



# Southside Montessori Elementary School

May 2004

## Earth Day

This glorious spring was a great opener to acknowledging Earth Day. In Montessori education, both preschool and elementary, a sense of awe for the earth is nurtured every day. In a way, every day is earth day as we move through the year exploring seasons, animals and plants, habitats, geographic regions...the universe! All of the seeds sown in these areas are called forth from the child's experience from home and school (the gardening, nature, science exploration, simple observations, those conversations you have in the car on the way to school)...They continually build a bigger picture, expand on concepts, eliciting ahhs... They not only foster a sense of awe and curiosity, but in the elementary child, a sense of appreciation comes into focus as well as a growing sense of responsibility in the developing individual. This sense of responsibility and knowledge, of appreciation and respect, is what we want for these children as they mature into adults.

## Montessori skills

I remember a comment made some twenty years ago by a Montessorian who had taught elementary for a lengthy period of time and had teenagers himself. He said that as he watched his high school children, his own and former students, he observed a difference between them and the non-Montessori students. The difference, he felt, was their approach to difficulties, problems, life... He pointed out that the Montessori children had learned, from early on with the preschool materials that a problem has a solution. For example, when using the cylinder blocks the child removes all the cylinders and upon replacing the cylinder into the holes, he/she may be left with one mismatched cylinder and one empty hole. No one need point out or assist the child in realizing a mistake has been made. The child observes the dilemma, and decides to redo the block. No adult has been apart of that process. The materials had instilled the "observe, respond, solve" skill.

Then in elementary, the child's mind continues its conceptual growth while adding an increasing level of abstraction. Having learned much about the world, the child looks at issues and responds. For example, a group of children learning about the interrelationship of life in the rainforest, hear about the deforestation and respond:

1. "Wait! There are plants there that might help us cure diseases!"
2. "If you cut down the trees, think of what will happen to the animals that rely on the trees for their habitats?"
3. "What about the ozone?"

and on and on....

The children (in my Santa Fe classroom) making these comments, then set about learning more about saving land in the Amazon rainforest. They hooked up with a conservation group and



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found that they could contribute money for the purchase of sanctuary land for an area being acquired by the conservation group. They then wrote articles about this, distributed the information to families in their Montessori school, relatives and neighbors. They collected money and were able to contribute to the purchase of several acres of land. The motivation came from their heads and their hearts. They felt empowered that they had helped in such a large way.

What a gift we, as parents and educators, give children when imparting this approach to life.

### Earth Day Lesson

This is a lesson we did with an apple representing the earth. Of course the lesson involves a lot of conversation and discussion of what the child knows. For your benefit, I will be brief.

Picture the earth like this:

Having cut the apple in fourths,  $\frac{3}{4}$  represents the ocean,  $\frac{1}{4}$  the earth.

Land: Cut  $\frac{1}{4}$  in half to represent  $\frac{1}{8}$ <sup>th</sup> Uninhabitable and  $\frac{1}{8}$ <sup>th</sup> Habitable

Take  $\frac{1}{8}$ <sup>th</sup> and cut off  $\frac{1}{4}$ <sup>th</sup> (32<sup>nd</sup>). This is agricultural. Take Agricultural and cut a very thin slice to rep Drinkable Water.

Ocean: Take  $\frac{1}{4}$ <sup>th</sup> and cut in half. One represents Non-productive and the other is Productive. Take Productive and cut a very thin slice to represent the Photic Zone (where photosynthesis can take place).

- Your Assignment: Nurture our Planet!

### Southside Montessori Elementary Update

Southside Montessori Elementary is completing its first year in Spokane and gearing up for the 2004-05 school year. We look forward to the expansion of the Southside community. Our new families bring with them a wide variety of interests, skills and experience and have indicated an interest and enthusiasm in sharing their good energy with us.

### Spokane Community Service

The children have really enjoyed their community service with the Manito Lions Club. They set tables each Wednesday morning for the Lions Club luncheon. I am researching other community service projects to add to our repertoire for next year. If you have any suggestions, I would appreciate hearing your ideas.



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Know of someone who would like to donate some National Geographic Magazines?

If you come upon anyone wanting to unload some magazines, please have them call Southside. We can put them to good use!

## The most often asked question of Southside

We are currently enrolling grades one to three. Will we expand upward? That depends on the needs of the community. This year we have only had first and second years, so we have not yet had to make a decision.

The District 81 Montessori teachers tell me that the Upper Elementary often has additional positions for 4, 5, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades for two reasons: One, increased class size and, two, they have people leaving the program, moving, etc. Knowing this, will Southside families consider the lottery for upper elementary? We don't know yet, cause we don't know those families yet! So, I guess you could say, "We are in an evolutionary process."