



*February, 2007*

***TO  
LOVE  
THE  
CHILD***

Several weeks ago, I had the opportunity to observe a primary classroom for the entire morning. It was quite a privilege to be able to just sit and watch, take it all in, relax. I had brought my journal so as to take notes, knowing that I can't sit for very long without writing about what I am experiencing. As my mind started to put into words what I was watching, it came to me that what I was watching was about love. What I was seeing was what love looks like in motion in so many ways and forms. And so I had to write an article about what it is we do here at Community Montessori School that is really about loving children and what that means. Exactly.

At first, what struck me were the calm and the serenity and the quiet of this classroom. There was a feeling of harmony and rhythm and there was the presence of an unmistakable joy. I am not speaking of "happiness" which is entirely different from joy. There was happiness, and I could see that in the children's faces as they talked with each other and went about their day. But joy was present too and that was evident if you looked closely at the children's satisfaction and contentment in them. I watched a child washing cloths. He was a new 3 year old and as he washed and scrubbed he became aware that the scrub board had ridges on one side. Then he became aware of the difference between the bar of soap falling from the edge of the scrub board into the water and a cloth that he placed there next, allowing it to fall as well, watching closely. He was not "rough housing" or creating a mess or being inappropriate in any way. Actually, he watched that one time and then went back to scrubbing and rinsing and hanging each one carefully to dry on the drying rack. I think what I watched next was such a thrill to me because when I was teaching I never had time to really just focus on one child, endlessly if I wanted. Today, I could. He next went to the clean cloth cabinet and got out a clean, dry, cloth for the next person. But while the cabinet door was ajar, he suddenly caught sight of the mechanism that holds the door shut and proceeded, carefully and quietly, to open and close the cabinet door, watching carefully each time. This guy is someone who wants to know how things work!!!! (That's what I said to myself, a scientist in the making)!! He went back to the work and with a deep breath quietly smiled to himself, noticing no one outside of himself and his activity. This (to me) is what joy looks like. It is almost unnoticeable and rather quiet, a solitary experience. In that moment, I, too, experienced a kind of joy of my own because I felt so deeply the wonder that such a place for children exists. Here is a place where a child can choose something he wants to do, and once the lesson has been given, is then free to choose it any time he wants. He may do it for as long as he wants and have the experience of no one interrupting him or talking to him or correcting him or demanding that he do it like an adult! How extraordinary is that?! This tells him he is respected and capable and independent and BIG. He is free to experience a deep satisfaction in his own way and not have anyone praising him and thus taking it away, making it belong to someone else by their evaluation of him instead of to him alone. I felt so happy for this child, felt what a marvel that he happens to be here in this amazing place, at this most impressionable time in his life. I wrote it all down. Then looked around to watch whatever might catch my eye. I watched a child

who was very very precise and careful in her carrying and execution of her work (the trinomial cube), her pride in herself palpable. I watched an older child setting out her table washing on the larger towel, placing each piece of the work so as not to create a sound (no one watching her, no adult near by who she might be performing for...I was on the other side of the room and she was totally unaware of me). There is the possibility for great satisfaction in precision, in the self-control it takes to do such things. What I know as a teacher is that it is expected in this room, this kind of attention to detail, or it would not be happening. Children must be shown such things many many times, their attention brought to the order and carefulness that working with each and every piece of material deserves. But the satisfaction belongs all to the child once capable of precise movements coupled with the active choice to do that! Only the child can choose to be careful, make great effort, care about what she is doing. Thus it is solely HER accomplishment once she attains this place of "arrival." And you sure can see it on her face!!!!

As the morning continued on, I started to think about what it really means to love a child. It means to serve their true need to develop to their maximum potential, in every way. How do we do this? I looked around and then wrote this list from what I was looking at: clear expectations, teaching by showing (not talking), creating their environment with their "supreme development" in mind, allowing for endless repetition, respect, equality, kindness, slow, deliberate movement, consistency, the teaching of socially aware behaviors and being given time to practice them! Being aware that all children have gifts and being willing to help them discover what they are. Help the child love learning for its own pure pleasure, for the thrill of discovery and the joy of mastery. Keep interruptions to a minimum. Always encourage (being careful with words that judge (good, bad, right, wrong) and use words that guide, not evaluate ("you are moving right along aren't you?" "Isn't it fun learning things?" "Don't worry...we've got lots and lots of time"...)). Let the child do what she is capable of doing for herself. It robs her of the joy of her abilities and accomplishments when helped unnecessarily. Well, my list took up two pages and this is getting ridiculous! But you can see that what a child needs to grow and develop is all present in a Montessori classroom. Put in a trained and highly sensitive adult who knows how to present wonderful lessons and is someone who is full of joy and life herself...and there you have it. The optimum environment for the child... and for adults who love to watch the mystery of Montessori in action!

*Questions  
and  
Hopefully  
Answers!*

How do we, as parents, help our children to return to the primary level rules re: manners, orderliness, responsibility? It seems that once our children left Primary we became so much more focused on the academics that we forgot the other fundamentals of responsible behaviors. What can we do now?

Here's the truth: there is no easy and painless way to reintroduce appropriate manners and responsible behavior. The key is to do it anyway and truthfully. Have a family meeting, make it brief, and just tell the truth as to the rules that are necessary for your household and family to operate smoothly and harmoniously. Start with just a few changes...increase over time. Make sure there are consequences and say what they are ahead of time. Now it is up to you to enforce them. You are the parents and it is your responsibility to teach your children how to be responsible and well mannered. You want them to be able to go anywhere and be well received. Kids need to PRACTICE good behaviors so that they become second nature to them, automatic.

An example: Your child has been told a gazillion times to hang up his coat. Daily. Does he have a convenient and appropriate place to hang his coat is my first question? If so, you say it ONCE and then there is a consequence (and if you want this to be effective you'd better make it a rough one...the next social outing is cancelled, he is now not getting that whatever it was you said he was getting). If you have warned your child, and have stated clearly the consequence, make no mistake that it will only take this one time. But it's up to you. You will be tested. Follow through.

Why don't you have more than one of each piece of material, especially in the upper levels? How do you expect these kids to get their needed work done?

Once the child is developmentally ready for Junior level he is ready to work with others. In fact, he is no longer interested in working alone as he once was in Primary. The junior level materials are expressly designed for two to four or five children to use together. This sets the stage for the development of the social skills necessary in learning how to agree to disagree with their peers! They learn how to help others and to receive help as well. They learn the skills needed to discuss, negotiate, and thus are learning how to be part of a community. The teacher oversees this process, making sure each and every child gets the proper presentations and experience with the materials. She makes sure that each student is working on their appropriate level, completing assignments, and fully comprehending the curriculum.

In the next newsletter, our current culture's obsession with multi tasking will be discussed in relation to how this is affecting our children...not to mention us!