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## Through the Eyes of Delight\*

by Donna Bryant Goertz | Montessori Blog

8 Comments

Let us go into the summer seeing our children through the eyes of delight.

Our work as adults, parents and school, is to see our own children and those of our community *through the eyes of delight*. This is not easy work; it is hard work, but it is the work that matters most for our community and our children.



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Of course we see what is troubling in situations, relationships, and events facing our children, but we see it with fullest hope and trust. We do see the challenge and the great struggles facing us with our own and other children, but we see those as worthy of our most dedicated and skillful effort. Each and every night we go to bed with an affirmation of hope and trust in our hearts. Every morning we awaken to renew this affirmation for the coming day. We know it is effort that matters most, so we rejoice that seeing all of our children through the eyes of delight is so very challenging that it requires our utmost effort. What do we rely upon to make this trust and hope wise and practical?

We rely upon the social emotional curriculum of our school.

## **The Social/Emotional Curriculum of our School**

So what is it any way? What program do we have in place? How demanding is it, how rigorous, how effective? We have some idea what the rest of the curriculum is and know how daunting and challenging it is.

We may or may not be aware of the specifics of the daunting work in mathematics: in children's house, subtraction and division with the stamp game; in elementary, compound complex sentences and cube root; and at Gaines Creek—just imagine!

We may or may not be aware of the hard challenges in language: in children's house, prepositions and puzzle words; in elementary, compound complex sentences, punctuation, and the uses of felicitous language; and at Gaines Creek—just imagine!

And so on with history, geography, sciences, the arts, and practical life. We present hard challenges to the children in all curriculum areas.

It is the same with the social emotional curriculum, the curriculum of character and values.

What, then, is our demanding social emotional curriculum? Above all, it is the fullness of the Montessori plan: the way each level meets the needs of that age and stage, the recognition and provision for the development of the will, the exercise of choice, the practice of independence and interdependence, the individualized rate and progression, the self-formation and education, the three-year cycles. The children notice and offer a tissue to a crying child, they help one another learn to read, they pitch in to clean up when someone is discouraged, they give affirmation and encouragement to a struggling classmate, they raise money for disaster victims, they promote and sell Fair Trade products, they comfort someone who has disappointed and embarrassed himself. So the fullness of the Montessori plan for 0 – 18 is the seedbed for social emotional development. But there's more—much, much more.

The social emotional curriculum really takes off not with all that is in place in the plan, but with what we may think of as going wrong. This is where Montessori really shines. This is the joy of Montessori. It is in our ability as a community to see what goes wrong through the eyes of delight. "Oh, yes, what an opportunity this harrowing situation offers us!" Of course, first is the shock, then the dismay. But fast upon that, follows the skillful, diligent, work of the community to take every bit of benefit possible from what went wrong so that it becomes a part of what is so right about us.



The social emotional curriculum is the daily, weekly, monthly; the ongoing and continuing struggle with the children's development and their relationships with one another. The values the children confront when things go wrong, the accountability demanded of them in supporting one another through troubling incidents, the honesty, compassion, and creativity that this requires— all of this

is the social emotional curriculum.

Our school works through the provision of materials, a vast array of scientifically and esthetically designed materials. So what are the materials we provide in our social emotional curriculum, for the development of character and values? They are the children themselves, their social emotional development, and their relationships with one another.

In every curriculum area, our guides work is to present the materials, to make intriguing and inspiring presentations. So what are the presentations made by the guides for social, emotional development, for character and values development? They are the work the guide does with the children on their own development and their relationships with one another.

Our guides observe and choose when to make each presentation in all curriculum areas. What is it the guide sees to prompt a presentation and to choose which presentation to make in the social emotional curriculum, in the values and character development? The guides see something going wrong, a situation that is risky, that could be dangerous physically or emotionally. They see relationships that are problematic, not in the best of health. They see a weakness in attention, a lack of effort, a distraction of self or others. They see undue aggression whether passive or active; they see a need to learn limit-setting with one another or a need to respect limit-setting from one another. They see coercion or manipulation. They see something we would call mean, crude, hurtful, or dangerous.

When the guides observe these situations or behaviors, they become highly charged, keenly stimulated, and creatively engaged in planning interactions, interventions, and presentations. This is Austin Montessori School's dynamic social emotional curriculum. This is as much what defines our school as any other strand of curriculum. We are inspired by the opportunities we see, the needs the children show us in their behavior, their relationships, and their actions.

How do we as a community become more and more capable of seeing all of these struggles and efforts of our guides and the work of our children through the eyes of delight? Because if we don't do so, we will fail our children and they will fail themselves—fail to gain what there is to gain through this curriculum. They will fail to become capable of profound respect, clear and strong limits and boundaries, wise and effective practice of hope.

It is through our school's social emotional curriculum that we bully-proof and victim-proof our children by infusing their everyday lives with opportunities to draw the line firmly on themselves and on one another, to control their impulses, and to delay gratification. Through this curriculum we fill our children with wise but active trust in themselves and one another, with undying but soundly based hope, and with ever-renewed creative approaches to problem-solving in their own development and in their relationships with one another.

How do we see all of these struggles through the eyes of delight? That is our soul-work, our constant spiritual challenge. Let us go into the summer actively and energetically addressing this challenge. Let us see all of our children through the eyes of delight.

\*Title taken from the works of John Breeding.



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