

The Icebox

The Monthly Newsletter of Montessori in Redlands

Reprint



Journey to Discover My Child's World

by GREG MARTIN (father of Amory, age 3)

This past weekend Montessori parents and teachers attended the *Journey & Discovery* event at MIR. As father of a soon-to-be four year-old daughter, I was eager to take the journey to discover what I might about my daughter's daytime world.

We started by meandering through the classrooms in silence. As we did so, vivid memories from decades ago came to mind as I recalled scenes and voices from my early school days. It became apparent as the day progressed that I was attempting to comprehend her world in the only way



possible: By comparing it to and recollecting the experiences of my childhood.

I am new to the Montessori experience and the day provided many gratifying and valuable insights. Two areas that I most appreciated were the classroom organization and the dynamic culture that takes place on campus.

One of the most obvious and remarkable differences about the classroom environment is the absence of a teacher's desk and traditional front to back "projection" arrangement. Instead, the classroom is more of a constellation of destinations that includes bookcases, project areas, and multi-sensory "thought puzzles," all intriguing in their possibilities. For older children, the puzzles increase in their complexity to



illustrate various principles of mathematics, geometry, and language. Computer workstations are also present in the upper grades. The physical setup of the classrooms prompts one to wonder how the configuration relates to the teaching methods.

In the Montessori environment, there is a clear emphasis on the value of personal experimentation vs. being "taught at". Both teachers and students are encouraged to be in a mode of experimentation. Assessing what's next for each student is also emphasized.

Though the differences from traditional education are often subtle, there is a distinct lack of rewards and

penalties as incentives to achieve, and the individual is afforded more control over the pace and direction of their studies.

A significant part of developing the whole person is the daily challenge of navigating a free-flowing social environment. Having children three to six years old [in Primary] sharing the same classroom gives rise to dynamic opportunities for interaction, conflict resolution, collaboration, and cultivation of a cooperative mentality.

Though competition is de-emphasized, there is a clear recognition that cooperative skills confer a competitive advantage and benefit to development. Along with mastery in academics, the cultivation of character and courtesy are included as part of



educating for life.

As a father I can think of no more serious or solemn duty than that of selecting the formative environment for my daughter's early education. I know that the self-image and worldview she gains will in many ways shape what she will become.

In view of this, I am particularly appreciative of the dynamic, cooperative culture that blossoms at MIR. The faculty are clearly dedicated to their work, possessing a sense of sacred purpose and sincerity that seems to imbue this campus with a presence all its own. One of the major obligations of both parenting and educating is the

need to empathize adequately with the fears, frustrations, sentiments, ambitions, and concerns of these tender and impressionable beings. The value of being known and heard is a precious gift that we are constantly called on to deliver.

The Montessori philosophy, and MIR by extension, places emphasis not on prodding children to achieve greatness but rather engaging them through their natural curiosity and interest and encouraging them to discover and declare their own authentic ambitions. By cultivating in them the courage and effort it takes to maintain an open, experimental mind the Montessori environment maximizes their potentialities.

The unique opportunity of MIR is not just the practices, principles, and puzzles but its dynamic culture fueled by the perpetual and passionate faculty, parents, and community that each year rededicate themselves to what is possible here among the citrus groves.

Lastly, there is a lot of faith here: Faith in the goodness of creation and in the resourcefulness of the human spirit. I am gratified and privileged to have found such a destination for my daughter's formative education.