Peace Education

Brickton Montessori is officially designated as a Peace Site by World Citizen Inc. and committed to peace education, which includes teaching conflict resolution skills. Our mission statement reflects the importance of providing our students with opportunities to be and develop into responsible participants in our global community. Our problem resolution policy allows for respectful action to resolving problems, including an outline of a course of action for both parents and personnel. As stated in the Parent Handbook, Brickton Montessori School does not discriminate in admissions or placement on the basis of race, sex, color, creed, national or ethnic origin. Harassment of any kind, including sexual, ethnic, religious, or racial is not tolerated at Brickton Montessori School.

Equity, justice and peace education are important components of the Brickton Montessori curriculum for all programs. Peace education is fundamental to understanding equity and justice, and we work with students at each level to see the cause and effect of their behavior in ways that are developmentally appropriate. Ground rules and peaceful conflict resolution are the foundation of the curriculum. The ground rules are introduced to the classrooms by the teachers and are consistent throughout the school day as well as before- and after-school care. The ground rules are posted in each classroom as a reference for all of the children. In the Toddler and Children's House programs the teachers may, as needed, remind the children of the written rules. In the Elementary programs, the students create and sign the ground rules and use these to facilitate independent conflict resolution discussions. The Middle School students take complete ownership of their ground rules and are the primary enforcers of the rules. In addition to ground rules, the teachers have group meetings regularly, allowing students opportunities to discuss classroom social issues or concerns. In the Lower Elementary program, the students utilize an agenda notebook where they record items to be discussed throughout the week, such as an unclean bathroom, missing community items, or social issues. In the Upper Elementary program the students bring up the issues themselves during meeting or inform the teacher ahead of time. In Middle School, it moves to a more student-driven "counsel" and employs the use of a "talking stick" to ensure that all parties are heard.

While the implementation of the curriculum is different, according to age level and developmental appropriateness, there are common themes across the programs. Each program emphasizes grace and courtesy, global citizenship, service learning, and respect and appreciation for all people regardless of gender, culture, race, religion, sexual orientation or sexual identity. Much of this teaching is integrated into literature, music, and art, with appropriate lessons to reinforce these concepts. Holidays, however tend to be secular in nature, with some religious or civic holidays introduced or discussed casually. We have a Diversity Coordinator that acts as a resource to teachers for curriculum content and implementation.

The Toddler curriculum places a focus on grace and courtesy, as children are taught how to use their words to resolve conflicts and how to respectfully interact with one another. Service learning begins at this age when veteran students hold hands with a new child or pass out the napkins for snack. Children of various backgrounds are represented with pictures on the walls. The students are taught familiar nursery rhymes in both English and Spanish. Books in the classroom library are often read aloud and are chosen to include children of various abilities and ethnicities. The musical selection takes on a global flavor to include a variety of cultures.

The Children's House program continues and builds on the work started in the Toddler program. In addition to exposure to multicultural literature and music, the Children's House curriculum includes conversations about civic holidays and may include conversations and celebrations of religious holidays based on the classroom make up. Literature and music are chosen based on inclusivity of multi-ethnic, multi-abled, and non-gendered bias characters and themes. Additionally, the Children's House program implements the Anti-Defamation League's World of Difference anti-bias curriculum. The multi-age grouping in the Children's House lends itself to service learning through peer teaching. Additionally, the children are responsible for helping with snack and lunch set up and classroom cleaning jobs which fosters a greater sense of community responsibility.

Equity and justice are woven into the Elementary and Middle School programs. In addition to following the World of Difference anti-bias curriculum, the Lower Elementary program includes lessons about stereotypes, facts versus opinion, discrimination, gossip, and exclusion. Lessons are taught using role play to give the students an opportunity to internalize difficult concepts. The classroom follows the rule of three: "is it true, is it kind, is it necessary" to foster a rich sense of fairness. At the Lower Elementary level, the students will often bring one another to the ground rules in the classroom in order to reference them as they discuss the conflict at hand. The Lower Elementary library is rich in biographies that represent gender equality, from scientists to artists. The selections include Spanish language books and are all read by the teacher before being presented to the students.

The Upper Elementary and Middle School equity and justice curriculum is organic to the social studies and civics lessons, as well as to the interactions with the community outside of Brickton. The conversations change yearly depending on the makeup of the classrooms, the topics covered, and the experiences of the students. While teaching U.S. history, for example, the students learn about equal rights, civil rights and different groups of people and their contribution to history. The students in the Upper Elementary classroom participate in lessons which are relevant to their lives, but teach ideas such as the Suffrage Movement, world religions and minimum wage. The Middle School curriculum revisits and expands on these themes to include a study of the United States government as well as other forms of government.

The literature books in the Upper Elementary and Middle School level are chosen deliberately. Biographies (inclusive of history), books with conflict resolution, and books with strong characters or characters whose lives vary greatly from those of the students, are featured prominently.

The Upper Elementary and Middle School students have more opportunities than the younger levels to interact with the community inside and outside of Brickton. The students participate in reading buddies with the lower elementary students, perform community service in the Toddler and Children's House classrooms, and are charged with managing their own fundraisers for trips to Nature's Classroom Institute or, in the case of the Middle School program, Washington D.C. and New York. The Middle School students take walks outside of the building for lunch; take the "L" Downtown and to other destinations in the city. The Upper Elementary students also use public transportation for their field trips. These excursions outside of the building provide teachable moments on how to peacefully and respectfully coexist with others, for example, using proper public transportation etiquette.

Another way for students to learn about equity and justice, as well as to respect differences among people, is through exposure to different communities through service learning. Each year we collect food and winter garments to donate to the Salvation Army or a local CPS school and make holiday greeting cards for military patients and medical personnel at Landstuhl military base in Germany. After the earthquake in Haiti, the Middle School collected medical and other supplies and raised money with a bake sale to support relief efforts. Our students have important opportunities to extend themselves to others who are different.