

NORTHSIDE MONTESSORI SCHOOL - EARLY LEARNING, PRIMARY & SECONDARY

CHRONICLE

AUTUMN 2024



TRANSITION PROGRAM

A MONTESSORI APPROACH TO TOILET LEARNING

3-6 CLASSROOM

IMAGINATION AND READING IN THE CLASSROOM

6-9 CLASSROOM

A GREAT START TO THE NEW YEAR

ADOLESCENT PROGRAM

MONTESSORI DOES IT BACKWARDS!



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Message From the Principal



Welcome to another edition of the Northside Chronicle. This edition covers the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024. As a vibrant Montessori community, Northside Montessori School celebrates the wonderful opportunities that exist within our Montessori classrooms and also the wonderful parents, students and staff that make up our lovely community.

Over the past two terms we have had many opportunities to come together for school events, celebrate milestones, be thankful for family, and welcome in a new year. All these events happen around a very active school community, and a host of other classroom activities and opportunities for students across our school. Here are some of the key events for Term 4 2023 and Term 1 2024.

Each year our school community shares in a movie night in our lovely school setting. Each year we are able to gather together under clear skies and share delicious food and a movie. It was so good to see so many Northside families attend and enjoy our 2023 Movie Night.

In Term 4 of 2023, our 6–9 and 9–12 students entertained us with their annual productions. With a large number of parents and family members supporting and encouraging our students, the performances were great, and it was wonderful to see the effort that was put into preparing for these. Each year our 6–9 students write a story and then develop dances to accompany the narration. This is always delightfully creative and a joy to watch. Our 9–12 students typically undertake an adaptation of a well-known movie or play. In 2023 our students performed *Mary Poppins*.

Also in Term 4, we welcomed our extended family members to our school to enjoy our Grandparents and Special Friends Day. Our students enjoyed having their grandparents and special visitors in their classrooms and the opportunity to show them the work that they have been doing. The day was made extra-special by the musical performances from our students and a morning tea.



Montessori education is about helping our students to be part of their wider community and contribute positively to our society. As part of this, our 9–12 students went to Kids Giving Back, which is a charity that feeds those experiencing homelessness. Through cooking and preparing meals, children involved in Kids Giving Back are encouraged to feel compassion and empathy for those in the community who do not have all they need. The meals prepared will go to an organisation called Rough Edges in Darlinghurst to be handed out to people in need.

As we celebrated the Christmas period at Northside, we asked families to contribute gifts, which we donated to an organisation called Weave. It has been wonderful to see the tremendous generosity exhibited through the gifts that we have been able to provide over the past couple of years.

When the collection was complete, a representative from Weave named Dean came to the school to speak to the students about the Weave 'Cool Kids' program, which seeks to support children from ages 7–12 from disadvantaged backgrounds. About 90% of the children they support are Indigenous. I am very thankful to the Northside community for their generosity and willingness to support such a wonderful organisation.

As part of the end-of-year activities, we celebrated those students who were completing their primary schooling. In 2023, our Year 6 students and their families celebrated the end of primary school with a celebration ceremony

followed by a celebration 'beach party' themed dinner. It is always wonderful to be able to share this milestone with the Year 6 students and their families. We are thankful now that, with our Adolescent program, many of our Year 6 students are continuing their Montessori education in our high school.

2023 was concluded with our end-of-year garden party. This was a whole-school community celebration of the 2023 school year. Part of this annual event is the drawing of our end-of-year travel raffle — congratulations to all who won in 2023.

Our 2024 year has begun well, with many exciting school events, and a number of new families joining our Northside community.

At the end of Term 1 we held our 2024 Welcome Event Bush Dance. At this event we enjoyed lovely food together as well as dancing to live music from the Rosella Bush Band. Like many of our school events, our Welcome Event was organised with the support of our wonderful P&C members and parent volunteers.

We are certainly looking forward to the continuation of a wonderful 2024 as we commence our building works to increase the number of classrooms in our school and provide renewed and refurbished facilities for our students. We are excited about what the future holds for our wonderful Northside Montessori School community.

Adam Scotney
Principal

Toddler and Transition Program: A Montessori Approach to Toilet Learning

by Sandra Sin

“Learning to use the toilet is a natural process that begins when your child’s desire to be grown up and his neurological development have reached the point where he can control his bladder and bowels. We don’t train children to use the toilet, we support them when they are ready.”

– Tim Seldin, *How to Raise an Amazing Child: The Montessori way to bring up caring, confident children*

The Montessori approach to toilet learning emphasises independence, respect for the child’s natural development, and creating a supportive environment for learning. Here are some key principles.

Education and demonstration: Parents and caregivers educate the child about using the toilet through demonstration and explanation. We may explain to the child that we use the toilet to get rid of the parts of food that our body does not need. We begin very naturally when the child is young, talking with them about their bodily functions as we change their nappy. Avoid giving them negative feelings towards these bodily functions, such as by making faces when changing their nappy.

Preparation of the environment: The Montessori environment is prepared to support the child’s independence in toileting. This includes having a child-sized toilet seat or potty, a step stool for reaching sink and toilet, and easy-to-remove clothing that the child can manage on their own. A potty kept in the bathroom (rather than moving it around the house) can be available from a young age so the child can sit on it and imitate others in the household, even long before they have bowel and bladder control.

Toileting routine: From around 18 months old, children often begin to be interested in toilets. The Montessori approach encourages the child to take an active role in the toilet learning process by being involved in their nappy-change process. Here are a few steps that parents may want to consider:

- Adopt a standing change position where possible — change the wet nappy in the bathroom next to the toilet as the child stands so that they begin to connect bodily functions with the toilet. As the child gets older, they are encouraged to take off and dispose of their nappy/pull-up by themselves.
- Build a routine encouraging the child to sit on the potty/toilet as often as needed — encourage the child to sit on a potty after they help to take off their nappy. Even though the child may just sit on the potty for a couple of seconds, they will get more comfortable using the potty each time. As the child’s interest in and ability to use the toilet increases, we change the language to “It’s time to use the potty/toilet”. The “potty/toilet time” can be incorporated as part of the routine of waking up, after a meal and/or before a bath. If we notice that the nappy is dry before potty/toilet time, there is a higher chance that the child will be able to eliminate on the potty/toilet.
- Get the child into a routine of using toilet paper, flushing the toilet, and washing hands after potty/toilet time. Some children may need many opportunities to practice for an extended period to learn to wipe their bottom



and it's wise to start early, before they become fully independent in toileting. We can offer our help after they have a go cleaning themselves.

- Encourage the child to practice pulling up and pushing down their pants before and after potty time to encourage independent dressing. This is an essential skill when the child needs to undress quickly to get to the toilet in time.

Readiness: Montessori believes in observing the child for signs of readiness rather than imposing a specific age or timeline for toilet learning. "Follow the child" is a common saying in Montessori and this includes toilet learning. Signs of readiness often include:

- staying dry for longer in their nappy
- being able to push down and pull up pants
- showing general interest in using the potty or toilet
- demonstrating increased awareness and control of bodily functions — such as telling a parent/carer when they are toileting or moving to a quiet/private spot to have a bowel movement
- disliking staying in a wet or soiled nappy and/or requesting a nappy change

- expressing a desire to wear underwear.

Patience and understanding: Montessori recognises that toilet learning is a process that takes time and varies from child to child. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to be patient, understanding, and supportive throughout the process. We understand that toileting process may put extra pressure on parents/carers, and therefore we recommend that they:

- buy spare underwear and clothes so that their child can change as many times as they need to and then continue with their day with minimum stress
- dress toddlers in clothing that they can take off and put on easily by themselves and avoid buttons, snaps, belts and overalls
- have a bucket for used underwear to go in before washing
- prepare a bucket with some cleaning cloths for cleaning the floor
- if the child wets their underwear, stay calm and reassure them by saying, "I see you are wet. It's time to use the toilet and get some dry clothes", then involve the child in the clean-up process and ask them to choose fresh underwear after sitting on the potty/toilet to see if there is more

- look out for signs of readiness before starting toileting and be consistent. If possible, plan to stay home for a few days to avoid the need to put on nappies for going out or on a long car trip
- be organised and prepared with spare clothes and a bag in which to put wet clothing and some cloths for cleaning up when going out
- consider using training pants when going out. Training pants are handy to keep the mess contained. However, it may confuse the child as they do feel like wearing nappies and the child may not be aware of the consequence of their elimination if they are wearing them at home.

Respect for the child's independence: This means allowing the child to decide when they are ready to use the toilet, assisting them when needed, and respecting their progress and setbacks without pressure or judgment. Be aware that some family issues can cause a setback to toileting, such as the birth of a sibling, a divorce, moving house or other big changes happening at home. Many families consider summertime a better time to start the process of toilet learning because children can be allowed to run around just in underwear at home and that helps them become fully aware of what's happening with their bodies. Remember that, although the child may wet their underwear, they are not having "accidents" or "failing", but rather learning the "lessons" and "sensations" to use toilet and the discomfort of having wet clothes. This is also a natural part of toilet learning.

Tips for boys: Bowel movement control often happens after urinary control. If they are regularly going to toilet to urinate, chances are they may have a bowel movement while urinating. It is for this reason that boys are encouraged to sit instead of stand during the first stages of toilet learning until they have mastered bowel movements.

Overall, the Montessori approach to toilet learning focuses on fostering independence, respecting the child's natural development, and creating a supportive environment for learning and growth. Our role is to be positive, patient and calm in supporting the child going through this natural and gradual progression. Children will learn to control their bodily functions at their own unique pace.

3-6 Classroom: Imagination and Reading in the Classroom

by Helen Atkins-Carey

We are often asked why we don't engage in imaginative play and stories in our classrooms; it frequently needs to be explained why fantasy and fairytales are not incorporated into Montessori education. It has been observed that, during the early years of development, children have a strong need for reality and concrete experiences. Maria Montessori observed that engaging with fantasy and fairytales can sometimes create confusion between reality and imagination for children with limited experience, hindering their understanding of the real world. The children in the 3-6 classrooms are in a sensitive period for absorbing information from their environment, which is why we provide them with accurate and concrete experiences that help them build a solid foundation of understanding. Montessori believed that it was crucial for children to first establish a firm grasp of the natural world before exploring the realm of fantasy.

Our classrooms focus on providing children with real-life experiences and practical activities that align with their developmental needs. The Montessori classroom is carefully prepared with hands-on materials that allow children to engage in purposeful, meaningful work. They are encouraged to explore and interact with their environment, fostering their curiosity and understanding of their world.

While fantasy and fairytales may not be emphasised during the early years, Montessori education does not completely exclude the use of imagination. We have observed that children will instinctively role-play real-life events they have experienced, give life and feelings to a fluffy toy, or imagine a village of mice in the garden. These imaginative situations are based

on the experiences the child has had in their time. This shows that imaginative play and creative expression are not neglected, but rather they are rooted in the child's real-life experiences, making the learning process more relatable and engaging.

The Montessori environment is rich in literature of all kinds. Montessori classrooms often value cultural diversity and inclusivity. While some fairytales have universal themes, others may contain outdated stereotypes or cultural references that are not inclusive or representative of all children's backgrounds. Montessori educators may choose literature and storytelling that reflects a diverse range of cultures and perspectives, fostering a sense of inclusivity and appreciation for different cultures among the children.

When we introduce a story to children, we will discuss the possibilities around what is real and what is imaginative. For example, before we read the book *Possum Magic*, we would talk about what we know to be true about possums and discuss what the real life of a possum might look like. Books and literature form a great basis for the foundations of learning and creative thinking in the Montessori classroom. During this time, we foster a love of reading and learning.

As children grow older and their cognitive abilities develop further, Montessori education does incorporate imaginative experiences. However, during the early years, the focus is primarily on the child's connection to reality and providing them with concrete learning experiences.

3-6 Classroom: Going out - Montessori Beyond the Materials and the Classroom

by Margret Ranada Palma

In the Montessori environment, the concept of 'going out' is usually introduced in the primary years of a child. In our 3-6 environment, the children experience 'going out' through adult-organised field trips, excursions, nature walks, or any opportunity that allows them to explore outside the classroom with a guide. This prepares them at an early age before they step into the next cycle.

"When the child goes out, it is the world itself that offers itself to him. Let us take the child out to show him real things instead of making objects which represent ideas and closing them in cupboards."

– Dr. Maria Montessori

In Term 1, our Extended Day children visited the Art Gallery of New South Wales and viewed the Kandinsky exhibition. The children were very excited to get on the bus and take the trip to the city. One could hear chatter: "This is the way to my home ..." or "You turn to that street to go to my Nan's house". The excitement could be felt and heard as some children talked about the visit to the gallery. Some commented that they had never been to the gallery, and a few said: "I've been there before!"

As the children alighted from the bus, they greeted the bus driver and thanked him. We then found a place to settle and have morning tea together. Afterwards, as we entered the gallery, we were greeted by a friendly staff member and the children once again practised their Grace and Courtesy as

they said hello and listened with respect while rules and directions were being communicated to the guides.

Viewing the artwork of Vassily Kandinsky was an experience as an adult. When one took a step back and observed and listened to the children's reactions and comments about how they saw the art being displayed, it was a fascinating encounter. Even other exhibition attendees were commenting on our children's conversations as they were prompted by the guide to share their interpretations of how they viewed the different pieces of art. Adults around us were saying: "Oh, maybe the children should tell us more. They could teach us a thing or two".

Exposing the children to these different types of activities opens their eyes to a much wider world than the classroom and the materials can offer. They begin to apply the lessons in Grace and Courtesy, practise their conversational skills, and use the different vocabulary from our language lessons.

During the activities presented in the interactive area of the exhibition, the children used the implements provided. Some likened them to our Metal Insets and started designing their own artwork, as we do in the classroom. There was no need for instruction, and they explored freely, with such concentration, allowing others to use the different shapes as well as the coloured pencils.

When we stepped outside for lunch and had a



picnic in the park across the street, the children enjoyed the rays of sunshine and the beauty of nature that the day had to offer. They rolled down the hill, played tag and chased each other in the afternoon. There was no playground or play equipment in the area, but they naturally found ways to play with each other. We explored a nearby tree and observed how the children created a game to step on the overgrown roots or go around the humongous tree trunk. We raced up the hill and prepared to depart for school. Upon our return, we had a small group discussion where children shared their favourite parts of the day. The following day, the children wrote stories about the excursion, and some even wanted to extend their learning by continuing their artwork in the classroom.

There is much to teach, learn, and explore beyond what the materials in our environment have to offer. It is the enrichment of activities through different experiences and expertise that present themselves and the awareness of what we can offer the child. We have incursions that invite more curiosity to our children's learning as we observe their interests and listen to their ideas to extend their learning. We also have parents and carers who visit our classes and share their skills, hobbies, or profession to give the children a glimpse of what adults do.

We have much to offer the children: a walk to the park, discovering one's backyard, an outing to museums and galleries, a bus or train ride, or food shopping. These daily activities we usually do as

adults are experiences for the children when they are involved and engaged. These prepare them to get to know the world beyond their classroom. It is an exploration of life as they go on different adventures.

6-9 Classroom: A Great Start to the New Year

by Vyshnavi Bharadwaj

We welcome this new year with great joy, anticipating a year ahead filled with exciting events and valuable learning experiences. As I sit down to write this article, my heart swells with pride witnessing the seamless integration of new students into our vibrant 6–9 community. The term has been eventful, with highlights including our school excursion, the relocation of the Gunyah classroom, and the highly anticipated Coming of Life Presentation Evening, just to name a few.

Australia Walkabout Wildlife Park excursion

Our excursion to Australia Walkabout was truly eventful. Not only did we learn about the traditional uses of native plants for food and soap-making, but we also had the opportunity to learn the art of throwing a boomerang. It was a fun and educational experience for all of us as we explored the wildlife sanctuary, a heritage-listed Aboriginal cultural landscape adorned with ancient sites dating back more than 4000 years. Amidst the serene surroundings, we encountered free-roaming emus and kangaroos, adding an element of excitement to our journey.

Gunyah classroom relocation

The Gunyah classroom relocation this term was a significant event, and on behalf of the entire Gunyah family we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude for the exceptional support received from the school community.

The children demonstrated remarkable responsibility as they took on the task of wheeling out the shelves laden with materials and placing them in the new environment. In just one day's work, our classroom was transformed into a Prepared Environment.

As a directress it was a joy to observe the inner drive within these children to complete work with enthusiasm and determination. Their commitment to the task at hand exemplified some of the key characteristics that Dr Montessori highlighted about Second Plane children:

- Children are **physically strong**, with great strength and stamina.
- Children have a **greater independence**. Children between the ages of 6 and 12 exhibit a growing desire for independence, both physically and socially. The responsibility entrusted to them, such as planning the transition between classes, provides an opportunity to demonstrate this independence. With this newfound sense of responsibility, children are able to engage in what Dr Montessori termed **great work**, a combination of their interests and the ability to perform the activities with stamina.
- Dr Montessori highlighted the importance of children being able to **self-evaluate their own understanding and skills**, emphasising that this is a valuable skill applicable across various aspects of life. When considering humanity on a larger scale, it becomes evident that progress and development are often the result of individuals coming together, leveraging their combined strengths and abilities. This collaborative spirit was observed within our community of children as they moved the shelves, with each child assessing their role – deciding who would lead, push, hold the sides, and steer the direction. Through this experience, they gained insight into the concepts of right and wrong, and began to internalise rules, reflecting another characteristic of the Second Plane of



development, known as Moral Development, wherein the child's conscience begins to evolve.

Coming of Life presentation evening

It was a delightful evening observing our children's enthusiastic efforts in showcasing their understanding of the Second Great Story. We extend our gratitude to the parent and school community for their presence, encouragement, and insightful questions, which helped our children articulate their accomplishments. However, it's important to reiterate that projects like making models or dioramas are not unfamiliar to our children; they are continually engaged in such activities and researching various topics. In a typical day in the 6–9 classroom, one may observe children immersed in a wide array of activities, with research and projects being integral components of their daily work.

One of the reasons we encourage projects and research is because they aid children in developing and using their reasoning mind, allowing them to explore the 'why' questions that arise. Through the Great Stories, we inspire children to use their imaginations to delve deeper into reality. They move beyond sensorial exploration as the Great Stories introduce the concept of Earth as a Prepared Environment, meticulously evolving over countless years to accommodate the unique presence of human beings. To open the door and

create the dramatic idea, Dr Montessori created the Great Stories.

The First Great Story – We begin by directing the child to the start: at first there was nothing and then the universe came in to being and with it our Earth began to cool down. This is the story of “The God with No Hands”, and it sets the stage for everything to come after their understanding and what we're going to do in the environment.

The Second Great Story – There are new actors arriving, in the shape of plants, insects, amphibians, and reptiles: the new actor is life. At the end of this story we see the introduction of the last actor, the human being. We are hoping that the children will recognise that everything else had to happen as preparation for the arrival of the human being, we also want them to recognise that everything has its time and task. The Second Great Story sets the stage for the coming of the diversity of life, the plants and animals, and is the foundation for biology.

The Third Great Story is “The Coming of the Human Being”. In this story the focus is on bringing the characteristics and gifts to the stage of this drama. The children are directed to consider the many different environments human beings have adapted to, meeting their basic needs to survive through the ages.



The Fourth Great Story is “The Story of Communication and Signs”, and the **Fifth Great Story** is “The Story of Our Numerals”. These two Great Stories help children realise that as soon as human beings arrived on Earth, they needed to express themselves. Spoken and written language became a necessity as humans built up their lives. Human beings also found they needed to measure and calculate, so having a language of numbers also became necessary.

Dr Montessori said that the mind of the child works by itself, moved by a power within. These wonderful stories not only unlock the doors of knowledge but also offer children ample opportunities to embark on their own explorations in the journey of discovery.

Empowering minds: Embracing the Montessori philosophy of education

As I conclude, I find myself drawn to the profound wisdom of Dr Maria Montessori, whose teachings continue to inspire and guide us in our roles as educators. Dr Montessori emphasised the pivotal role of adults in nurturing children's independence and fostering their ability to think for themselves. She aptly coined this mantra for Second Plane children: “Help the child to think for themselves”.

In her insightful words, Dr Montessori highlighted that the responsibility of adults, whether they are teachers or parents, is to sow the seeds of culture in the fertile minds of children. Once these seeds are planted, our task is to nurture them with care and patience, much like tending to a growing plant. However, just as we refrain from constantly

digging up the soil to check on the seeds' progress, we must resist the urge to micromanage or intervene excessively in the child's journey of growth and discovery. Instead, we must trust in the innate potential of each child and create an environment that allows them to flourish at their own pace. By providing the right balance of freedom and guidance, we empower children to become independent thinkers, capable of navigating the complexities of the world with confidence and curiosity.

In embracing Dr Montessori's philosophy, we honour her legacy and reaffirm our commitment to nurturing the next generation of thinkers, innovators, and compassionate global citizens.

“The secret of good teaching is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim therefore is not merely to make the child understand and still less to force him to memorise, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his inmost core. We do not want complacent pupils, but eager ones; we seek to sow life in the child rather than theories, to help him in his growth, mental and emotional as well as physical, and for that we must offer grand and lofty ideas to the human mind, which we find ever more ready to receive them, demanding more and more.”

– Dr Maria Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, p 16

9-12 Classrooms: Term 4 2023 Highlights

by Leticia Castellanos

As the 2023 school year came to a close, the 9–12 classrooms at Northside Montessori School were buzzing with excitement and nostalgia, filled with memorable moments that will linger in the hearts of students, teachers, and parents alike. From captivating performances to heartfelt farewells, here's a glimpse into the whirlwind of activities that unfolded within the vibrant school community.

Production: *Mary Poppins*

The 9–12 students took the stage by storm with their outstanding performance of *Mary Poppins*. The production was a testament to their creativity, dedication, and collaborative spirit. From flawless acting to beautifully coordinated dances, the students left the audience spellbound. What made this performance truly special was the effort the students put into crafting their own props and costumes, showcasing not only their artistic abilities but also their resourcefulness.

Graduation ceremony

The academic year reached its peak during the Year 6 Graduation Ceremony. With Year 6 students' parents and relatives in attendance, the atmosphere was charged with both pride and nostalgia. The Year 5 students delivered excellent speeches, while the Year 6 students added a musical touch by singing their goodbye song, accompanied by a variety of instruments. The ceremony marked the end of an era and the beginning of exciting new adventures as our graduates transition to high school.

Graduation party

Following the ceremony, the school community moved seamlessly into celebration mode with a beach-themed graduation party. The playground was transformed into a lively beach, with disco lights, games, and a delicious pizza feast. Adding a personal touch, the Year 6 students compiled a heartwarming video featuring childhood photos of each student, creating a nostalgic backdrop for the festivities.

Community-building activities

Towards the end of the year, the 9–12 classrooms engaged in various community-building activities.

From the lively Secret Santa gift exchange between Orana and Amaroo classes to the mouth-watering potluck meal where students shared homemade dishes, the sense of camaraderie and friendship thrived.

Additionally, memorable experiences were created through special excursions:

- **Collaroy Beach:** Students embarked on an exciting excursion to Collaroy Beach, filled with fun activities, team-building, and safety awareness sessions. Immersed in Australian beach culture, they enjoyed the sun, sand and surf while fostering bonds with their peers.
- **Kids Giving Back:** Instilling a sense of compassion and community service, the children participated in a heartwarming initiative. They lent a helping hand to an organisation by preparing meals for people experiencing homelessness in Sydney. Through discussions about homelessness and its causes, they developed empathy and understanding, strengthening their connection to the community.
- **Year 6 excursion:** Led by Adam and Janene, the Year 6 students orchestrated an unforgettable excursion filled with thrilling activities. From bowling and a special lunch to an exhilarating escape room challenge, the students collaborated and bonded, creating lasting memories of camaraderie and adventure.

Farewell Circle: Reflecting on shared memories

In an emotional Farewell Circle, each 9–12 student took a moment to express their heartfelt farewell words and share cherished memories of the Year 6 students. This tradition not only fosters a sense of closure but also highlights the strong bonds formed within the school community.

Fun Day

The school year culminated in a Fun Day where students of all ages enjoyed an array of activities, including jumping castles, laser tag, and wheelchair basketball. The laughter, camaraderie and spirited



competition provided a fitting end to a year filled with academic achievements and personal growth.

Clap Out

The tradition of the Clap Out marked the Year 6 students' symbolic last walk through the primary school gates. The entire school community gathered outside, creating a path lined with cheers and applause. This emotional send-off allowed everyone to express their appreciation for our graduates and wish them well on their future endeavours.

With the curtains closed on another successful year, the Northside Montessori School community looks back on these memorable moments with gratitude and anticipation for the exciting adventures that lie ahead. The 9–12 classrooms are truly a hub of creativity, friendship, and growth, leaving an indelible mark on the hearts of all involved.

9-12 Classrooms: A Snapshot of Term 1

by Leticia Castellanos

As we reflect on the vibrant activities and enriching experiences of Term 1, 2024, it becomes evident that Northside Montessori School continues to foster a dynamic learning environment where students explore, discover, and grow. From delving into the intricacies of different countries to embarking on exciting adventures, the 9–12 classrooms have been abuzz with creativity, curiosity, and camaraderie.

Class Tea

Building upon the spirit of community and collaboration, the term started with the Class Tea – a delightful gathering where parents and educators came together to discuss upcoming projects and activities. It was a heartwarming occasion filled with laughter, shared insights, and the reaffirmation of our commitment to nurturing every child's potential.

Country Project

One of the highlights of this term was the Country Project, an immersive journey into the diverse cultures and landscapes of our world. Students immersed themselves in the geography of various nations, delving into aspects such as government structures, currencies, flags, traditional cuisines, culture and iconic landmarks. Through meticulous research and engaging presentations, they not only expanded their knowledge but also cultivated a deeper appreciation for global diversity and interconnectedness.

New students

This term saw the warm embrace of new students into our close-knit community. Ethan, Ian, Liesl, Livia, Etienne, Marius, and Teddy joined our school family, bringing with them unique perspectives and talents that enrich our collective learning journey. We warmly welcome you all to Northside Montessori School.

School Snooze

In an exhilarating blend of adventure and camaraderie, students embarked on our School Snooze after their escapade to Treetops on the Central Coast, an exciting and challenging obstacle course high up in the tree canopy. Back at school, they bonded over preparing lunches, savoured a barbecue under the stars, and enjoyed a captivating movie night before preparing for the

sleepover. The following day, their exploration continued as they ventured to Cockatoo Island, delving into its rich history and gaining insight into the lives of the convicts who once inhabited it. This hands-on experience not only brought history to life but also instilled a sense of appreciation for the past. Thank you to Betty Mutanga, Veronica Morales and Karthik Bharadwaj for helping us overnight and throughout this incredible adventure with the children. We also thank Anabella Ng and Crystal Isaac for all your help and support.

Harmony Day

Harmony Day provided a vibrant celebration of cultural diversity and unity. Students immersed themselves in the rhythms and melodies of flamenco, revelled in the beats of African drums, and marvelled at the intricate beauty of Vietnamese music. The day was not only a feast for the senses but also a testament to the richness of cultural exchange within our school community. Sharing meals and laughter with parents further underscored the bonds of kinship and appreciation that unite us all.

Bush dance and tennis practice

The term had an excellent closure with our students' bush dance practice, where the educators from the Rosella Bush Band taught our students traditional dances and songs. The Bush Dance evening was filled with music, laughter, and delicious pizza, as students put their newfound skills into practice. Additionally, our 9–12 students participated in a tennis workshop at the courts at Robert Pymble Park. Walking once a week to the courts for the last three weeks of term, they engaged in warm-up exercises, learned and practiced tennis moves with their peers, and enjoyed playtime in the park's spacious green areas.

As we bid farewell to Term 1, 2024, we carry with us cherished memories of exploration, discovery, and camaraderie. At Northside Montessori School, every day is an opportunity to learn, grow, and embrace the wonders of the world around us. Together, we look forward to the adventures that await us in the coming terms, as we continue to inspire curiosity, foster creativity, and cultivate a community where every individual thrives.

Adolescent Program: Welcome To Our New Staff In Ngamaru

We are excited to welcome two new staff to Northside as we further grow our Adolescent Program. It is lovely that these two new staff will be able to work alongside Margaret and Helen in our program.



Hello there, I'm Hanna!

I completed my degrees in secondary education and science at the University of Sydney. I'm looking forward to sharing my mathematics knowledge and skills with you.

I also enjoy traveling and have visited at least 10 countries. Cooking is a passion of mine, particularly Asian dishes, so if you have any delicious recipes to share, please feel free to pass them along!



My name is Michael, but I like to be called Mike! I was born in the Northern Beaches and went to a local high school and uni. I completed a Bachelor of Arts in psychology with a Diploma of Education and have been a teacher for 10 years.

So far, I have lived and taught in 4 different countries across 3 continents, in multiple different settings, and have enjoyed many different experiences!

In my spare time I like to be active and social. Some of my favourite activities include scuba diving, snorkelling and going for interesting bushwalks. I also like to participate in group sports, especially soccer and dragon boating. Socially, I like to hang out with friends and play board games.

I am very chatty and enjoy getting to know and talking to new people, so please don't be afraid to come and say hi! I am looking forward to meeting and working with you all!

Adolescent Program: Montessori Does It Backwards!

Commentary by Helen Ralph

“Your child goes to what sort of school?”

Have you ever found yourself fielding questions like, “Montessori education – what is that?” or “Why is your child’s school so different?” If so, you’re not alone. Explaining the unique approach of Montessori education to friends, family, or even acquaintances can be challenging.

Navigating the differences between Montessori education and traditional schooling can be a journey of understanding for many. Montessori education is such a multifaceted entity – profoundly rooted in human development – that it can be challenging to reduce it to a quick and succinct response. Recently I came across a wonderful article written by Greg MacDonald, an Australian speaker, Montessori trainer and consultant. It gives valuable insight into not only the differences between mainstream education and the Montessori method but explains the reasons behind them. Below is his illuminating post:

Montessori Does it Backwards!

By Greg MacDonald, *Montessori Mentor Online*, 23 September 2020

When Dr Montessori began her work with children, she took a novel approach: Instead of imposing a preconceived educational system upon the children in her care, she observed them, and simply responded to the needs and drives that she detected. Slowly, she built a new educational approach.

A unique psychological theory evolved from this growing pedagogy in which Montessori educational practice and theory were interdependent. This outcome is still at the centre of Montessori work today and the Montessori approach is now gathering the mainstream recognition that it has deserved from the beginning.

Back then, Montessori’s methodology was contrary to the work of the majority of educators of her day. Writing of this in *To Educate the Human Potential*, she observed, “They seek a method of education to suit their theory, while we seek a psychological theory to suit our method.” Her approach, it can be observed by this statement, was backwards when compared to the approaches of other educators of her time.

As her educational practice and theory evolved, she found that the result of her work also stood in stark contrast to established educational practices of her time. “Our concept of education,” she explains in *What You Should Know About Your Child*, “may be figuratively described by saying that the educator stands behind the child and allows him to go forward as far as he can, whereas the other method is to stand in front of the child and prevent him from going further than the limits imposed on him by the teacher.”

Because she began her work in reverse order to the approach of her peers, practice preceded theory. This was the genesis of a new role for educators that was the opposite of other educational approaches.

And something else interesting happened ...

Montessori once commented that the educators of her time worked hard to establish discipline in their classrooms so that the children could work and learn. But her own experience showed that the opposite approach was much more profitable for children (and teachers) – it was work itself that led to self-discipline! Backwards, when compared to the widespread educational thinking of her time (and our time also, it seems).

Because of this discovery, Montessori teachers focus on finding activities that engage the attention and concentration of the children. Once the children begin to work, concentrate and learn, a change occurs: They become self-disciplined. The teacher does not need to impose external discipline because the children discipline themselves and each other!

This approach allowed the children to reveal previously unsuspected educational principles, each of which was the reverse of prevailing educational wisdom of the time ...

Montessori could hardly believe it herself:

*It took some time before I could persuade myself that this was not an illusion. At every new experience of the same phenomena I said to myself, "I do not yet believe it: next time I will". For a long time I was incredulous before the children, though always astonished and moved. Again and again I reproached teachers who reported results to me which I could not believe to be true, and the teachers said to me that indeed they could scarcely believe them themselves. – [Maria Montessori in] Mrs Sheila (Jamieson) Radice, *The New Children: Talks with Dr. Maria Montessori**

Here are some examples of these astonishing “backwards” principles that can be observed in the Montessori approach. They are as remarkable today as they were when Montessori first discovered them:

1. Children profit from large classes. There seems to be an ongoing effort on the part of educators and legislators to reduce the number of children in classrooms and to increase the number of adults with whom they come into contact. Maria Montessori learned from observation that, in fact, the reverse is actually more aligned to the children’s needs: 25–30+ children per teacher is preferable. A classroom assistant may be present if one is required by the authorities, but not in a teaching role.

You see, Montessori discovered that the most dynamic, productive learning opportunities occur when there are enough children to form an independent learning community. The formation of the first such communities happened spontaneously in Montessori’s first classes, and the phenomenon continues to occur now in the twenty-first century.

Mainstream schools aim for a ratio of small numbers of children to a large number of adults ... Then there is Montessori’s approach, which is backwards according to mainstream approaches: A large number of children and few adults.

2. The teacher doesn’t do all of the teaching. When people hear that Montessori offers an individualized program to each child, the question that they invariably ask is: “How can a teacher teach each child individually? There just can’t be enough hours in the day for this!” It’s a fair question, and the answer illuminates yet another way in which Montessori approaches education in reverse. This is because the teacher in a Montessori classroom doesn’t do all of the teaching ...

When there is only one adult in the learning community, children must sometimes depend on their own resources and upon each other. This in itself cultivates a striking self-confidence and independence in Montessori children. They also learn from their mistakes, they experiment, and they teach each other. Children are excellent teachers, perhaps because they are so close themselves to the learning experience that they are sharing. They also profit when functioning as teachers: To teach something, one must know it in a deeper, more profound way.

In a Montessori classroom, the teacher is not solely responsible for all of the teaching that takes place – the children also teach one another.

So the teacher teaches and the children teach. To these two facets of instruction Maria Montessori added a third facet that turns the idea of “manipulative materials” on its head.

Manipulative materials are common in schools around the world. Maria Montessori pioneered this approach, and in the process, she discovered that it is best for the teacher not to use these materials as tools for instruction during a lesson.

Montessori found that manipulative materials can serve as teachers in their own right!

This is a difficult concept to grasp: In a Montessori classroom, the teacher’s lesson is intended to show the children how a Montessori material is used. Once the children have grasped the process, they are left to work at their own pace with the material, and the experience, the material, teaches them!

The Montessori teacher's lessons tend to be shorter as a result (meaning that more lessons with more children can be delivered each day). Their objective is very often not to ensure that the children have grasped a particular concept or acquired a particular skill. Instead, the objective is to ensure that the children know how to use the material. Once this is accomplished, the teacher's job is done. It is now the task of the children to teach themselves with the material – they are taught by those marvellous Montessori materials!

So in a Montessori classroom the teacher teaches some of the time.

The children also teach one another, and all learn in the process.

And the Montessori materials teach! They are designed not as tools for the teacher to teach with, but as tools for the children to learn with!

3. Writing comes before reading. Maria Montessori responded to the sensitivities that she observed in young children. She observed, for example, that at a certain developmental point they are fascinated by textures – they want to feel everything. So one educational material that Montessori introduced was letters made from sandpaper. She found that her young children loved to follow the contours of these letters with their fingers, learning how each letter is formed and at the same time, learning the sound that each makes.

Soon, they were ready to write, but their hands were often not controlled enough to write with a pencil. Montessori introduced cut-out letters of the alphabet and these children (aged four to four-and-a-half) began to write word after word with these mobile letters.

Surprisingly, they showed no interest in reading the words that they had formed, and for a time, they appeared to be unable to do so. That's backwards to the beliefs of most people who would say that you can't write until you can read! Who could have imagined that young children would write, but be unable to read what they had written?

Not even Montessori, but this is what she discovered!

And she also found that this inability to read what had been written was short-lived. Soon, the children not only wrote copiously (graduating to writing with chalks and pencils in what she called an "explosion" into writing) but they also read insatiably.

4. Universe first in the elementary [primary]. As Montessori turned her attention to elementary children six years of age, she found that they had an endless curiosity about the universe that surrounded them. (Their questions always seemed to begin with the words "Why...?", or "How ...?").

Educators of her day tended to introduce these children to a study of their family, believing that this was a more immediate interest to them. But based upon her observation that these children seemed curious about much grander things, Montessori decided to start at the other end of the spectrum: She introduced them to the universe!

An enthralling story, complete with scientific experiments (including a volcano that actually erupts) and eye-catching posters sets the scene. Then more lessons follow, expanding upon this introduction and inviting the children to study elements of astronomy, geology, chemistry and meteorology.

The result? Totally engaged, enthralled students whose studies take them further than their teachers could ever have imagined.

All because Montessori does it backwards...

5. Field trips led by the children. The typical school field trip is planned and supervised by the teacher. The teacher decides where the children will go, why they will go, how they will travel, what they will do when they get there, and what they will do when they get back to school.

It should be no surprise that Montessori does it backwards here also.

The Montessori "Going Out" program for older elementary children is planned and supervised by the children themselves. These senior elementary children have been preparing for the "Going Out" experience for years, guided by their teacher and partnering with her, assisting as she organizes class field trips, and thus acquiring the skills that they will need to do this for themselves.

When a mature "Going Out" program is underway, small groups of children decide where they will go, why they need to go there, how they will get there (and back), what they will do when they

arrive, and what they will do when they get back to school. A responsible adult chaperone shadows them, making certain that the children come to no harm, but, in reality, the children lead the adult. (How backwards is that?) The children make the decisions. They make the mistakes. They solve the problems that they encounter. They do all of the work before, during and after the event.

And they have a dual learning experience. They obtain the information that they went out to obtain. (This is the children's agenda.) But they also find that they have developed the skills to go out into their community independently. They blossom socially, because this is very much a group effort, and collaboration is vital if a "Going Out" is to be successful! (This is the adult's agenda.)

That's Montessori: Moving forward by doing things backwards, as the above examples demonstrate. There are plenty more examples once you start looking for them! The striking thing about all of this is that it's not really backwards for the children! Each of these "backwards" approaches are in place because *they work*. And each approach works because it was inspired by the children themselves.

As Montessori often remarked, she did nothing but follow the lead of the children.

Montessori education may look backwards to some – but watch Montessori children as they move forward with impressive momentum!

At Northside, this backwards-by-design is featured in every classroom. In our Adolescent Program, while textbooks are available, they're not used in the conventional sense with every student studying the same chapter at the same time. Instead, they are a resource used to support individual student learning journeys. Here, students take the reins of their education by selecting areas of interest within a given topic, conducting independent or small-group research, and ultimately presenting their findings to their peers. The end product is as diverse as the students themselves – speeches, Socratic seminars, models, documentaries, mind maps, essays etc. Each presentation reflects not only their depth of knowledge but also supports the development of robust communication skills. By doing this, students grow to understand that learning is not merely about checking boxes or chasing grades, but rather a valuable experience to be shared.

In traditional schooling, subjects are separated. A rigid timetable is scheduled, with blocks of time devoted to distinct subjects. 'Book learning' is seen as different to more practical subjects as mandatory technology, visual arts, and food technology. In our program, subjects are integrated as much as possible. The work of the mind, heart and hand is seen as enmeshed and equally essential. Recently our adolescents have been working on refurbishment of the land to the side of the classroom. They formed groups to lay paths, build a cement footing for a shed, establish garden beds and create signposts. What resulted was the chance to develop a lot of practical life skills like budgeting; collaborating; compromising; making, admitting and rectifying mistakes; being accountable to a group; and following through on an agreed-upon plan within a timeframe and monetary limits. There were also practical opportunities for mathematics (area, volume, converting between units of measurement, work on angles and ratio and data collection on spreadsheets). Science (especially physics and biology), English (procedure writing, comprehension of written directions, verbal communication such as contacting and negotiating with suppliers), visual arts (creating a mood board, sketching and technical drawings), and geography (study of the water cycle and profile and qualities of the soil and terrain) were just some of the subjects interwoven with the project.

In our Adolescent Program we follow the same New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) outcomes as any other NSW school. However, we do so backwards. We start with the students themselves. We focus on identifying what we want the students to understand, know or do. This is based on our Montessori training, our knowledge of the students and NESA outcomes. We ask students what interests them or sparks their curiosity about the topic. We match their self-chosen projects to the outcomes and plan the best way to assess their work. Finally, we create the learning plan. We provide the key lessons needed for students to achieve their goals and meet the outcomes. Guided by the students, we can meet and exceed the outcomes without being locked into a 'one-size-fits-all' prescribed path or one textbook.

So next time you are asked, "So, what's different about Montessori schools?" I hope this article can inform your response. Montessori does it backwards and for good reason – the child requires it.

PE and Montessori Sport: Balance of Challenges In The Outdoor Classroom

by Kieran Tolley

“The child’s conquest of independence begins with his first introduction to life. While he is developing, he perfects himself and overcomes every obstacle that he finds in his path. A vital force is active within him, and this guides his efforts towards their goal. It is a force called the ‘horme’.”

– Dr Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, p 83

Since starting as the sports teacher last year, I’ve found the role a constant challenge. And that’s exactly what I hope the students can say for their lessons too. I want to start with this reminder: children need obstacles in their way in order to be encouraged to make their own path.

My goal has been to approach each sport this term with the structured teaching of basic skills, with the intention of getting into game structures soon to give the children the opportunity to learn organically.

Our additional coaches in 2023



Term 1: Table tennis – This was coached by **James An**, an expert table-tennis player and previous Olympian.



Term 2: Orienteering – **Elizabeth Bulman** from NSW Orienteering gave us cognitively and physically challenging courses.



Term 3: Swimming – All students had the opportunity to benefit from levelled classes with swimming coaches at **Aquabliss Pymble**.

Term 4: Surf lifesaving – The team from the **Surf Life Saving Crew** gave us challenges in a range of skills as we rounded off the year at Northside’s traditional beach day.



The 6–9 classes

In 2023, I structured the lessons with a similar skills-based progression focus. This made it easier to utilise all the professionals and experts we've been lucky to have with us. Leading into this year, I was excited to have Tim Brackenrig from Superb Tennis return to cap off our tennis unit for upper primary, after he helped deliver a non-competitive based program for the high school last year. Tim and I planned to have the same main goal for the unit: to see tennis being less about competition and more about having fun. In our levels 1, 2 and 3 this never seemed in doubt, as in each lesson the whole group enjoyed the personal challenges of gaining control with the ball. Students were encouraged to feel comfortable with a racquet in hand, develop a natural swing and body movements to guide the ball, to then get the most out of then being on court. The challenge to me was to me was to keep game structures simple so as not to be too daunting. We had fun with simple wall-return forehands, 'keeping the ball alive' doubles, using a large yoga ball for awareness of positioning on court, and cooperative returns at the low net on a small court.

Expertise from Tim and assistant coach Alice was also invaluable in helping students step up to their next level of technique, particularly for those with some previous experience or natural aptitude.



The 9–12 classes

Across each level I have seen a growth of enthusiasm as a group/community. With Years 4, 5 & 6 I have found since last year the constant challenge has been to strike that balance-so that all students have been supporting in getting confidence, and skill competence enough to start, but that also those with more competitive natures are given a chance to find success in ways beyond having to 'win a game'.

We were ready to move onto games in close to, or at full court size much earlier than with the Year 1s, 2s & 3s. This made the trek to the two hired courts at the end of the term even more invaluable to increase flat space to use, as well as the practice of hitting across the full distance at the regulation net. Some of our students came with seasoned knowledge of the game and were able to take a leading role with the rest of their peers, which I again brings a different possibility of challenge-not necessarily the one students might have been expecting.



The 3–6 classes

I have thoroughly enjoyed starting with the Extended Day and Pre-Primary groups this year, including the very different challenges they require. I have been in early childhood educator roles since 2004, and from this and knowing the differences within learning in the First and Second Plane I planned a different structure for the lessons for those from our youngest rooms. In contrast to a key sport focus, we have been having fun games or physical setups that each time utilise one of the NSW Fundamental Movement Skills. Primarily we have been honing our standing jump, under-arm throw, and catching (from a pass to chest), with a small range of balls: tennis, (soft) dodgeball and size 2 basketballs. Each group loved starting with a regular “Captain’s Coming” game. This was my way of letting the children observe and then do for themselves, regularly revise these movements, and then take turns to lead the group too.

The children will naturally build body memory and precision with these skills over time, and more practice or repeated movement at home is beneficial, so I do encourage families to have their children show either the jumping or ball catching we’ve been doing and have a go with them!

We’ve also had time practicing the steps of skipping, and for dribbling a ball as an introductory focus. These skills will take a little longer for more of the group to use independently so starting early means we can try skipping or dribbling in more complex and enjoyable ways in following terms!



OOSH News: Before & After School Care and Holiday Program

by Surendrini Giritharan (OOSH Coordinator)



What a year we had in 2023. We had lots of learnings, laughs, and lasting memorable experiences.

Our classroom is comprised of multiple age groups. Children from Pre-Primary & Primary all share the same classroom. This is based on Montessori's understanding of children's development. The younger children learn from the older children, who in turn are able to be role models, exemplifying appropriate behaviour and work habits. Peer teaching and sharing of knowledge is encouraged and the older children take great pride and joy from teaching and leading their younger peers.

Our daily meditation/silent sitting has been a great success. We do this to calm and relax the children after school and believe it would be helpful in the children's future, particularly for those who have learning difficulties or other behavioural issues.

Staff work closely with children who have behavioural issues and also regularly communicate with families to explore ways to help children with their behaviour.

We also observed that there were a number of pre-primary children who learnt how to play different board games from their older peers during their afternoons in OOSH. At the end of each year, we clearly see positive change in almost every child, how they have built their confidence in talking, learning, their language skills, sharing and participating in activities without any fear.

We provide materials and activities suited to all age groups for the children so that their time in the OOSH room is both enjoyable and educational. We also facilitate activities according to their interests and requests. At the beginning of each year, we purchase lots of new materials, including educational games, dress-ups, and



various materials where they can show their creativity and imagination. You can see some of our children's highlights in our newsletter photos.

We provide one hour of outside play during school terms and a variety of outside incursions during vacation care, with different sports games to build their physical strength, mental strength, their confidence and learn how they should be a team player in a group environment.

Our program covers different aspects of learning in a practical way which creates interest in most of the children. This is going to help them throughout their school years and build skills which they can take into adulthood. We always encourage children to spend time on their own to build their confidence and creativity. At the same time, we organise group indoor games, craft activities, and outdoor activities to build their social interaction, sharing, and confidence.

Our holiday program is organised with a variety of enjoyable learning activities which engage the children's interest, learning and most importantly

is still fun! We have a variety of incursions including our own indoor outdoor games arts and craft activities.

A gentle reminder to all parents and carers whose children are attending our holiday program:

- Please provide morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, water bottle, hat and a set of change clothes for pre-primary children if any accidents occur.
- Since it is a long day for the children, they need lots of food during the day. So please ensure you pack enough food for your children.

Finally, a big thank you to all our wonderful staff members: Christine, Kay, Kieran, Lavina, Mandy, Ruth, Sandra, Sarah, Sharna, Shimla, Silvia, Sun Mi and Sureni. Without your commitment, cooperation and support the program wouldn't be possible. 2023 went relatively smoothly and without any major hurdles and a big thank you goes out to all of you for helping make that happen.





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