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# MONTENESSORI INTERNATIONAL

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## Food for thought

# The Children's House Earth to Table program

This independent Montessori school in Traverse City, Michigan has been using their Earth to Table program to teach the children about the importance of growing and cooking their own food as part of a healthy lifestyle. The program's **Jamie Schaub** tells us more.

## Vision:

We believe that education for all children should integrate opportunities to understand about the importance of a healthy body and mind. Through our Earth to Table program, it is our mission to offer children developmentally appropriate opportunities for physical activity, gardening, and cooking. Our vision is for every child to learn healthy practices from the start and lifestyle habits that will last a lifetime. We are hoping to create habits that will help the children lead healthier, happier lives.

## Introduction:

Maria Montessori said, "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." At The Children's House, we have established an Earth to Table program which allows children to experience nature through all of their senses.

Our program includes three curricular areas: Physical Education, Della Terra (gardening and botany) and Kitchen Classroom. We create opportunities and experiences for children to learn about the importance of good physical health through activity and by eating healthy food. By regular and consistent experiences in these curricular areas, students have daily opportunities to move, grow, and eat well. Students at The Children's House, an independent Montessori School in Traverse City Michigan, are able to dig their hands into growing and preparing the food they eat for lunch and snack each day.

A student may plant a seed in the classroom as part of a lesson and move the seed into a pot in our greenhouse.

She will tend to this plant during Della Terra, our garden classroom, and harvest it for use in our kitchen classroom. Finally she will eat it for lunch.

As a celebration of the love and labor put into our gardens and greenhouse throughout the year our school families and community members come together to enjoy a Harvest Dinner in the fall. Our classrooms are buzzing with chopping, slicing, harvesting and cooking during the week of the celebration. Everyone in the school is surprised and grateful for all that we are able to produce and enjoy during this dinner.

## Della Terra:

Students have daily opportunities to be a part of our gardening program. There are a variety of activities that our students engage in including planning our garden, selecting the plants they will grow, preparing the garden and greenhouse for planting (tilling, cleaning, raking), planting, caring for plants (watering, mowing, thinning),



Working the apple press to make cider for the Harvest Dinner.



harvesting, washing, preparing, cooking, and serving.

## Kitchen:

Students spend time preparing snacks and meals for themselves and their friends in our Kitchen Classroom. Often times they will also harvest crops in order to use them as ingredients. Our students are a part of the entire process from washing, to chopping, slicing, dicing, rolling, stirring, cooking, and serving.

## Physical Education:

Our school offers daily physical education classes for our students. We are just one of three schools in the state of Michigan offering daily Physical Education. Students learn how to keep their physical body healthy with daily exercise and they also engage in lessons related to their mental health.

## Integration:

Our Earth to Table program includes our physical education classroom, which teaches students about healthy minds and bodies with lessons on emotions, exercise, nutrition,



citizenship, grace and courtesy. In the kitchen, students gain an awareness of where food is sourced, they help in the planning of meals, utilize math skills for multiplying recipes, gain an understanding of nutritional content of foods and, of course, learn how to cook. In Della Terra, our gardening program, students learn to grow the food we eat from seeds to harvest and back into compost. Our program creates a full circle from the earth to the table.

We encourage art as a form of reflection on the students' experiences in our Earth to Table lessons. Students express themselves through journaling, creative writing, painting, drawing, and

classrooms for help in peeling and cubing. Squash was the main ingredient. In 2012 our students harvested 260 pounds of squash which became the centerpiece for our meal. In 2013, the garden crew focused their efforts on harvesting mint leaves to make tea for the dinner. The children packaged some of the mint and gave every family a mint tea bag to take home to try. The children were proud to see all of their work culminate into a celebratory feast.

#### Why we do this:

Maria Montessori said "There must be provision for the child to have contact with nature; to understand and

students' poems from our program were published in The River of Words Poetry Anthology.

#### Student Quotes:

1st grade student: "I wasn't on the lunch list for tomorrow, but after being in kitchen classroom my mouth was watering and I asked my mom to call and add me."

2nd grade student: "I like plants in our classroom because they surprise me every day."

3rd grade student: "My favorite gym class is when we use the smoothie bike; the wheat grass we grew actually tastes good!"

**Our students are learning more than where their food comes from, they are also developing an understanding of waste, they are gaining knowledge of local resources, and connecting practical life lessons to experience.**

photography. The Children's House students are able to display their reflections on our blog: [earthtotable.edublogs.org](http://earthtotable.edublogs.org)

#### Harvest Dinner:

We are a school striving to make a connection between the food the children eat and where it comes from. Throughout the year our students learn about seasonal eating directly from our gardens. What we grow dictates what will be on the lunch menu each month. The highlight of our seasonal eating occurs in early October at our annual Harvest Dinner. This is a gathering to celebrate all that we have grown and harvested throughout the year.

This year, more than 200 people gathered for our Harvest Dinner event. The majority of the meal was sourced from the school's own gardens and greenhouse, while the remaining ingredients were sourced from local farmers in Northern Michigan.

In the week leading up to the Harvest Dinner, the kitchen was buzzing with lists of tasks, chopping and more chopping which moved into the

appreciate the order, the harmony and the beauty in nature." We are raising fit young people by helping our students learn how to care for themselves, encouraging healthy, sustainable lifestyles. Through this we are helping to build a healthy environment and community by creating lasting relationships in the school and local community, growing citizens who are empowered to care for their environment. Our students are learning more than where their food comes from, they are also developing an understanding of waste, they are gaining knowledge of local resources, and connecting practical life lessons to experience. Our students are becoming life-long learners, who are taking the responsibility to care for our environment and their lives.

#### Awards:

Our school has received the highest Michigan Green School Award for the sixth year (as of 2014). Students have attended The Michigan Land Use Initiative Conference and a Small Farms Conference to talk about our Earth to Table program. Two of our

#### Future:

We hope to become a leader in our area for wellness programming, sharing our resources and working within our community. Additionally, we plan to produce a product that the students are ▶



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able to sell within our community as a fund raiser. We hope to create a model for other schools to engage in a program like our Earth to Table program. In the fall of 2014 we will begin a Montessori Adolescent Program in which our adolescent students will have the responsibility of making decisions related to our gardens.

**Montessori Connection:**

We are following Dr. Maria Montessori's words: "The land is where our roots are. The children must be taught to feel and live in harmony with the Earth."

Part of the elementary Montessori lessons include experiments in the 'needs of a plant.' Instead of limiting this lesson to a presentation in the classroom, our students experience this lesson with their own hands throughout the year as they dig in the dirt, plant seeds, check on their plants, water them, make sure they have sunlight, and eventually harvest and eat. Students in our classrooms continually ask to go check on their plants in the greenhouse, hoping to see

growth. They have the freedom to go into the greenhouse, and if they see the plants need attention, they tend to them.

The basis of a Montessori classroom guides children toward their own independence. We believe that an important part of being independent is taking care of our bodies. A couple of

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ways this manifests is by teaching the children to grow their own food and have an awareness of where their food is coming from. Our students prepare and cook food for themselves and their friends while learning the importance of a balanced meal. Our students are creating healthy eating habits at a young age, and these are tools they can carry with them throughout their lifetimes. They are also creating healthy exercise habits in our daily physical

education classes. We know that children need to move, so we give them opportunities to move every day. We hope that our students will learn to take responsibility for their health and live long healthy lives.

*"It is necessary to have the child exposed to the vivifying forces of nature, it is also necessary for his psychological life to place the soul of the child in contact with creation, in order that he may lay up for himself treasure from the directly educating forces of living nature. The method for arriving at this end is to set the child at agricultural labour, guiding him to the cultivation of plants and animals, and so to the intelligent contemplation of nature."*

**Maria Montessori**

Maria Montessori asked, "how often is the soul of man- especially that of the child- deprived because one does not put him into contact with nature?"

For more information about The Earth to Table Program at The Children's House Independent Montessori School in Traverse City, Michigan: Email: [earthtotable@traversechildrenshouse.org](mailto:earthtotable@traversechildrenshouse.org); Blog: [earthtotable.edublogs.org](http://earthtotable.edublogs.org); Video: [vimeo.com/76786311](http://vimeo.com/76786311)

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