Montessori of Macon’s Mission
“To Educate the Whole Child for a Whole World.”

By the whole child, we mean the social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of being human. By nurturing the wholeness of our children and fostering respect for each other, nature and community we prepare them for a life of continued joy that will contribute positively to a whole world.
Wow … the 3rd session of school! In many ways it feels like those words should fully paint the picture of all that has gone on over the past 9 weeks. Only 9 weeks? Yes, it really has only been 9 weeks since we came back to school in January.

The winter break historically feels like the least restful break for our entire community, adults and children alike. Between holiday festivities, family gatherings, travel plans, visiting relatives, lots of sugar and different routines it is no wonder most of us did not get much rest over the winter break. As we came back to school in January, I visited our classrooms checking in to see how everyone was settling in. I remember one particular day, the first week back, when I was visiting one of our primary classrooms. As I entered the classroom, I quickly noticed an almost silent classroom with productive, engaged, working children. It was obvious by the focus and work of the children they were all extremely happy to be back to school and back to their familiar routine! Ahhhhhh the beauty of routine and consistency was truly felt around the classroom. We all enjoy visiting with family and experiencing new things, however there is definitely something very centering to us as humans to find our familiar routine once again.

From there, the session truly took flight! January brought us many classroom conversations about MLK Jr. and other peacekeepers around the world. After celebrating MLK Jr., our students became quickly involved in selecting, practicing and preparing their lesson for Tour of Lessons. Our students work very hard to refine their presentations and are always appreciative of parents taking the time to stop by their “station” to be given a lesson. It was a great night of parents seeing lessons by their own children and also having the opportunity to visit new classrooms around our campus. We wrapped up January with our annual Open House for new families. This year we had the largest turnout with 36 families attending our Open House!

For our upper elementary, middle school and high school students, the highlight of session 3 is always the Valentine’s Dance. Everyone at the dance, students and chaperones, have a fantastic time. If you are ever in need of making up some Parent Power hours … volunteer to chaperone! You will have a great time, see some awesome dance moves and might even end up on the dance floor dusting off your electric slide.

As we wrapped up session 3, we joined Montessori schools around the world to celebrate Montessori week. Montessori of Macon has always celebrated Montessori week by holding our annual Peace Pole Ceremony honoring Dr. Montessori’s work on peace education. Each year our students do a wonderful job of sharing what peace means to them through song, art, poetry and more. This year was no exception!

Before you know it, we find ourselves wrapping our third nine week session and are ¾ of the way through this school year. Spring will soon be here and the break is around the corner. Just as I could feel the “aaahhhhhhh” on campus when we settled into our school routines in January I can also feel the buzz of spring arriving. Just today, I saw lower elementary students weeding their garden. Middle school students were discussing what seeds to sow and discussing the bees that will be coming soon. Upper elementary students have been planning and preparing a new garden space for their classroom. A refreshing reminder to us all that spring is a time of new growth and new opportunities. I can’t wait to see what “grows” the 4th and final session of this school year!
Valentine's Dance 2016
Time and time again I have stated the third session is always my favorite. By this time of the school year the children show a great deal of concentration throughout the work cycle. During this session we took a closer look at all there is to know about penguins and other birds. We have enjoyed reading lots of books and discovering fun facts. The children thought it was funny when they learned the daddy penguins keep the egg on their feet and use their big bellies to keep the egg warm. They also learned that all birds have feathers but not all birds can fly. It’s always rewarding to see how they light up when they learn new information.

In the classroom, there are several activities the children are able to engage with that is related to our topic. The children continue to develop their fine motor skills, hand and eye coordination, concentration, sense of order, independence, and control of movement all with simple activities they love to do in our practical life area. Also, many have learned shapes, colors, number recognition and other cognitive skills. Many of the children have enjoyed learning the difference between objects that sink or float, as well as things that are magnetic versus non-magnetic. Most importantly the children continue to develop their social skills as they engage with one another. We have been excited about Maria (Anna’s mom) reading to us in both Spanish and English on Thursday mornings. Our session has been filled with a lot of exciting activities. We are looking forward to what the fourth session has to offer.
Toddler 2
Ms. Amanda & Ms. Carla

Toddler 2 had a very busy session 3. We explored size differences and lessons on sequencing. We used logical learning opportunities to obtain this understanding. We come into the classroom, hang up our lunch box, use the bathroom, wash our hands and then we choose work. The order of this sequence of activities is understood by the children because it has been the routine since the beginning of the year. The classroom has picture matching works that reinforce the concept of sequence learning. This helps and encourages abstract thinking, for example, the dog is dirty, then the dog takes a bath and lastly the dog is clean.

We had many rainy days this session. This gave us a perfect opportunity to explore the weather and the winter season. During one rainy day we opened all the windows to the classroom and used our senses to explore the rain. We felt the rain as the wind blew it through the window onto us. We could smell the freshness of the rain. We could hear the rain as it came down onto the ground and as it hit the trees. Some children wanted to taste the rain, so we opened our patio door to open our mouth to the sky and tasted the wet rain. It was a beautiful organic learning experience for them.

We learned about the different parts of the body. We have songs and books to help facilitate this learning. We also play a form of “Simon Says.” This helps them learn to follow verbal direction, encourages listening skills and concentration. We are currently learning about zoo animals, the sounds they make and the differences between each. We are continuing our alphabet sign language every Friday and we are up to letter “N” at this point. It amazes me, how this has become such a popular activity in our classroom. The toddlers are so excited every Friday to jump right in with the letters, hand sign and sounds they make.

We had many new opportunities for the older toddlers to help and guide our younger toddlers learn self-care skills. They are eager to be the “helper” and show them the way towards independence in many areas. Right now, the older toddlers are taking a great interest in care of the classroom. They help us often with plant watering, sweeping the floor, cleaning tables and many more tasks. I love to see the toddlers take ownership in the classroom and show respect for the environment. They have learned so many things so far throughout the school year and we still have one more session to go. I’m excited to see what it has to offer us!
“...success [in music education] is bound up with the need for the production of plenty of music around the child, so that there is set up an environment calculated to develop musical sense and intelligence.” Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*

The sensorial area of a primary curriculum is probably my favorite because each activity in this part of the classroom appeals to a corresponding sense organ. The bells are among the most fascinating sensorial materials, with the aims for this work being discrimination of sounds and preparation for musical education. The lesson for the bells follows the same sequence as for other sensorial materials: recognition of differences, matching, and grading.

The children in our classroom are fascinated with the exploration of musical sound. In addition to learning simple rhythmic activities and different musical expressions, we also studied the orchestra and its different instrument families. We began to do some music appreciation by studying the famous composer Beethoven. Dr. Monty played for the children different instruments from the brass family, and Nashe's dad, John, gave a great presentation on stringed instruments with his violin.

During this session we continued with our cultural studies by focusing on Antarctica and Asia. The children learned about their landmarks, resources, wildlife, and flags. During the month of February we celebrated the Chinese New Year. Nashe's mom, Kim, was kind enough to give a presentation about this celebration. The children enjoyed learning about the Chinese zodiac, making dragon masks, monkey headbands, and re-enacting the dragon dance.

Valentine's Day was a joyful celebration for the children; they loved to share a token of their friendship with their classmates. The practical life sections of our classroom reflected this celebration by integrating heart-shaped objects and the color red. Many thanks to Dawn Lewis for all the wonderful decorations for the classroom.

In the language area, our first year students enjoyed working with sound games and other phonemic awareness exercises, while our second and third year students made progress with reading and writing.

Throughout the third session, the children learned about Kandinsky and Van Gogh, their lives and artistic expressions. The children also enjoyed experimenting in the art area with different works based on these famous painters. We are wrapping up the session by talking about presidents and famous African-American inventors.

While all this learning together was happening, the children continued to work on their individual lessons. It is a privilege to witness them becoming more independent and focused every day.
Primary 2  
Ms. Amanda & Ms. Jenny

We had a busy New Year! The older children in the classroom have been focused on their cultural studies, math, and language works. A surge of our second year students leapt into reading for the very first time! Our younger students have been working hard in practical life and sensorial as well as in our pre-language and pre-math shelves.

We are seeing lots of independence in art, as well as in other areas of the classroom at this stage in the academic year. Many young children have mastered cutting with scissors, pasting with glue sticks, and creating individual artwork in the classroom.

We worked on our Valentine’s projects, while studying the artists Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso, and Van Gogh. We made our Kandinsky artwork using chalk pastels and construction paper, where the children experimented with making concentric circles. The children got very creative with their use of hearts and decorated the classroom with them. We also created self-portrait collages in the style of Picasso. We worked with different media, such as chalk pastels. In order to beautify the outdoor/garden environment, one of our students had the idea to paint river rocks and add them to the garden area. Each child got to paint their river rocks and place them in their garden plot.

One week during the session we had many extra apples for snack, so we decided to make some applesauce in the classroom. Each child had a turn to peel and cut apples. Ms. Jenny brought her mounted apple peeler, slicer and corer, so this made the process safe and enjoyable for the children. The children enjoyed eating the applesauce they made as part of their morning snack.

The change in seasons brought up topics such as winter, winter sports, temperature (especially cold temperatures), states of matter as they pertain to water; solids, liquid and gas. We studied blubber and what types of animals have it. We learned about Antarctica and now we are studying the continent of Asia. During our study of Asia we had a parent volunteer talk about the Chinese New Year. This family shared Taiwanese currency, Chinese New Year’s decorations and talked about “good luck” related to this holiday. We will have another parent come in to share some Indian Cuisine and to talk about Indian Culture. We have had several parent volunteers in the classroom so far this year, and would like to extend a big “thank you” to all those volunteers!

The students have enjoyed learning about music and different instruments. We learned about the orchestra and had a parent volunteer come in to play the violin. Each Thursday, Dr. Monty lets us strum his guitar at the end of music. He recently brought in a clarinet and a French horn to share with us as well. We have been listening to Mozart and Tchaikovsky together as a class.

The students enjoy learning about our national holidays and national history, as it’s related to some of the political holidays we’ve had this session. We learned about Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. Conversations of peace and its importance arose as we talked about these influential leaders. We encourage and promote peace every day in the Primary 2 classroom and our students enjoyed celebrating peace with you at the Peace Pole Ceremony.
Our classroom is a place of learning. It is a peaceful place where we respect each other. Every day we work beside friends who are different from us in many ways, and similar to us in many ways. We are all friends. We are all on different levels in each of our endeavors, and we each have different strengths. The Montessori classroom is truly special. Dr. Montessori provided us with materials and lessons that give us more than any “traditional” learning system can offer. We experience this each day.

Our days, as always, have been full of working with mathematics: operations and facts, geometry and fractions. We learn to read through a variety of materials: Biome Readers and SRA’s, word study and grammar. These are our basics. “Traditional” schools learn these too, but Dr. Montessori’s methods are so much more expansive. Her methods enlarge our capabilities to do and think about math, to read and make connections with our reading. In the midst of these basics, our students are also being given “frameworks”, big knowledge about big subjects. On these frameworks they will put future facts and future knowledge for a more complete understanding of all their subjects. They will be able to make connections across their lessons and experiences. To build these frameworks, most recently, we have had the Second and Third Great Lessons from Dr. Montessori: The Time Line of Life and The Coming of Man. We follow what the scientists have found from fossils, and try to understand that they are always looking for more evidence to learn more and correct previously held theories when necessary. Amy, Ian’s mother, brought replicas of early human skulls from Mercer University’s collection to teach us many facts about the different stages of human development.

In addition to these basics, the Montessori Method of teaching children includes beautiful geography lessons: biome maps, political maps, pin maps. Our children learn about animals, plants, and people in all the different biomes of Earth. They make paper dolls, draw pictures, or sew felt dolls recreating these animals or people.

Our children’s artistic abilities grow as they learn their lessons. When recording their lessons, they draw realistic pictures of their work. Ms. Kerry has recently been teaching us a series of art lessons. We have been learning about colors, color values, and lines. Our resulting pictures are hanging around our classroom and in our entrance way. They are beautiful! We have always had musical instruments in our classroom for the children to play with their music lessons with Dr. Monty. We have recently added a Pipedream instrument for them to practice during work time, too. It is a pleasure for everyone to hear its soft notes quietly ringing.

Lower Elementary 1 is a welcoming place to be. We appreciate our time spent together.
On any given day, visitors to MOM may see students in LE 2 gathered around the classroom windows to observe and record sightings of the birds visiting our feeders. We are excited to be participating in Project FeederWatch! This is an annual event organized by The Cornell Lab of Ornithology as a way of tracking bird populations. Our observations of the birds we see are submitted to an online database that is used by scientists in their studies. We are thrilled to be participating in this big work of “Citizen Science.”

Our interest in birds stems from the Lower Elementary curriculum emphasis on vertebrates. Every LE student does a systematic study of the five basic types of vertebrates, beginning with fish and tracing the development through more and more complex organisms: fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. Last year while we were studying birds, we completed a 500-piece puzzle featuring eight different birds typical of the ones we see at our feeders. The children wanted to learn the names of each one. They soon discovered that the names we had been using were simplified. The cardinal is actually known as the Northern Cardinal, the chickadee we see is the Carolina Chickadee, our goldfinch is the American Goldfinch and so on. They enjoyed the challenge of learning all of the bird names, drawing their favorites and doing research on different species so that they could present their reports to their classmates.

Our research and reports also led us to the historic artwork of John James Audubon and the modern day society that carries his name. We have learned to appreciate the observational skills required to create the paintings of these birds in such intricate detail. Some of our classmates have tried their hands at copying one of his works. We enjoy perusing Audubon magazine and Birds and Blooms.

Our enthusiasm for birds continues to grow. We originally had one bird feeder, which was faithfully tended by Ms. Elizabeth Irwin until she handed over that responsibility to us when she retired. Last spring we added a hummingbird feeder to one of our side windows. We were surprised and delighted to have many tiny, colorful visitors there. Last fall we added two tube feeders and a tray feeder that attaches directly to the window glass by suction cups. More recently, we have put out some suet cakes. Our students are learning to identify many of the regular visitors at our feeders. We routinely see Carolina Chickadees, Mourning Doves, House Finches, Carolina Wrens, and Northern Cardinals. The American Goldfinches are just beginning to put on their bright yellow feathers for summer. Although not at our feeders, crows and hawks make regular appearance on our campus. Occasionally we see some turkeys.

Continuing their sponsorship of birds on campus, Elizabeth and Ed Irwin recently installed two nesting boxes in our wooded play area. The boxes are similar to those made for bluebirds, but their holes are smaller in order to accommodate brown-headed nuthatches. This small, non-migratory songbird is native to Georgia and has been in decline in the Southeast. The Audubon Society has made providing shelter for them a priority in hopes of reversing the trend. We are eagerly watching for them to make an appearance at MOM.

We are very fortunate to have such a wonderful environment that allows us to see a wide variety of bird life up close. It is rewarding to see how excited our students get at the discovery of a new bird and to hear them talking and sharing among themselves about “our” birds. This is the epitome of a Montessori education: to use what inspires a child as motivation for learning.
Imbedded in Session 3 is Montessori Education Week, an international commemoration, beginning the last week of February each year. In Upper El, we begin our celebration with books, stories, and discussions of the life of Maria Montessori. Our students enjoy hearing of Maria's childhood and young adult years (even if these stories have been heard before), and the many obstacles she overcame to achieve her dreams. The idea of not being admitted to technical or medical school because she was female, or only being permitted to pursue a very limited number of career paths, seems absurd and almost “unbelievable” to our modern-day students; however, they realize that only because of her unyielding fortitude, was she able to pave the way for others who would follow in her footsteps.

With that being said, Maria’s “story” is just the beginning. It is her ideas of peace and international understanding that we further explore, and how all citizens of our world can live together harmoniously. This year, each student wrote a peace haiku and developed a corresponding visual aid, representing what peace means to him or her. Our students did a wonderful job presenting their ideas at the annual Peace Pole Ceremony.

Coincidentally, prior to our commemoration of Maria Montessori, we studied the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This included his support of nonviolence, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March from Selma to Montgomery, and eventual assassination. Many students were horrified to realize the atrocities committed against people just because of their skin color. We discussed the fact that Dr. King continued his work for equality despite personal threats to him and his family. Students were tasked with creating a bi-fold to illustrate the importance of the civil rights movement and Dr. King’s work. An integral part of the project was: “How would America be different today if Dr. King and others had stopped their work due to personal threats?” One student remarked, “If not for the work of civil rights leaders, I would not have many of the friends I have today.” Here again, students recognized the benefits we gain from the hard work of the people before us.

Another highpoint of Session 3 was the annual Tour of Lessons. Our students prepared for and presented lessons from all academic subjects ranging from square roots to the water cycle to appositive phrases to squid dissections. While all visitors enjoyed themselves, our students are the ones who benefited the most from the evening. There were many jitters before parents and friends arrived. Students asked, “How will we be able to talk for 45 minutes?”, “What if someone asks me a question I don’t know how to answer?”, “What if I get nervous and forget what to say?”. However, after the presentations began, everything fell into place. Students became relaxed and the time seemed to fly by. The next day when we discussed the events of the evening, the students expressed pride and a deep sense of accomplishment. They emphasized the number of times they presented their work and how impressed visitors were with their knowledge. All students agreed that after teaching their lessons repeatedly, they definitely knew their material. It is this ownership of learning that is at the heart of Maria Montessori’s goals for educating the child.
Middle/High
Ms. Sarah & Mr. Robert

I have heard people complain that when they were in school they never learned how to do taxes, how to write a check, balance a check book, create a budget, interview for a job, etc. These are all wonderful life skills that are very important in adult life, and yet, they are often dismissed in traditional education. The students themselves have mentioned wanting to learn these important life skills.

In our Middle/High classroom as we focus on the “whole child” we are able to not only teach academics but also build important life skills. Last year, the middle school students had an economic activity where they were given a job and salary to start. From that salary they would pay bills, tuition payments, car repairs, etc. Throughout this process they would write checks to the companies, fill out deposit slips for their bank accounts, and keep an accurate and up to date check ledger. This was a great experience for the students!

This year, our high school students are learning real life skills in a different way. They just embarked on a week-long internship. In preparation for this internship, they had to find information on three potential companies where they would be interested in working. They created a professional proposal letter, a skill that will serve them well as they pursue jobs, college internships, and more. They learned how to make follow-up calls to those they had not heard back from, which helped sharpen their phone skills as well as helped them understand the importance of following up.

This preparation and planning led up to their week-long internship where they were expected to work as any other employee. They got a firsthand look at fields they are interested in pursuing, and a chance to see the reality of the work field and what it means to have a job. This experience culminated with the students writing short non-fiction stories/articles detailing the experience and reflecting on what they learned.

Life skills are also incorporated in our curriculum though electives such as: cooking, orienteering, organization, planning, budgeting funds, running a business, and many more. It is beautiful to be able to watch these students take on such independent tasks. I enjoy watching the students lead each other in PE activities or running morning meeting. I may be biased but, I truly believe that our students are learning invaluable skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives.