

moveable alphabet

Winter 2010

From the Principal

PAGE 1

Alum Explores New School

PAGE 2

Do-Si-Do at RPMS

PAGE 3

Inspiration Cafe

PAGE 3

Peace Begins with our Children

PAGE 4

Pennies for Peace

PAGE 5

Sones de Mexica

PAGE 6

Spanish Goals at RPMS

PAGE 6

Trip to Stem Cell Research Lab

PAGE 7

PAGE 7

Preschool Walker

PAGE 8

From the Principal

By Debbie Senoff-Langford

"Love is in the air" at RPMS on Valentine's Day. I'm sure the faculty and children would all agree that this is one of our favorite holidays! The thought and effort that goes into preparing for the day gives the notion of 'self directed' activity a whole new meaning! I walked in this morning to find teachers bringing in coffee for their colleagues decorated with special handmade cup cozies, valentines and breakfast treats. Many children arrived with little notes of affection for their teachers. As you walk down the toddler and preschool hallway, you'll see lovely decorated bags for valentines to be placed in by each young child. This activity can take several days by the time each child distributes their valentines. Some children have handmade their valentines and such effort is taken to write each child's name on their card as best they can. The finale is the individual class parties. Tables are decorated and little treats are shared. All in all it's a wonderful celebration.

Upstairs you can feel the energy from the moment the elementary and middle school students arrive. They only



have a few hours to go before revealing who they chose for the secret class lunch swaps. The students fill in a form with their favorite lunch items and whoever picks them (teachers also participate), prepares their special lunch. But it is so much more than the food. Boxes are decorated, notes of affection are written, little gifts are

included and no matter who you choose (it is a random pick), the children rise to the occasion. It is truly a joy to watch the children's excitement as they arrive in the morning with their little bundles of love to share with friends. What I observed as the children gathered on line in anticipation of friends

continued on page 2



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guessing who made their lunch is that it is all about the giving and less about receiving. A real lesson in grace and courtesy.

We all define community differently, but from what I see, our children have a strong sense of belonging and protectiveness towards one another. They express those sentiments differently depending upon their age, but the seeds of caring start in the Willow Room. Those seeds grow as the children do, extending all the way to our Middle School students. The beauty of our school is that there are so many opportunities to express this sense of community. It can be seen in the middle school students carrying toddlers in their arms who have fallen asleep at a dance concert, or an eight year old telling me she will help a crying preschooler down to their class. We see community in the two Cedar students who found the library so messy that they decided to call a community meeting to deal with the issue. Community is our volunteers who come to do carpool, coach basketball, prepare lunches for the Inspiration Café, Haiti projects, and art projects. It is the teachers and board who are working together on our accreditation self-study work or the mom who regularly comes to help with reading. There are too many examples to list, but as a school we always look for ways to be connected and it is through student, teacher and parent initiatives that this value is actualized.

To quote my favorite Beatle on this Valentine's Day, "Love is all you need".

In peace,

Debbie



Alumna Explores New School

by Maureen Dondlinger, Director of Development

RPMS alumna, Bridget Rundquist, took a moment after her first visit to the new school in December to answer a few questions about life after RPMS:

- What years did you attend RPMS?
1993-1998: 3-6 through 2nd grade
- What specific RPMS "works" do you remember the best and how have they helped you become a better learner in your future academic experiences?

The RPMS works I remember best are the pink tower, bead chains, the peace rug, and sand paper letters. All of these works promoted independent learning and exploration. The peace rug in particular taught me a skill that I use frequently. It not only taught me that I need to listen to the other person but it provided me with an outlet to practice that skill. The peace rug also taught me to talk out conflict and appropriate approaches to resolution.

- How did your Montessori education help you make the transition to a more traditional classroom in high school and then into the collegiate academic environment?

My Montessori education prepared me for the academic rigor of high school and college. However, coming from a Montessori background presented me with some challenges in high school. Through my Montessori education I was taught that it was acceptable to question the world around me in order to understand and in high school I had to work really hard to refine my way of questioning so it wouldn't be interpreted as disrespectful or undermining to my teachers. The methods and philosophies I was taught through Montessori education are very noticeable in the way I learn and approach my education.

- What are the top three things you learned at RPMS?

The top three things I learned at RPMS were to be responsible for myself, to take pride in my work and that my actions could affect other people, whether it was a positive or negative effect was up to me.

- What advice do you have for RPMS students?

A piece of advice I have for RPMS students is to take advantage of the experience and education RPMS is providing. It is extremely unique and the skills you learn through a Montessori education are priceless. Everyday when I'm at school, I realize that my Montessori background is the reason behind why I function and learn the way I do. If you would like a tour please contact Maureen Dondlinger at 773-271-1700 or email at mdondlinger@rpmschool.org



Do-Si-Do at RPMS

by Denise Eichorn - mother of Maude Tabak, Sycamore and Lila Tabak, Hawthorne

The Second Annual Music and Arts Showcase had a different tempo this year as RPMS held its first ever Barn Dance. Organized by music teacher Jason McKinnis, the event was a celebration of students, music, dance and community.

The Barn Dance was an extension of this fall's 1st -5th year music class emphasis on dance, particularly square dancing. "Bringing the kinesthetic element into the forefront of music instruction has brought student participation to an all time high," said Jason. The students enjoyed learning about music in a different way and made a memory game of remembering dance steps in sequence.

Rather than just have the students perform what they learned in class this fall, Jason wanted to do something as a school community. The Barn Dance was a way to celebrate what the children learned in class and give them the opportunity to share their knowledge with the RPMS community. Many parents received a crash course in dancing from their children that night!

Jason and two members of The Fantastic Toe Trippers Orchestra, along with RPMS students, played music while the gym filled with enthusiastic dancers. Jason called the dances while students taught "The Sashay", The Do-Si-Do", and "The Promenade" to willing participants. Songs included "Bring Me a Bucket of Water", "Jump Jim Joe" and "Bow Wow Wow". It was a rousing good time!

Although the Barn Dance was a brand new experience for RPMS, the event went just as Jason expected. He particularly enjoyed watching couples, friends and children connecting in a different way. It was truly a community event with people interacting, laughing and dancing. Jason summed it up, "The goal? Did you have a good time? That's it." Parent Eileen Dordek agrees. "I loved that the parents (and grandparents) participated, were silly and even foolish with our kids. We ask them to take risks all the time; it was good that we were pushed to do it, too."

For the many families who were disappointed when the music stopped, the burning question is -- when is the next Barn Dance? People are ready to tap their toes and swing their partners all over again.

zINSPIRATION CAFE

by Juju Crandall-Ritzu, Cash Thom, Sycamore
and Mia Seeley, Oak,

Once each month, students in the Oak and Sycamore classrooms are making lunches for Inspiration Café. Inspiration Café is a café and kitchen where they give free lunches to the very poor or homeless. Our classes are helping out by preparing food to give away.

On one Friday every month, around 15 kids from the 9-12 classes are doing things like washing apples, making sandwiches and putting food and drinks in bags. The parents donate the food we use to make the lunches and then also drive the lunches to the café. The actual putting together and bagging lunches takes place in the staff room. All the kids make an assembly line to make the sandwiches. Sometimes the line gets messed up in a funny way. For instance, one time some of the kids volunteering put way too much meat or cheese on the sandwiches, and then the sandwiches wouldn't fit in the sandwich bags. Another funny mistake was when people were washing apples with what they thought was soap, but was actually lotion. They had to switch to dish soap and clean off the lotion.

All the kids think that volunteering for Inspiration Café is fun. We like that we're working together and that we're helping people who need food.



Peace Begins with our Children

by Diana Rose, Oak InternAssistant

We must lay the foundation for peace ourselves by constructing a social environment, a new world for the child and adolescent, so that their individual consciences may develop. A vast education reform and above all a vast social reform are called for today.

- Maria Montessori

While our peaceful celebrations and demonstrations have been a larger theme this school year, peace education is celebrated every year in all of our Montessori classrooms. Maria Montessori believed that the establishment of a peaceful society begins with the child. She claimed that “averting war is the work of politicians; establishing peace is the work of education.” In each of our classrooms we honor Maria’s practice of Peace Education in three different areas of our curriculum: Cultural Studies, Environmental Studies and Conflict Resolution.

Upon entering any RPMS classroom it is difficult not to notice some representation of the larger world. Whether in the form of student created pinhole maps, multi-cultural artwork or signs displaying other languages, the world at large is constantly accessible to our students. For instance, in the Ginkgo Room photos of Gandhi, Maria Montessori, and Frida Kahlo greet children with the word peace written in their native languages. In Hawthorne students are presented a work called “Peaceful Leaders” where they learn about global peacekeepers such as Chief Joseph, Dr. Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama. In Redwood there is an entire wall covered in beautiful artwork from all continents of the world. Not only are they exposed visually but RPMS students as old as three years are literally handed the world to study and trace and then encouraged to explore further as they study particular countries, peoples,

languages and traditions. The cultural education we offer our students helps them to both appreciate the similarities and differences between themselves and other peoples of the world and to understand that they are just one integral part of a vast world that they must help to maintain.

Our environmental curriculum has a similar function in that it helps students realize that humans are just one small part of a complex system of sustainability. Studies of biology, zoology and botany begin in our early childhood classrooms as students learn the different parts of plants and animals. These scientific studies continue more in depth in our elementary and middle school programs where students learn about such things as plant and animal classification and the vital functions of different organisms. An appreciation for all life forms starts to solidify as students realize the ability of an ant to carry twenty times its weight or that some Red Wood trees have lived to be hundreds of years old. In helping our students understand the importance of each of the world’s organisms we also teach them to treasure and protect these same organisms.

While conflict resolution is an essential element of each level’s curriculum it takes on many different forms. At the early childhood level the emphasis is on finding peace within oneself. Students are introduced to games such as the “Silence Game” where they challenge themselves to sit as quietly and calmly as possible. In Catalpa students play Yoga Simon Says to help them achieve inner peace. In addition, children at this level begin to practice a style of peer conflict resolution that will carry on into their elementary, middle school and, hopefully, adult lives. If you walk into any one of our elementary classrooms you are likely to come across children passing some sort of stick or rock back and forth. In Hawthorne Room students sit at a special Peace table and are encouraged to speak one at a time, listen with an open mind and heart, and use “I statements” to express how they feel. Often in the younger classrooms teachers spend a lot of time modeling this practice with students but by the time students



reach the upper elementary and middle school classrooms they are able to peacefully and effectively solve their own conflicts without much adult assistance.

Peace Council is also introduced at the elementary level to resolve conflicts and discuss important issues at the larger classroom level. At the beginning of each year in Hawthorne students are invited to bring in a small item such as a bead or toy car to help decorate a "peace stick" that gets passed around at council. Hawthorne assistant Julianna Palm noted, "students will now sometimes ask to hold council. For instance, one student noticed that people were misbehaving in drama and wanted to talk about it as a class." At the middle school level council meetings are held daily to both resolve any classroom conflict and also as a way for students to share affirmations about one another. As a culmination of all of the mediation practice students encounter at RPMS our middle school students travel to either Washington D.C. or New York's UN headquarters to witness how such peace processes can be expanded to handle much larger social and global issues.

Our goal as RPMS educators is to provide our students with a well-rounded education that not only gives students a sense of the world around them but also establishes their place and importance within it. Our hope is that as our students move on to other schools, communities, and perhaps even continents they will take with them their appreciation and respect for all life and people.

Pennies for Peace

by Heidi Picard, mother of Jack Butcher, Catalpa and Hugo Butcher, Maple

Even though Rogers Park Montessori has been collecting Pennies for Peace for several years, we have only recently had the honor of meeting Sadia Ashraf, the Outreach Coordinator from the Central Asia Institute (CAI). The CAI is the organization founded by Greg Mortenson, author of the New York Times best sellers, "Listen to the Wind" and "Three Cups of Tea". The CAI has built over 120 schools throughout Pakistan and Afghanistan. Mortenson's latest book, "Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, not Bombs in Afghanistan and Pakistan", was published in December 2009.

As many of you know, Mortenson's unsuccessful attempt at climbing K2 is what landed him in the business of building schools. Sadia, during her visit to our school, reinforced that sometimes the challenges we face might, in fact, be disguised opportunities. Through his missteps on the mountain, Mortenson found his true life's work. A lesson for all of us, especially in these uncertain times. For our children, having a best friend move, feeling scared when you move up classrooms, or not getting into the high school you wanted the most are examples of choices and obstacles that can be embraced to make the most of a situation.

Sadia spoke with the afternoon classes, stressing the importance of educating girls in Pakistan, and now Afghanistan, to encourage peace through education in the region. Our students were reminded how some children have to write with sticks in the dirt because they have no pencils or paper and how some gather outside in the cold since they have no classrooms.

Then our children witnessed how the pennies they put in the jar at the front desk can help to change the world. We were shown pictures of students who looked a lot like our own students, living in remote regions of central Asia - and with a desire to learn. They saw the children building the schools they would later attend, just as the children of RPMS "build" our school through community and philanthropy. We were introduced to teachers in Pakistan, much like Nancy or Lindsay, halfway around the world. Then we saw the smiles on the faces of children with books in their hands breaking the cycle of illiteracy and violence.

I also want to mention my perspective as a parent. Our children are respectful, bright and empathetic. The questions they asked and answered were those of true humanitarians - such as a student asking why the CAI is mostly concerned about education of girls (the answer being that the educated women stay in the community to teach the next generations, while the educated boys are more likely to leave to a big city). A concerned young RPMS boy then asked if the CAI lets the boys learn too - which of course they do. Our children have a strong geographic knowledge of the region - when they were asked, "what is the tallest mountain in the world?" most hands went up immediately with Mount Everest as the answer. When Sadia asked about the second tallest mountain in the world, more than half knew the answer, K2!

The final piece of wisdom Sadia left the children with was to go home and thank their parents for their education, and to be happy and eager to learn everyday because they go to a wonderful school. Education is their gift.

Our school collected \$791.92 in pennies to present to Sadia, along with a bouquet of flowers to thank her for the work she is doing. Our Pennies for Peace collection continues today, accepting bills as well as pennies.

Sones de Mexica

by Rebecca Herman, Oak

In December, RPMS hosted the music group Sones de Mexico. Sones performed regional music and dances from all over Mexico for the p.m. toddlers and Extended Day through eighth grade students. The following is a review written by seventh grader, Rebecca Herman:

A few weeks ago, the whole school gathered in the gym to watch a performance by Sones de Mexico. This Mexican dancing and singing group entertained everyone by their funny stories, dances and cool costumes. They sang a couple of traditional Mexican songs and performed an Aztec ritual, where we greeted all of the four corners of the earth. The performers also taught us about all the cool instruments and about some of the costumes they used and their Spanish names. This group had many stories to go along with their songs, including one about a Texas mouse getting lost in Mexico and an old lady who loved to dance. All of the Mexican stories were funny, and kept everyone, even the teachers, clapping along and dancing in our seats the whole time. Several kids were even invited to come up and learn dance moves and dance around the room with the musicians. I'm glad that everyone got to participate in some way, whether it was just singing along or dancing on stage! I think everyone liked this amazing performance and are happy that they got to enjoy it.



Spanish Goals at RPMS

by Valerie Shull, Spanish Teacher

"It is difficult to imagine a job, a profession, a career, or a leisure activity in the twenty first century which will not be enhanced by the ability to communicate efficiently and sensitively with others...Possession of the linguistic and cultural insights which come with foreign language study will be a requisite for life as a citizen in the worldwide neighborhood."

At Rogers Park, students benefit from early foreign language study, beginning with exposure in Extended Day through more advanced study in eighth grade. At the elementary and middle school levels, the Spanish curriculum is rooted in the Standards for Foreign Language Learning as set forth by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages. These standards revolve around five areas:

- **Communication**
Communicate in languages other than English to express feelings, emotions and opinions and provide and obtain information.
- **Cultures**
Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices, products and perspectives of the culture studied.
- **Connections**
Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through foreign languages and recognize distinctive viewpoints only available through foreign language and its cultures.
- **Comparisons**
Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparison of the language studied and their own, as well as comparison of the cultures studied and their own.
- **Communities**
Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting, and show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

What do these standards look like in the Spanish classroom?

All students attend Spanish classes which meet three times per week at the 6-9 and 9-12 levels, and four times per week at the 12-14 level. In 6-9, children participate in songs and games while practicing communication through greeting each other and asking/ answering questions. Early comparisons begin with looking at the alphabet in English and Spanish,



Trip to Stem Cell Research Lab

by Chance Hammond, Bryce Lunsky, Declan Galleher
and James Frazier, Oak

and students connect their learning of numbers with using a calendar and telling time. The 6-9 year olds participate in an introduction to Latin American and Spanish culture through independent research projects, songs, folktales, and geography lessons.

Students at the 9-12 and 12-14 levels participate in practical life classroom simulations such as shopping and visiting a restaurant. Afterward, these students head out into the community to practice their Spanish language skills at a local market and restaurant, in which their ability to use vocabulary, numbers and math in Spanish are tested. These students continue exploring Latin American and Spanish culture through cultural research, presentations, literature, art and food. They also attend field trips to places such as the National Museum of Mexican Art and Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theatre.

In 12-14, students have an introduction to issues related to immigration and cultural identity as well as a study of literature by prominent Hispanic writers such as Carlos Fuentes and Sandra Cisneros. Cultural studies become more in-depth and specific and comparisons between cultural beliefs and practices are made. At these levels, students draw on their own English language grammar lessons to inform their comparison of language usage and grammar in Spanish. This year, 12-14 year old students will participate in a pen pal program to use their Spanish to connect with students from Latin America and Spain.

All levels of the elementary Spanish program are driven by a curriculum called "Viva el español", which was both written by teachers who are well versed in second language acquisition and endorsed by ACTFL as incorporating the five standards areas. At the 6-9 level, this curriculum is supported by Montessori Spanish materials which create a hands-on, self-correcting work in each classroom.

Many RPMS graduates go on to further Spanish study in high school and college and participate in study abroad programs. With their experiences at RPMS, we look forward to seeing these young adults as bilingual citizens of a worldwide neighborhood

On November 12th, the Aspen room students had the opportunity to go and tour Dr. John Kessler's Stem Cell Research Lab at Northwestern University. The 7th grade boys (Chance, Bryce, Declan and James) took the opportunity to go to the lab as an educational field trip. The lab was in downtown Chicago.

At the lab, we learned about stem cells. One of the uses they have is repairing the spine after spinal cord injuries. In order to test the effects of the stem cells, they sever the spinal cords of mice and use the stem cells to allow the mice to regain use of their legs. The needles they use to inject the stem cells into the mice's back are about a tenth the size of a human hair. We saw a video demonstrating exactly this.

We found the testing portion to be very interesting, and we were glad to find out that they take very good care of the mice. The people working at the lab often have to stay up full nights to help the mice urinate by squeezing their bladder because they are numbed, and to constantly check up on the mice's well-being.

They also use the stem cells to cure disease. Some of these diseases are: Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

In conclusion, we learned about modern technology, the many uses for stem cells, and we had a great time.

QUETZALCOATL - AZTEC GOD

by Sebastian Vondrak, Sycamore

According to ancient Aztec religion, it took the gods five times to create the world because of fighting between the gods. Quetzalcoatl (the plumed serpent) got bones from the under world and added his blood to bring them to life, creating the world. He also introduced cocoa beans to the humans.



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Preschool Walker

By: Skyler Arden, Sydney Baer and Mikey DeFilippis, Oak ,
and Jacob Herman, Sycamore,

One of the jobs the 9-12 students do is Preschool Walker. Each morning, students in the Oak and Sycamore rooms go downstairs and walk the 3-6 year olds to their classrooms. There are lots of good stories that come from being a preschool walker. Last year there was a little boy who always carried a backpack with nothing in it. Another kid always wanted to hold your hand.

“I think that the 9-12ers are a good influence on the 3-6 year olds.”
- Mikey DeFilippis

At the beginning of the school year, a lot of the kid in preschool don't want to go to school and they get sad and miss their parents. We like to talk to them and make them feel better. Some of them are shy, but some of them love it when we talk to them and ask about their day and what classroom they are in. They also love to talk about the toys they bring in for favorite toy day!

“It is great to see all of my old teachers downstairs when I take the little kids to their classrooms!”
-Jacob Herman

Overall, being a preschool walker is a lot of fun. All of the sweet little kids are there and the teachers really appreciate our help.