Cultivating Peace at Home

How often I wished for some "peace and quiet" as a multi-tasking parent! Some moms say they retreat to the bathroom for time alone, only to find their children knocking or calling through the door. How can we keep our own inner composure and help our children learn to be thoughtful of others and content with themselves? In other words, what makes peace happen?

Aristotle observed that "We acquire virtues by first having put them into action." Recent research confirms that behavior change often precedes changes in attitudes and feelings. Maria Montessori got it right by modeling calmness and respecting children's needs as she helped them learn the Silence Game, the lessons of Grace and Courtesy, and how to care for themselves, the classroom and everything in it.

I'm sure you have observed your child's Montessori class and seen this in action. There is a peaceful hum as twenty young children engage themselves in work either separately or together. It is easy to adapt some of Montessori's principles at home.

Rhythms & Routines at Home

You no doubt are already providing your child with a sense of security by your regular routines of daily living. Knowing what to expect makes room for peace of mind as there is no need to be anxious about what might happen next. As your child learns to help with chores and play independently, he gains the ability to feel in control. You can continue to build both inner and outer peacefulness by adapting the following ideas to your routines:

- Recite and repeat a familiar poem or song. Help your child to learn it, too. Repetitive sounds and rhythms help to quiet the brain. You might start with what you know, singing together the ABC song or reciting a favorite nursery rhyme like Humpty Dumpty.

- Stop to observe and listen to nature: a sunset, an animal, the ocean. Take a deep breath (better yet, five) and listen for a moment.

- Practice and model courteous behavior at home. Say "hello" and "goodbye" directly and with meaning, and of course, "good morning," "please," and "thank you".

- Establish a bedtime routine that provides time to transition from the busy to the quiet. Read, sing a song, or share some finger plays together before the final "good night." If your child does not already have special "security" objects and routines, help her to find self-soothing methods (arranging pillows, dolls, curtains, lights, etc.) that are comforting for solitary peacefulness.

"Preventing war is the work of politicians, establishing peace is the work of educationists."
— Maria Montessori
We had our last visit with Officer Max and his friends, Paramedic Kyle and EMT Haley. The children were re-introduced to Kyle Gatchell, who came to school this week in a different uniform. Kyle and Haley talked with the children about what paramedics do and showed them some special equipment that they might use if anyone was ever sick or injured. They then took us outside to see the inside of an ambulance to help the children feel at ease if they ever had to be transported in one. The children have been enjoying these visits and learning about our community helpers. I would like to give a huge shout out to all the members of the community that shared their time with our class. Thank you!

As a teacher of young children, I am often asked "How do you manage 20 children of different ages, doing different things at different times?" In a Montessori classroom, the teacher, child, and environment create a learning triangle. The classroom is prepared by the teacher to encourage independence, freedom within limits, and a sense of order. The child, through individual choice, makes use of what the environment offers to develop himself, interacting with the teacher when support and/or guidance is needed. Even though there are many levels of learning taking place throughout the day, each child is working at the level that is right for him/her. I once heard a Montessori trainer say that “No group ever creates anything” by which he meant that while a group can refine or elaborate on an idea, the ideas come from individuals. And in order to have ideas, you must have time to focus. A Montessori environment allows for that opportunity to focus.

Again, this entry is about our class’s incredible interest in Geography. At this time, this study/learning is mostly about the physical world, and that means a lot of activity with the puzzle maps. Since three to six year-olds love to do puzzles, and love to know the names of everything in the environment, we follow the children’s interests by offering puzzles of real value: the continent maps! As Michael Olaf says, “Children easily absorb and memorize the relative sizes, shapes and locations of continents and countries of the world in this motor-sensorial time of life.” Many of our children, from the youngest to the oldest, are working on puzzle maps and creating their own wonderful maps to display or take home.

Flags of the world have a special attraction to children. I begin the lesson of “Flag Work” individually, when a child shows interest, knowledge of the world map and beginning knowledge that continents are made up of countries. I tell the child that the flag represents a country, and that we must be very respectful of any flag. The flag must be carried carefully to the table on a special stand. The flag must always be kept upright unless necessary to measure the dimensions of a shape on it. Also, to do this lesson the child has to have mastery of his or her HAND; that is, he or she has to be able to control a pencil, color within the lines as well as possible, and then replicate a word or label on the paper. Although we still do not have a complete selection of flags, many children are working on the flags we do have!!

I will keep you informed after break about studying a particular continent and asking for your help in providing indigenous foods, music, or artifacts that we can display or manipulate to help the children really get an idea or “flavor” of a region. More to come later!
Several lessons were presented to our students this week including the subtraction stamp game, division racks and tubes, the multiplication checkerboard, North and South America and country research. We had an informative writing assignment on Wednesday which involved writing news articles to provide information to the reader. Students learned about the purpose of the lead, body and the wrap up of a news article. The value of answering the Five W's was emphasized.

M.M.U.N. (Model Montessori United Nations) students worked on their display boards that they will set up at the N.Y.C. conference. Tomas' Poland board will include information on Polish food, famous people, landmarks, transportation, currency, country facts, and the art of paper cutting. The table in front of his display board will hold a 3 part Polish, English, pronunciation matching game that he made. The board for the Democratic Republic of the Congo will provide information on D.R.C.'s sports, land and water formations, endangered animals, currency, and food. Mandala, a popular board game in the D.R.C. will be available for visitors to play. They may also explore a book of trivia and facts that the boys are making.

I hope that during vacation your families get a chance to bond and learn new things about each other that you don't get to experience every day. Between school and work, routines and the rush of activities, it's nice to take time as a family and explore new adventures together. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone return to school happy and refreshed!