

“Children! Mistakes are *WONDERFUL* opportunities to learn!”

These are the words of my beloved Montessori School Science Teacher, Bob Jackson. He was a big man, a literal giant in the eyes of a 12-year old, and I can still hear his voice booming off the walls of our Middle School classroom, filling each student up to their eyeballs with his infectious curiosity. At the time I was never fully conscious of this idea that little treasures existed in the hearts of mistakes. An adolescent mind isn't necessarily prone to self-reflection, and besides, this principle was intertwined into the very fabric of the Montessori environment we were working and learning in. Now as an adult, with children of my own moving through the Montessori continuum, I find myself astonished and delighted when observing the same credo living on in my kids each day at Whipple Road.

There seems to me to be a very clear link between the act of making and acknowledging a mistake, trial and error, and the state of being resilient. Developing a comfort and relationship with inaccuracy or in Montessori terminology ~ the control of error ~ not only enables a child to withstand difficult conditions, but also allows for fearlessness and joy to emerge during the act of learning and discovery. It is in this place that something truly magnificent occurs: the child takes ownership and responsibility for their actions. And often, they will do it with gusto. My daughter Sophia is in her third year of Primary with Sherry and Jennie. When she shares a short story with me that she has written during the day at school, she often self-edits her grammar and narrative in a developmentally appropriate way. She'll insert an adjective where there is none, or play with a handful of verbs in order to emphasize the point she is after. She doesn't necessarily call them by their technical names, or even spell words correctly; that will come later. But, if you ask her what part of speech they

represent, she will happily say “*that’s a blue triangle, Daddy,*” or “*this here is a red circle.*” The grammar box she has most certainly worked with for so many hours in the classroom now lives within her, the colorful symbols for each part of speech dancing on the tip of her pencil. Born out of this fluidity is a kind of pleasure, a fearless gusto that electrifies a child and drives them further on their quest for knowledge and understanding.

Resilience allows you to maintain your trajectory. You might be moved or disturbed to either side of the path, but you keep the general direction you’re headed in. You’ve got this spacious, foundational relationship with the essence of what the work you’re doing stands for. There is an element of trust in the process of asking and answering questions about the world, and a conviction that error and mistake are integral to that process. Therefore you can take a lot of knocks, you can experience setbacks, but you will always take the steps needed to adjust course. To have resilience and robustness take root in an individual’s character is one of the fundamental goals of a Montessori education. In a sense, a Montessori Life is one in which you are able to return to that spaciousness and clarity, and not forget yourself or your purpose in the peripheral aspects and busyness that we all generate as human beings each and every day.

As Montessori Parents, my wife Jessica and I are fortunate enough to witness this resilience in our children and the purposeful work they do every day. We can connect with it and be inspired by it, and in turn, experience our own fearlessness and perhaps even joy when life confronts us with its challenges. And we’re not alone. I’ve found that The Montessori School parent community is composed of a group of resilient individuals who exhibit true passion and commitment to their children’s development and wellbeing, as well as to their own. Through my involvement with the Parent Association, meeting with other parents in my children’s class rooms, and the spontaneous connections made in the hallways each day, I’ve come to appreciate the power of this positive communal feedback loop. Plugging into it and contributing to it both in large and

small ways amplifies the creative output of the community as a whole, which in turn strengthens the arc of our children's learning and growth.

I wanted to end by sharing a poem that I think exemplifies this state of courageousness found in The Montessori School experience. It represents the clarity that comes from paying careful attention to the work one is doing and the tranquil industriousness with which it is performed.

The Opening of Eyes

That day I saw beneath dark clouds
the passing light over the water
and I heard the voice of the world speak out,
I knew then, as I had before
life is no passing memory of what has been
nor the remaining pages in a great book
waiting to be read.

It is the opening of eyes long closed.
It is the vision of far off things
seen for the silence they hold.
It is the heart after years
of secret conversing
speaking out loud in the clear air.

It is Moses in the desert
fallen to his knees before the lit bush.
It is the man throwing away his shoes
as if to enter heaven
and finding himself astonished,
opened at last,
fallen in love with solid ground.

-- David Whyte
from ***Songs for Coming Home***
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