-old person, etc., and think about what skills will be important for them to be productive citizens. Of course, you will want them to excel in reading, writing, math, science, and history. I also know your list would include a lot more than that! I know you want them to be excellent communicators and problem solvers, have strong analytical skills, be independent, empathetic, compassionate, self-advocates, and so much more.

At Montessori of Macon, our classrooms and curriculum are designed to give your student developmentally appropriate practice in ALL areas.



The key word in that sentence is practice! As a parent, watching our children practice this can be one of the hardest parts of supporting our growing children. Practicing many of those social and emotional skills often involves a mistake by your child or another student, resulting in your child's hurt feelings. As a parent, it can be upsetting if another child is unkind to your child, or even feel worse if your child is being unkind. I ask you to think about your child practicing social and emotional skills the same way you think about practicing math skills or practicing reading. As we practice and learn new skills, we get some things right, and we get some things wrong.

That is just the natural progression of learning. These situations provide valuable practice for students on both sides of a disagreement. The child being unkind gets practice in empathy, compassion, communication, and more. The other child gets the opportunity to stand up for themselves, articulate their feelings, and learn the power of their voice. Both children learn about boundaries in relationships, appropriateness and consequences of actions, expressing feelings verbally, and listening. While watching your child go through this is painful, this practice is necessary for all involved to become healthy humans.

And one more thing: learning isn't always linear! As our students practice and refine their skills, they are still children and will still make mistakes. It would be unreasonable to think once a child learns multiplication, they will never make a future multiplication mistake. The same holds true for children learning these important social and emotional skills.

Even though a child learns something today, they can still make future mistakes with the same skill. All is not lost when that happens, but rather, your child has the opportunity for more practice!



TODDLER 1

18 mos. - 3 years old
Ms. Whitney & Ms. Deidra

CONSISTENCY

Children Thrive In An Orderly World



The beginning of the school year is exciting, especially for our toddler children. For many of our new students, this is the first time they go to school, join a community of their peers, and have an everyday routine outside their homes. The transition from home to school can be challenging for some. As caregivers, we want to make the transition easy for all our young friends. We do that through order in our classrooms and consistent daily routines. Dr. Montessori wrote about young children's sensitivity to order. This "sensitive period" can range from 18 months to 4 years old, and

during this period, they don't just benefit from consistent routine; they demand it. With only a glimpse of the shelves inside a Montessori classroom, it's easy to recognize order in terms of everything having its own place.

"Order consists in recognizing the place for each object in relation to its environment and remembering where each thing should be. This implies that one is able to orient one's self within one's environment and to



dominate it in all its details. The proper environment of the soul is one in which an individual can move about with eyes closed and find anything he desires simply by reaching out his hand. Such an environment is necessary for peace and happiness." Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*.

We maintain consistency at school through our daily routine. Toddlers starting school for the first time don't know what to expect from their day, so keeping our schedule as consistent as possible helps them feel safe and comfortable. As children start noticing patterns and accept the stability of things around them, they become confident in what to expect from their day. After a while, they know when to work, play outside,

have circle time, lunch, and nap. For example, the beginning of our day starts with each child hanging up their lunch bag and putting on their quiet shoes. After, they are free to choose a work or have a snack. Having this knowledge frees them from uncertainty and allows them to focus their energy on social, emotional, and academic growth.

Children thrive in an orderly world. As adults, we learn to adapt when our schedule is interrupted; it can be difficult for us to remember how sensitive children can be to minor changes in their routines. They do not yet have the tools to adapt quickly. We all know life can get in the way sometimes, but that is for us, the adults, to figure out. When we give them the consistency they need, it is a wonder what they can accomplish.

TODDLER 2

18 mos. - 3 years old
Ms. Moira & Ms. Parker

TAKING CARE

It is so interesting to watch them learn from and take care of each other.



The new school year is always full of nervous anticipation and excitement. Old friends reunite, new friends are welcomed to the community, and we begin establishing routines to help everyone feel comfortable and confident in our classroom. The children enjoy the freedom to choose work within the classroom and love the practical life works. Practical life work aims to help children learn to care for themselves and their environment. The activities help children better control their movements, improve their concentration, and strengthen their hands for writing.

Practical life work also guides the children towards independence - something they strongly desire. Gaining independence allows toddlers to feel confident and empowered. Practical life activities allow the children to perform everyday tasks they see adults doing while fostering their natural desire to help. These activities teach the children how to live and function in the world. Using a spooning work, for example, where a child uses a spoon to transfer items from one bowl to another, makes them more proficient at serving themselves snacks and lunch. Accomplishing these everyday tasks fills the child with pride. As Maria Montessori said, "Never help a child with a task at which he feels he can succeed."

The children are enamored with their new friends and are learning from them every moment of the day. It is so interesting to watch them learn from and take care of each other.

There is a great sense of community within the Montessori classroom, where children of differing ages work together in an atmosphere of cooperation rather than competitiveness. There is respect for the environment and for the individuals within it, which comes through experience of freedom within the community." Dr Maria Montessori (as cited in *Elizabeth Hainstock, 1986, p. 81 - The Essential Montessori*)

We look forward to watching the children gain skills and confidence, improve their social skills, and learn many new things. We started music class with Ms. Erica this session, which was a big hit. We are thrilled she will join us every Wednesday morning to help us learn about and have fun with music.



Beginnings Are **ALWAYS** Exciting!



Our first school session is always full of fun as the children get to know new friends, reconnect with old friends and teachers, and become accustomed to our classroom routines.

In a Montessori primary environment, children are given freedom within limits to choose their own work and be an active participant in their learning. They can access hands-on materials in Practical Life, Sensorial, Math, Language, Art, and Cultural Studies. The materials allow students to learn at their own pace while developing concentration, coordination, independence, and self-confidence.

During the first weeks of school, teachers observe each child carefully to determine where they are developmentally and how to guide them in the prepared environment. Children are usually busy working with various materials as they become comfortable in the new environment.

We have also spent considerable time doing grace and courtesy lessons. As Dr. Montessori said, these lessons are the core of the classroom community or, "...grace and courtesy are among the first lessons in human relationships that we give to the child. These are, in their simplest form, the manners of everyday life."

We started the session with some basic Geography and Science lessons. We have explored water in all its forms, talked about oceans, ocean life, and sand, and enjoyed popsicles during the hot summer mornings! The outside environment is an extension of our classroom. After the summer break, there was a lot to do in the garden, and the children did a fantastic job resetting their individual raised beds, watering their plants, planting, and weeding.

We love each child's progress as they transition into a longer, uninterrupted work cycle.

PRIMARY 2

3 - 6 years old

Ms. Caitlin & Ms. Emily

Coming Together To Create A Community

It is an exciting time of the year, reuniting with returning students and getting to know the new members of our classroom. This session, we have been discussing the importance of being a positive role model to better serve the overall classroom community. No matter one's age, social or academic development, or even previous experience being in a classroom, we have all come together to form a community.

It is an important practice to acknowledge the individual gifts one has to offer, and the important role each person plays in creating a peaceful learning environment. I enjoy acknowledging and welcoming each individual student upon arrival as we warm up and get adjusted to our settling routines. It has been amazing to see how in just one session the children are showing more confidence in their individuality and exhibiting a great deal of independence.

"[...] The child's nature is to aim directly and energetically at functional independence. Development takes the form of a drive toward an ever greater independence. It is like an arrow released from the bow, which flies straight, swift and sure. The child's conquest of independence begins with his first introduction to life." Maria Montessori (*The Absorbent Mind*, pg. 83).

It is one's natural desire to find fulfillment in being self-sufficient. I am grateful for the Montessori classroom because it allows children's natural desire for independence to be nurtured in a safe and controlled place. Along with you, I am excited to see each child discover their inherent talents and interests.

Sometimes, when starting a new school year, it is just as much of an adjustment for the parents as it is the students. It requires not only a change in routine, but a change in watching how the child experiences the world outside of the home as they are exposed to more friends and more ideas. Thank you so much for all of the parental support we have received thus far in the school year. We look forward to the sessions ahead and watching your children grow alongside you!



LOWER ELEMENTARY

1st through 3rd Grades
Ms. Katherine, Ms. Gyni
& Ms. Amanda



different kind of “handwork.” Working with yarn and string to weave, knit, or crochet is a fun way to strengthen fine motor skills. At the same time, children can create beautiful works of art that they are pretty proud of. Your child may bring ten feet of finger weaving home, and you may wonder how that can be considered meaningful work. This work serves multiple purposes! It provides the child with a break in their academic work. It allows them to practice mindfulness and concentration skills that are then transferred back into their school work. It also provides repetition, which hones their skill, and they see improvement in their work over time, which offers great satisfaction. Finally, children who have mastered a skill enjoy teaching it to others, and it is an excellent opportunity for them to be leaders in the classroom.

So far this school year, children have received lessons on rolling a ball of yarn, tying a slipknot, finger weaving, and weaving on a loom. As children practice and improve their skills, they can receive further lessons on loom knitting, crocheting, kumihimo (bracelet making), and sometimes even knitting. Past projects completed by Lower Elementary children include hats, fingerless gloves, and scarves! Handwork is a beloved and valuable work in the Lower Elementary classroom that can easily be continued at home. The fine motor development, concentration, and hand-eye coordination fostered by handwork only reinforce these same attributes in your child’s academic work. Yay for yarn!



Mindfulness & Concentration

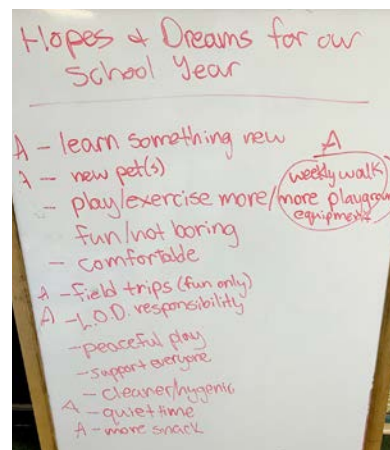
Maria Montessori once said that “the hand is the instrument of the mind” and emphasized the importance of honing the abilities of the hand even at a very young age. Toddlers practice pouring and pinching work to strengthen their fine motor skills. Primary-aged children reinforce their pincer grip by gripping the tiny knobs on the puzzle maps and geometry cabinets. This handwork continues in Lower Elementary as children manipulate small pieces of the stamp game or racks and tubes

to practice their math operations. All this vital work with the hands primes the children for writing, improves hand-eye coordination, and can literally rewire synaptic connections in the brain.

Children continue to manipulate a variety of concrete materials when practicing concepts such as math operations, parts of speech, or countries in Africa. In Lower Elementary, however, children also enjoy learning a

BUILDING COMMUNITY

*It's not just about hopes and dreams,
but how we make those hopes and dreams a reality.*



The first session's focus is creating a peaceful and normalized classroom. We work to build a community within Upper Elementary (UE) that supports everyone. This takes multiple forms of action, such as class meetings, modeling problem-solving strategies, directly teaching social-emotional skills, mixed-age group chores, and creating classroom guidelines to help us remember how we all want the classroom to run.

Class meetings are held multiple times weekly and can be called on the spot if an issue arises. In the first session, the teacher usually leads the meeting to show everyone how it should be run. However, 6th-years (or elders) will run the meetings in future sessions. Each meeting focuses on an issue or concern within the classroom. The first step is to explain the concern and allow each person to share their feelings or opinions about the issue. After that, students offer their suggestions for solutions. We then ask if the solutions are related, reasonable, and respectful. After we find the best solutions, we agree to try them for a few days or until the next meeting. In the following session, we take a few minutes to review how these solutions work and if we need

to change them. Thus far, we have discussed the timing of recess and protocols for outdoor breaks. The students typically bring rational concerns and reasonable solutions to these meetings. Being part of the problem-solving process helps them see how to solve problems peacefully and gives them ownership of the solutions.

As with class meetings, we see that students have more "buy-in" to a system they helped to create, so the entire class works together to develop guidelines or goals for the year. We began this discussion with our hopes and dreams for the school year. We sorted these into things they can control and cannot. We spoke about how "buying new chairs" or "having longer recess" were teacher-controlled items, but "having a quieter work time" or "being peaceful and respectful" were student-controlled. The class then broke into mixed-age small groups to devise actions they could do each day to help these goals.

After each group spoke, we gathered together with their ideas and whittled these down into 5 main things we all need to remember to do in the classroom. We voted to ensure everyone agreed with

these ideas, and then each student signed a copy to show we agreed. As the year goes on, teachers and students can use these as a reminder of how we want the classroom to be throughout the year. We also have the signed copy hanging in the room for reference.

Throughout the year, we directly teach problem-solving strategies (the non-math kind) and social-emotional skills. Within our school, we see education as not just for academic subjects but for



practical life skills, too. Thus, transparent, respectful communication and healthy friendships fall into this category. So far, we have discussed the many ways to solve conflicts, both with a few people and many. For outside games, we have a "sasquatch" technique. This is our keyword to tell everyone playing a game that we need to discuss an issue. Consider it an on-the-go class meeting. The person calling the sasquatch shares their concern, and others take turns to share their opinions. Ultimately, the group votes on a change or solution to the matter. If the problems are more minor, the students are all well-versed in rock, paper, scissors, or flipping a coin. If the issue is more interpersonal, we have taught the students to give an I-message. This is a framework for students to share their concerns or problems with other students clearly, respectfully, and concisely. After one speaks, the other student is given a turn to speak. After that, we move on to solutions or mirror back that they have heard one another's concerns.

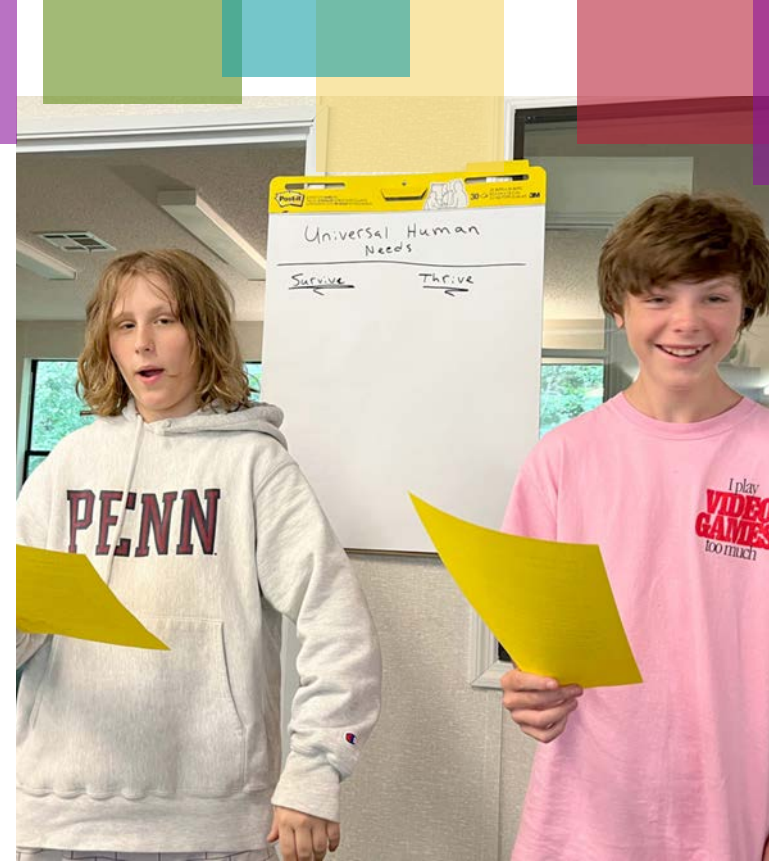
These strategies are on the classroom's "Wheel Of Choice." The students worked together to come up with all the possible ways to solve an issue in the

classroom and then created a large visual to remind themselves how to solve problems. This is another item to reference throughout the school year.

Our final strategy as we work towards building community is making sure the students have time to work, socialize, and discuss topics with people other than their best buddies in the classroom; helping to show them different perspectives and potential concerns in the classroom.

During the first week or so of school, lunch is eaten with people from different grades, genders, or other factors to help ensure everyone in the class has spent at least a little time with everyone in the classroom. After that, we have other opportunities for students to collaborate with various students. This includes class meeting discussions, small groups after lessons, and completing chores. This year, instead of individual chores at the end of the day, the room was split into different sections. Each section must be cleaned and maintained by a 3-4 person group. How they break up the chores is up to the group, but no one is done until the group is done. We also allow the 6th-year elder to lead by placing one elder in each group. This helps the new students better understand the expectations and gives the older ones a chance to manage a group using the various strategies we have taught.

These are some ways the students help build a peaceful and supportive community in UE.



ESTABLISHING PEACE

"Establishing lasting peace is the work of education."

- Maria Montessori

Engaged learning only occurs when the needs of teachers and students for physical and emotional safety are met. The link between engaged learning and student's need for physical and emotional security is well understood and fleshed out by great educators and psychologists such as Maria Montessori, Paul MacLean, William Glasser, Daniel Goleman, and many others. When in a state of fear, stress, or anxiety, the brain enters into "survival mode" - the reasoning areas of the brain shut down, making learning next to impossible.

The Middle School students and teachers started our year focusing on our collective need for emotional and physical safety and learning a method of communication that allows us to identify needs and work collaboratively to meet each other's needs when conflicts arise.

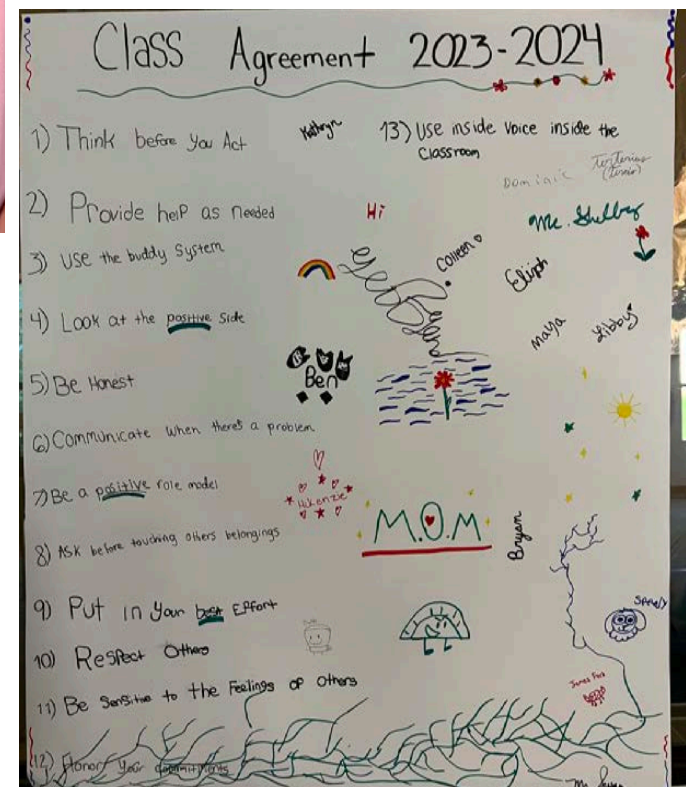
We started by creating a classroom agreement - a list of specific and actionable behaviors that, if followed, would create a classroom that is emotionally and physically safe (Fig. 1). This agreement is created by the students and teachers collaboratively so that everyone's needs and voice are heard and represented.

If we want to put the needs of our students and teachers at the forefront of the classroom, we need a way of communicating that puts needs first. The No-Fault Zone is a tool that helps students and teachers visualize a needs-based communication process (Fig. 2). The No-Fault Zone and corresponding lessons given in the first few weeks give students the background and the practical skills to communicate in a way that does not place blame or judgment. Instead, we learn to make observations, to connect

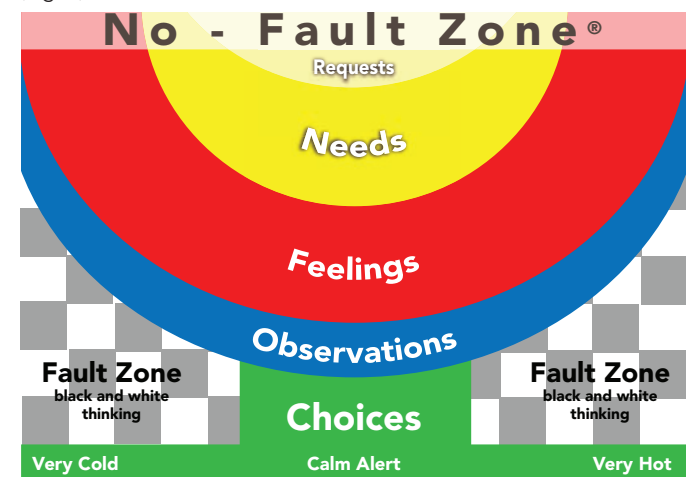
those observations to feelings that arise in us, and to connect those feelings to a met or unmet need. Once all sides understand their needs, we can develop strategies to help meet everyone's needs.

The power of this communication method comes to light when used to deal with conflicts. When communicating in the No-Fault Zone, we can listen to each other's feelings and needs when a conflict arises rather than blame or judge. When people do not feel blamed or judged, they are more likely to listen and to be open to requests. The reflexive reaction to defend or place the blame elsewhere can be bypassed, and we can make decisions as collaborators rather than enemies.

Maria Montessori believed that "Establishing lasting peace is the work of education." That peace comes from feeling safe, and safety comes from having one's needs met. Practicing a language of needs allows us to understand our needs and work collaboratively with the people in our lives to meet those needs. The classroom is merely a tiny version of the world. As our students move out into the whole world, they will take these lessons and experiences and forge peace in their own lives and relationships.



(Fig. 1)



(Fig. 2)

Montessori of Macon's Mission

"To Educate the Whole Child for a Whole World."

By the whole child, we mean the social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of being human. By nurturing the wholeness of our children and fostering respect for each other, nature and community we prepare them for a life of continued joy that will contribute positively to a whole world.



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AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY*
education that transforms lives
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