If you wish to give the means to the child for his development you must give them in such a way that the child can, and must move. ...In all her books, lectures, conversations, Montessori incessantly returns to this great theme of the importance of movement. —E.M. Standing Maria Montessori, Her Life and Work

On special visitors day you may have noticed a lot of movement in your child’s classroom. It was not chaotic movement but thoughtful movement within the pathways set by furniture and shelving. You may have seen the children carry one block and/or one red and blue rod at a time to and from it’s place on the shelf. In the elementary classroom you would see this thoughtful movement extend into their gathering of the materials needed before they begin a lesson. This movement can be found in all Montessori classrooms and is purposefully designed within the environment by Ty, Chris and Irene Montessori certified teachers.

Of course, we all need to move to get through life, but how children learn is closely connected to their movements. When movement is involved, the brain is stimulated differently than it is when one is passively watching and listening. Especially in the face of our sedentary lifestyles and our “infatuation” to all types of screens, it’s important to ask ourselves: What kinds of activity do children really need?

Joy and self-esteem are not measurable on an IQ or SAT test. Intelligence and creativity develop as children explore the world, figuring out on their own how things work.

The brain depends on all types of movement to develop. I’m sure you remember your child’s first movements, rolling over, crawling and as they learned to walk by tumbling and falling. The milestones of movement that you marked as your child grew were so important and signs of brain development.

Maria Montessori observed that movement enhances learning. In her book, The Discovery of the Child, she wrote: “One of the most important practical aspects of our method has been to make the training of the muscles enter into the very life of the children so that it is intimately connected with their daily activities.”

The Prepared Environment allows children to move freely around the classroom. They do not have an assigned seat, nor are they expected to ask permission to move about. Children choose an activity - they walk to its place in the classroom, pick it up, and carry it to a table or rug. As you know, much of the work is done on small rugs on the floor.

Montessori based her method of education on the premise that learning is linked to movement. Children trace the Sandpaper Letters while they learn the sounds. Their fingers move in a specific direction allowing their brain to remember the shape therefore allowing a letter to be experienced in a concrete way. They match the Color Tablets and find corresponding colors in the classroom. Children handle the Cylinder Blocks or Pink Tower, learning subtle differences in weight and size as they move them from the shelf to the rug and back again.

This is what you experienced on Special Visitor Day. Children discover themselves and the larger world by moving about and really need the freedom in the classroom for their whole experience.
This week I put out a new lesson called plant care. This new work can be found in the Practical Life area of our classroom. Many of the introductory lessons have been mastered such as pouring, squeezing, cutting and controlled carrying and are now used together in this more complex lesson. During this lesson, a child chooses a plant and carries it to a table. He carefully checks the plant for any dead or broken leaves and snips them off if needed. With a mister, a gentle spritz is given to the leaves and them wiped with a cotton ball, removing any dust build-up. When the plant is clean, the soil is checked to see if it needs watering. Finally a flag is placed into the soil showing that this plant has been cared for. With a thorough clean-up, the child places the lesson on the shelf ready for the next child.

Many scientific discussions take place around the plant care lesson such as learning about evaporation, plant nutrition, parts of a plant and plant identification.

During our gardening time, Miss Emily and the children made a vegan corn bread using ground corn that the children had the opportunity to grind themselves. Many of the children found it quite hard to turn the handle as the corn pieces were large and very hard. Our class got to have a special group snack of corn bread before heading out for recess.

Practical Life is the first stage of work in the Primary Classroom, although it spans the entire age group into the 5-year-olds. It also continues all the way up to the Elementary and Adolescent levels… but that is a different story. According to Dr. Montessori, the child must first master the ability to care for themselves, for others, and for their environment. Through these exercises children develop order, coordination, concentration, and independence. They learn to complete a task from start to finish, something they will need all the way through school and later life! It is so interesting to Rebecca and I to watch the three-year-olds and younger fours maneuver the complexities of the PL exercises, while the older fours and fives sally forth with confidence and joy in these tasks. Often the older students spontaneously clean a shelf when they notice dust on it, or sweep small areas of dirt and litter into a neat pile to be placed in a “dust pan” with a “brush.” They have already internalized the actions, but are now demonstrating how they realize the REASON behind the task: order in their environment.

Many parents wonder why this phase is so important. As Tiffany Cavegn says “The basic skills of order, concentration, coordination, independence, and control are so necessary before [the children] are ready to move on to other skills such as reading and math.” So true!!!

We have been practicing some new songs to add to our repertoire. “She’ll Be Coming ‘Round the Mountain”, “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad”, and “High Hopes”, are a few of these very popular songs.
Elementary students are thrilled to be on their own and left to their own devices for their second week of ice skating. Despite not having a skating instructor, all of the students are getting enough exercise to work up a sweat, according to Danny. Miss Cristina who has never been on the ice until last week is picking up the sport very quickly. Carly has offered me tips on backward crossovers which I'm definitely not ready for!

Emily, from Island Grown Schools, came in with all the ingredients for two ethnic recipes to culminate a unit on grains this Thursday. They made a banana bread from the Caribbean which was delicious. To go with the bread, they brewed up some Atole which is an ancient Mexican beverage with origins in pre-Columbian times. Similar warm drinks, thickened with cornmeal, are found throughout Central America and are popular for breakfast. The Masa harina in this drink is the traditional flour used to make tortillas, tamales, and other Mexican dishes.

Our new substitute teacher, Zenita, (pronounced Jennitha) spent the morning in our class on Monday. She is from the Czech Republic and is half Vietnamese. We pulled out several Atlas's with her to locate where she is from, as she told us about her country and why it used to be called Czechoslovakia. Later she worked with Carly and Gracie as they filled out their country research forms on the Czech Republic. It’s interesting to get personal perspectives of a country compared to what is found in encyclopedias and on the internet. The girls will present their findings to the class in the future.

Late Day with Miss Weezie and Miss Cristina

We are fortunate to have on staff Trish Saul who is temporarily filling in for Miss Weezie. Trish is a licensed Massachusetts educator and came with outstanding references from her prior teaching positions at the Jonas Clarke Middle School in Lexington and the Cardinal Spellman High School located in Brockton. We are glad she was available to fill in for Weezie in her absence.
Film Screening

Saturday, February 6th, 2016, 4:00 P.M.

Martha's Vineyard Film Center

$12. General Admission $9. Member

$7 child 14 or younger

Doors open for admissions 30 minutes prior

You can pre-order your tickets at:
http://mvfilmsociety.com/2016/01/most-likely-to-succeed/

Panel discussion Q&A immediately following with:

Matthew T. D’Andrea, L.P.D., Superintendent of Schools

Richard Smith, Assistant Superintendent

Donna Luther, Head of Inly School, faculty member of Creative Education foundation and adjunct faculty member at Lesley University

Timothy Madden, State Representative for Falmouth, Martha’s Vineyard, the Elizabeth Islands and Nantucket

Presented in collaboration with the Vineyard Montessori School

The current educational system in the United States was developed a century ago during the rise of the industrial age and was once the envy of the world. However, the world economy has since transformed profoundly, but the US education system has not. Schools are attempting to teach and test skills, when mastered, that still leave graduates woefully unprepared for the 21st Century. After presenting this problem, the documentary focuses on the story of a school in San Diego that is completely rethinking what the experience of going to school looks like. As we follow students, parents and teachers through a truly unorthodox school experience, the audience is forced to consider what sort of educational environment is most likely to succeed in the 21st century.

“...a message Americans need to hear, and desperately test.” –Huffington Post

“...among the best edu-documentaries ever produced.” –Education Week

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