

Spring Is Here How Will the Children Know?

by P. Donohue Shortridge

The child who has felt a strong love for his surroundings and for all living creatures, who has discovered joy and enthusiasm in work, gives us reason to hope that humanity can develop in a new direction.
M.M. Education and Peace, p. 58

Montessorians understand that children cannot feel a strong love for their surroundings without a concrete exposure to it. Daily visceral experiences beget knowledge, which begets joy, which begets love.

Here are some suggestions, some enticements to awaken their discovery and focus their attention:

Observe everything, even the smallest changes. At line time, tell a simple quick story, "This morning when I went outside at my house, I noticed that there are green shoots on the branches of my ash tree." As always, be sure to use specific words and correct names.

Look out the window of your classroom. Make a statement about what you see and then pose a question without giving an answer: "Oh look, there is the robin making her nest. I wonder what materials she is using?"

Provide infants a blanket under a tree upon which to lie so they can feel the air moving through the natural environment.

Put snack outside on a warm day.

Extend the distance of the toddler walk. Stop and smell the air and the awakening flora. Look up for nests and down for tracks.

If it's been awhile, refresh your window washing work, even a new towel will draw the children to it.

Tell parents that their children will be going outside in the rain, then go.

Know and name all the trees, bushes, flowers, plants and animals on your campus as well as on your walks in the neighborhood. As Montessorian Nimal Vaz says, "The adult is to be the intelligent guide." We don't preach or teach, but rather notice, name and ponder. "I wonder if there are any new buds on the Hawthornes?" Older children could make name cards for the trees, do leaf rubbings and match to the botany cabinet. They could measure and chart the growth of the leaf. You could do a same-and-different game with trees, bushes and plantings. "How many trees just like this one do you see?" or "Find all the bushes that have leaves just like these."

P. Donohue Shortridge

Enthuse your parents with your love of nature, e.g. in your newsletters, on your white board, in e-mail blasts etc. include a sentence about something on nature. For those parents who need reasons why their child needs nature, feel free to print my article, "Children in Nature, Why it Matters" which is on my website, under Articles for Parents. Provide books in your parent library on the importance of nature, like Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*.

Bird watching, bird identifying and bird feeding. Can you name the birds in your locale?

Dirt digging and dirt transfer on the playground. Wheelbarrows, shovels, trowels, sifters and buckets, yes. Add water if you dare! Mud matters.

Flower arranging using real flowers. This is important all year, but especially right now. The children will associate the flowers they see, touch and arrange with what they notice in gardens. Find a free or discounted source for daffodils, tulips and other spring flowers. (Ask your local grocery store floral manager to save her about-to-be-thrown-away flowers for you; also funeral homes and florists. Perhaps ask a parent to take this on.)

Plant something. Plant it outside as soon as you can or start it inside and then transplant it when it's warm enough.

Plant food.

Plant something fragrant like lavender or rosemary.

Refresh your nature shelf and also put items from nature in various spots around your classroom, e.g. an interesting piece of bark set out on a one-person table.

Here's a fine book on the subject of nature projects for young children – not Montessori, but can be adapted: *Small Wonders, Nature Education for Young Children*, by Linda Garrett and Hannah Thomas

If you haven't already done so, move some of your individual tables up against the windows.

Break some regulations and get pets into your environment. Have visiting pets at the least. Don't forget the invertebrates, e.g. snails, worms and spiders.

Put together a weather station on a table by a window in your classroom. This you want to have all year round. The seasonal change quickens at this time of year, so provide binoculars, a clipboard, maybe some nature items, a related book or two and perhaps art supplies for the children to draw what they see. For EC, be sure to make it a one-person work with a clear lesson on how to use this space. Take it outside too! Elementary students can be expected to write observation reports, chart temperature fluctuations, measure the humidity, etc.

Germinate lima beans, taking pictures or drawings at every stage, then put the pictures in a basket for the children to seriate.

Take the botany leaf cabinet outside once the leaves fill out on the bushes and trees on your campus and do a matching work.

Refresh your book corner to include books about spring. See book list below for suggested titles. Yes, some books on the list are specific to Colorado; your local bookstore surely has books for your region.

And then there is the Decorah Eagle project: <http://www.ustream.tv/decoraheagles> Part of the Raptor Resource project, check it out. They have affixed a hidden camera right up to the nest in Decorah Iowa. There are lights on at night too so you can really see (eagles can't see the lights, so they are not disturbed). If you are an elementary classroom you might have this video as part of a unit you are doing, but for all of us, we can celebrate the wonder every day. I have this URL on my bookmarks bar and check it out first thing every morning, for the last three springs now. As I write this early in the morning on March 4th, mom eagle sits on her three eggs in the snow-covered nest! Egg number three arrived two days ago!

Finally, get outside yourself over the weekend and evenings, observe closely, then be sure to come back to the classroom to tell short stories to the children of what you saw. "Yesterday, when I was on a walk in my neighborhood, I saw . . ." Be sure that your language reflects your awe and wonder at life around you. The children will rightly believe you are referring to them.

P. Donohue Shortridge



Books for Spring
(rev. 3/14)

Floppers and Loppers. Stan Tekiela

Little Colorado. Denise Brennan-Nelson and Helle Urban

Who Pooped in the Park? Gary D. Robson

My First Day, What Animals Do on Day One. Steve Jenkins and Robin Page

Wolves. James Maclaine, Illustrated by John Francis and Kimberly Scott

Paws and Claws. Stan Tekiela

A, B, See Colorado, An Alphabet Book of the Centennial State. Claudia Cangilla McAdam. Photography by John Fielder

Animalogy: Animal Analogies. Marianne Berkes, Illustrated by Cathy Morrison

Owls. Valerie Bodden

Born Wild in Colorado. Wendy Shattil and Bob Rozinski

Big Tracks, Little Tracks, Following Animal Prints. Millicent E. Selsam, Illustrated by Marlene Hill Donnelly

Who Pooped on the Colorado Plateau? Scats and Tracks for Kids. Gary D. Robson, Illustrated by Robert Rath

Bumblebee. J.V. Wilson, Illustrated by Adrienne Kennaway

Hi, Koo! A Year of Seasons. Jon J. Muth

Weeds Find a Way. Cindy Jenson-Alliott, Illustrated by Carolyn Fisher

Nest. Jorey Hurley

The Reason for a Flower. Ruth Heller

P. Donohue Shortridge is a Montessori consultant, conducting staff development sessions and parent night talks. She is also the creator of the DVD, *Aidan's Muddy Adventure*, illustrating to parents the ease with which the young child adapts to his natural surroundings. <http://www.pdonohueshortridge.com>

P. Donohue Shortridge



© 2014 P. Donohue Shortridge

fostering the authentic life of children and their families in the American culture

P.O. Box 2888 · Littleton, CO 80161-2888 · 303.378.0253 · pds@pdonohueshortridge.com · www.pdonohueshortridge.com