

## An Introduction to Ecological Literacy At Fields of Green Montessori School

This new term that has come about in recent years is just another way of describing with a few words what our mission must become if we are to have an inhabitable planet for our children and grandchildren to inherit once we are done with Her.

I write the last few words as if I am implying a rape of sort, and indeed I am. What man has done to our Mother Earth is akin to such an assault. I could write chapters on this thought, but many others have already done so – Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, etc....

Our present form or institution of education does not address even a fraction of the history of our planet, its myriad of interconnected systems and our human relationship within the biotic communities. I have been working for the past 18 years on creating a new type of curriculum that satisfies the needs of our society in its present definition of education as well as combining what I have learned as a naturalist, environmental educator, Montessorian, ecologist and parent.

I began my quest feeling very alone in my belief structure, but through the years in my research I have become acquainted with a network of individuals and groups that have also dedicated their life to this work. The names are endless and they begin with the famous that I have mentioned above and go on to include others that are famous within my circle of colleagues, such as Thomas Berry, Lynn Margulis, David Orr, Margaret Wheatley, Krishnamurti, etc. I now feel well surrounded and supported, although not enough locally I must add. Those few that support me on a local level do so out of a desire to march with me on the quest for a change, a new perspective that we can impart to our children. Those few include you.

The new perspective is really an ancient one that we are digging up in the form of respect of our primitive cultures and natural history, while adding to it our newest knowledge about our ecosystem and the universe that carries it in its arms. This knowledge and respect that goes hand in hand with humility and wonder is what defines Ecological Literacy, also called Earth Literacy. It is under this umbrella, along with the terms "Integrative Education" and "Montessori Philosophy" that we teach your children. This form of alternative education, as our society likes to call it, is what we feel is the most important and effective way to teach the collective of people who have gathered together, at times unknowingly, to create this new way of education. We are not just a bunch of tree huggers and ex-hippies of the '60's trying to retrace the path back to those days as we are often accused of and jokingly referred to. This collective includes the most brilliant and brightest of scientists, ecologists, biologists, philosophers, cosmologists, astronomers – all the "-ists" and "-ers" who dare to think outside

of the mechanistic box that our industrial world created and which we were born into.

By venturing out of that box, we have found a world that exists far beyond our expectations, our dreams, and our visions. That world includes the cosmos and all that exists within. This "cosmos" is the stuff that Maria Montessori and many others have found should be the basis for education – the platform, the foundation that education is built from. For this solid foundation, which is indeed our source as humans, will carry our children into the future prepared more than most to navigate their way through life, and indeed joined with life in a contract that began perhaps long before the Big Bang. We are indeed made of "star stuff" and to return to the source and learn from there is what education should be all about.

With this long statement of philosophy and passion for what Krishnamurti calls the "right education," I wish to introduce our curriculum. This curriculum is a work in progress, an evolution that began long before my career of 20 years. Here at Fields of Green your child is taught integrative education through an ecological perspective in a Montessori philosophy.

In the young group of 3-6 year olds the children will, along with their teachers, explore the sense of wonder that they carry naturally within. This wonder of all things is the motivating factor of all learning. Our teachers work with each child's sense of wonder in all areas of learning – Math, Language, Science, Geography, Cultural Studies, Foreign Language, Practical Life, Art, Sensorial, Music and Drama. Woven through these areas are the knowledge, respect and humility of our cosmos.

Each year our 3-6 year olds will work under a thematic umbrella of ecological literacy. This year we have chosen "The Principles of Ecology." The year will begin with the concepts – the web of life, nested systems, etc, presented through the perspective of the stream that runs through our school property. By the end of the year we will address how humans affect ecological systems and what we can do together to correct our errors over time. Again, this theme will weave itself into all areas of what we call our learning community. All of these potentially "hard" concepts are easy to teach to youngsters by bringing the concept to its simplest form. It is in essence the study of all of life, but done so through the eyes of wonder.

In the elementary program, the children build upon these themes in a continuum of knowledge, respect, humility and wonder. The 6-12 year olds study these concepts in a deeper fashion as they are able. Again, everything is woven together so that the lines between subject areas blur as we weave a tapestry of knowledge.

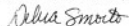
Also, the elementary curriculum includes learning about their sense of place in the study of the local peoples and the different ways of making a living long ago and presently. We will focus this year on the local farms and seek out the elders of the area to help us weave together the stories of the past as they relate to farm life.

The independence that they gained as 3-6 year olds continues along the lines into independence as budding adolescents. The students are given unique problems to solve – practical, real life issues that will give them ideas and solutions to navigating their world. Preparation for life and further education is forefront in this time period of study. Again – knowledge, respect, humility and wonder is cultivated at all times. These things never need to leave the arena, no matter how old we become.

As the leader, the founder and the visionary of this school, I carry these four virtues with me and they are an integral part of our school. I also carry the other senses described in our new brochure, for without all of these I would be as effective as a stone lying under the ground, even though that stone too has merit and a purpose. I am also the main weaver in this school, but I ask all to join me on the loom as we all weave together the beautiful tapestries that become our children's lives and who in turn weave themselves into the tapestry of all life, which now hangs in our barn room as a reminder of why we are here.

I welcome you all to our learning community in our new home and I ask that we all join hands and work as a collective to give our children the very best that life can offer.

Yours in service and education,



Debra Smorto  
Owner/Director