



## General Introduction

Our decision to apply for this grant was based on the fact that emotional intelligence, interculturality and positive diversity are considered some of the key strengths and core values of both our Preschool and Elementary programs. We strongly believe that choosing to actively teach these concepts offers students concrete, crucial skills and abilities that will benefit them in our increasingly digital and global work, and empower them to lead positive lives as individuals and as members of their communities. With the rapid changes communities and societies have undertaken in the past century – changes that are only accelerating – we can no longer have the information and insights to prepare our students for their place in the world to come; instead, we must strive to equip them with the abilities, skills and intelligence to shape their place themselves.

Those skills must specifically include:

- Maintaining an attitude and motivation for lifelong learning
- Emotional intelligence and awareness of oneself and others
- Foundation of interpersonal and intrapersonal values including peacefulness, kindness, respect and integrity
- Well-developed executive functions and control of own behaviour
- Positive attitude towards diversity, a curiosity about our differences and ability to see them as strengths of a group rather than issues to eliminate

As such we welcomed the opportunity of support to further develop and grow our curriculum in this area, as well as the chance to share it with other educators and students.

## Approach to the Grant Work

### Team Discussions and Preparation

Before beginning work with the students, we sought input from the teaching team as a whole; given the significant infringement of the project on class time, we believed it critically important that the project be embraced and actively supported by the entire teaching team. Furthermore, we wanted the character, values and cultural work to be integrated and reinforced throughout the day in other lessons so that the children could apply their knowledge, which was modeled to them by the teaching team, for example:

- During Cultural, History and Geography lessons, leaning on the cultural themes of the project;
- During Writing, Debate and Drama, incorporating the themes of the project;
- In behavioural and interpersonal conflict, leaning on the values work with teacher guidance such as: “What would be the respectful thing to do in this situation?” or “How can you demonstrate responsibility now?”

For all of those reasons, the entire teaching team participated in planning, organizing and scheduling of the project curriculum based on monthly team meetings, and class teachers observed project lessons in an advisory capacity even when they were taught by another teacher, at a minimum once per month.



This preparatory and follow-up work was, we believe, critical to the success of the project and would highly recommend each school incorporating this curriculum to carry it out themselves, in a period of at least a month leading up to the beginning of the project.

We began by asking the team to formulate their own individual responses to the following questions:

- What is cultural and values education?
- What are its purposes and goals?
- Can it be carried out by an educational institution?
- Does it have immediate benefits for the student, class and society? Does it have long term benefits?
- How can we support it outside of structured lessons?

We then continued by asking the teachers to select topics to cover, ranging from values they believe would be most applicable to their classroom community to cultures they believed the students would have a high motivation for studying and understanding.

Having a diverse teaching team, many of our team members have participated in specialized character and diversity education programs and were able to share information or report on their experiences, which provided us with additional resources to draw on. Those included emotional intelligence curricula such as the Montessori Flower of Peace, the Calming Jar tool and others, which we incorporated into the program.

Although most of our staff embraced the project, we found several common lines of concerns or reluctance that we believe would be valuable to address before pursuing the curriculum work:

- Time away from academic work for students and time demands on staff, scheduling;
- Difficulty to measure and define success;
- Training and staff education, consistency between classroom and project lessons;
- Parent information and support.

The academic hours demand of the project are overwhelming, especially if expressed in a ratio relative to total academic time. In part, we chose to alleviate the concerns of the teachers by scheduling the lessons in the later portions of the day and in the afternoon, allowing for uninterrupted academic work in the productive period of the morning. This has proved to be a successful decision as the rhythm of the day suited the character of the work; the children came to look forward to it as a relaxing, creative and rewarding exercise. Towards the end of the afternoon the students were able to reflect on the events of the school day, they appreciated the creative character of the cultural lessons and their own leisurely exploration of the themes often resulted in them finding unexpected connections, and finally it was easy to lead into parent events and displays close to dismissal time.

Teacher training and education were, as previously stated, found to be a critical component of the project and we estimate a need for at least 10 hours of preparatory work and discussion, and further 10 hours of direct training for all teacher involved with the student group for the duration of the project. The full understanding, consent and support from all educators supporting the children – even if not directly involved in the project except for an advisory capacity – enabled us to integrate the project curriculum seamlessly into the classroom work and continue to reap its benefits well past the end of the project itself.



Parent involvement has been found time and time again a necessary component and predictor of student success in any educational endeavour. As such the project planning incorporated parent participation from the beginning. We notified the parent body before applying for the grant and, once it was confirmed, held a round-table session to explain the project and answer any questions or concerns the parents might have. Whilst we favour this mode of communication, we are also aware that not every parent might be able to attend, which is why we accepted submissions of questions ahead of time and send a record of meeting minutes to the entire parent body afterwards.

Following this, we incorporated information from the project work into our weekly newsletters, included project work into the students' take-home portfolios and invited parents to actively attend and actively participate in performances, events and festivals in the school throughout both school years. These proved to be not only a wonderful educational opportunity but also popular social and community-building events, regularly attended by about 50% of our families (depending on type and timing of each event). Besides this, we also scheduled dedicated Parent Association meetings once per term throughout the first year to continue to address parent queries and maintain parent connection to the project.

### Structure of the School Year and Themes

Following the structure for cultural curriculum of Maria Montessori's method, we began each school year with general lessons designed to give children a perspective and overview of our world that acts as a framework to place and connect further cultural topics.

We chose to incorporate the Cultural Curriculum into the geography curriculum of the Montessori system. Using materials and set lessons, the children learn to identify and geographically place the continents and reinforce the lessons with a number of follow up activities of cutting, colouring and creating their own maps; Elementary students are introduced to the Cosmic Education and receive Great Lessons starting with the literal beginning – the Big Bang. They study atlases and maps and receive impressionistic lessons about the different places, climates and biomes that can be found on the different continents. They learn to find their own home on a map of the world and are led to cultivate a joyful curiosity about all the other parts of our Earth.

Similarly, Values Curriculum was integrated into our Character Education and Grace and Courtesy Curriculum, which is interwoven into the entire school year in both Preschool and Elementary groups, not only in specific lessons and activities but also as a guiding principle applied whenever we work with conflict, student issues and similar.

To offer the children the opportunity to connect with the curriculum and feel ownership of the project, we began each school year with dedicated class meetings (in Elementary) and Circle sessions (in Preschool), guiding discussions during which the children had the opportunity to share their ideas and express which values or social norms and rules were important to them, and which cultures they knew or were motivated to learn more about. During the discussion, the guides encouraged the children's insights by asking questions such as:

- In the character education modules:
  - What is important to you in a friend? What behaviours and actions do you like from others?
  - Why do we care to make the classroom a good and peaceful place for everyone?
  - Are there right or wrong ways to act? What does that mean? Who decides what's wrong and what's right?



- How can you help someone who is struggling? How would you like others to help you when you are struggling?
- How does it make you feel when someone helps you? How does it make you feel to help others?
- What are some things that might happen in the classroom that you don't like?
- What kind of rules can we set in the classroom to prevent them happening?
- In the cultural education modules:
  - Do you know people who do things differently than you and your family?
    - Eat different food? Dress in different clothes? Speak different languages? Celebrate different holidays? Have different manners/grace and courtesy? Etc.
  - These are some of the aspects that create a culture. Do you know some different cultures? Have you visited a place where most people share that culture?
  - Can the weather in a place change a culture? Can the way nature is in a particular place change a culture?
    - For example, highlight clothing differences in hot and cold climates, or cuisine differences of sea-faring and inland peoples.

Through this discussion, we intended to lead the children to key understandings:

- Values module:
  - Social rules are a set of rules designed to make the community and society a safe and good place for everyone;
  - Values form a set of guidelines to our behaviour that help us function within the community; their importance is not in the habit, but in the purpose they fulfill.
- Cultural module:
  - All humans across the globe share universal humanity, fundamental needs, and deserve respect and dignity;
  - Cultural differences developed from time-and-place specific challenges, resources, or other factors;
  - Cultural differences are not “better” or “worse” but value-neutral.
  - Cultural study is a valuable learning opportunity that not only enriches our worldview but helps us understand our own culture and ourselves better.

Following that, we set general monthly major “umbrella” themes (such as China, or Respect), with a weekly sub-theme of a particular aspect (such as festivals, customs, or situations or environments).

The beginning of each module was spent with a general introduction:

- finding the geographic location of the culture being studied and identifying basic aspects, such as the language spoken or the major belief system;
- identifying and defining the value, and finding ways for the students to connect with it and concrete examples of its meaning

The last two to three lessons were spent in review and presentation of the children's work. Public presentation – such as a family festival, parent presentation or a display in the school's hallway – were key to further encourage children's ownership and connection with the curriculum.

The themes were scheduled in advance, either set before the beginning of the school year or a term ahead of time, to coincide with calendar events, field trip opportunities or other happenings that will enrich the curriculum. Special focus was given to possibilities to integrate Values and Culture by



highlighting connections between both major topics. We found it less important to provide a systematic, structured study, and instead more rewarding to make sure there were rich enrichment opportunities and experiences that allowed the students to connect with the curriculum in meaningful ways and receive a wealth of sensorial input, particularly in the Preschool program. For example, the China module should be scheduled to coincide with a festival such as the Chinese New Year, during which children can create their own dragon parade and enjoy lessons and activities connected to the traditions of the celebration. Meanwhile Respect is an integral and highly prized value in Chinese culture and this can be brought to the students at the same time.

It was very rewarding to identify resources of the student and parent body and special attention should be paid to cultures and ethnicities represented in it, or to parents whose career or skills connect to, or embody, a particular studied value. Oftentimes the families will be more than happy to actively participate in the curriculum: for example, a Polish student presenting their folk dress and music, or a Vietnamese family explaining the meaning of their family altar. The other students directly learn to view the differences of their classmates as something valuable and special, and it encourages the classroom community to seek out and express specific applications of their values, or study each other's differences rather than see them as basis for rejection. Furthermore, we found it important to include the majority mainstream culture – so, in the Czech Republic, focus for example on the Christmas celebration – to make it clear to all students that their own customs, celebrations and habits are one of Earth's many diverse cultures and not a "default" against which to measure others; and we avoided the value of „tolerance“ as we do not find it valuable in diversity education.

### Character of Lessons and Structure

To present the curriculum in an appealing, age-appropriate manner, a number of different styles and techniques were utilized. Rather than direct instruction from the teacher, focus was placed on experiential methods and the children's active participation. As such, each weekly module was set to include:

- Guided reading and storytelling
- Art projects and activities
- Music and movement opportunities
- Elements of drama, role play and presentation
- Supporting follow-up work in worksheets, word games and activity sets

Additionally, field trips and out-of-classroom experiences were valued and prioritized as a part of the integrated curriculum. As such, if an unplanned opportunity arose they held precedence over other parts of the lesson plan.

In the first stage of the project, lessons were presented in two large weekly blocks. Based on the experience gained, in the second year of the project we switched to shorter daily lessons. This allowed us to keep the children's sustained attention, encourage them to seek connections to the curriculum during normal daily activities, and limited loss of engagement from children due to a day's absence.

Most lessons, but not necessarily all, should include an introduction connecting the activity to the overall curriculum. This introduction should be very brief for the Preschool age group: a few sentences are sufficient. Story or narration accompanied by photographs, artifacts or a short video is preferable. With Elementary, introduction should still be limited to several minutes.



In the mixed age environment of our classrooms, the maturity and participation of the different age groups must be considered; this may not be as much of a consideration in age-segregated education but the relative diversity of the classroom groups should still be a factor in lesson preparation, especially in the preschool area. Each lesson should have an “extension” of increased complexity for the oldest students, who should also receive the most guidance from the teacher in terms of connecting to the overarching curriculum. However, the youngest students must similarly receive sufficient stimulation and engagement, knowing that whilst they might not understand the lesson fully, they must still find developmental and education value in the activity itself (for example, in the Primary program, the fine motor benefits of creating an art project).

As such each lesson should be considered as a layered complex system that all children are able to participate in and benefit from according to their level of development and maturity. Furthermore, in accordance with the Maria Montessori guiding principles, we believe that in any work with the child the teachers must be prepared to seek out and encourage the children’s own inventiveness, motivations and activity, and bring flexibility to the lessons when the situation does not follow the set plan.

This is especially apparent in Values work. If, for instance, the lesson was originally intended to cover the topic of Honesty but an unexpected, spontaneous occurrence in the classroom can lend itself to a demonstration on Kindness that had been the topic two months prior but the children are interested in and can connect immediately to their situation, the teacher should be ready to take this opportunity and deviate from the original plan.

## Preschool Program

### Introduction

Both Cultural education and Values work are key elements of our Preschool curriculum as they are important skills to introduce and develop within this age group. Preschool students are beginning to develop an understanding of the world around them as well as social structures within their group. Due to this, the Cultural and Values themes of this project were ideal for our work with the students.

Circle time discussions served as an introduction to each theme or sub-theme. These circle time sessions allowed the teacher to open the discussion and guide children through questions, telling stories and sharing information. Through these sessions, children were encouraged to explore their ideas and hear about their classmate’s ideas, deepening their understanding.

### Cultural Work in the Preschool Program

In our Preschool classrooms,, students are exposed to a diverse community of classmates and teachers. As an international school, we strongly believe it is our responsibility to nurture an awareness and understanding of multiculturalism, one that fosters respect, positive appreciation, and a global world view.

The set Montessori lessons focus on geography and culture, exposing children to the world around them. They are introduced to the continents, countries and geographical information through globes, puzzle maps, geography folders and other Montessori materials. Montessori language activities such as matching, sorting and labeling activities offer relevant images and vocabulary. The aforementioned lessons provide concrete experiences to the children while group discussions and activities offer a broader, more abstract view. For this age group, it is important to provide both so that children can fully understand the concepts.



In addition to the general studies of culture and geography, each month we set a general monthly theme of a major culture (such as Japan, the US) and then created sub-themes based on festivals, customs or particular aspects of the culture.

### *Lesson Structure and Sample Unit*

Most of our lessons included an introduction to connect the activity to the overall theme, after which we introduce the activity. The children then have the opportunity to do independent follow-up work through activities, material lessons, worksheets and reading.

Outlined below is a sample of our Unit on Halloween, a US tradition, and Harvest, celebrated around the world.

#### *Discussions and Lessons:*

- Discussion/lesson: What is Halloween? How is Halloween celebrated?
- Discussion/lesson: How is Halloween celebrated?
- Discussion/lesson: What is Harvest?
- Discussion/lesson: Why is Harvest important?
- Discussion/lesson: How can we celebrate Harvest?
- Guided activity: Pumpkin washing
- Guided activity: Art Collage using seeds and grains (apple seeds, corn, barley, etc)

#### *Independent Activities and Follow-Up Work*

In addition to the guided lessons and activities, students have many opportunities for independent work and follow-up activities. These included:

- Pumpkin washing (set up to wash a small pumpkin)
- Paper Jack-o-lanterns
- Dress-up Paper Dolls with costumes
- Halloween colouring sheets
- Halloween worksheets
  - number recognition (for students who are ready)
  - word match (if students are ready)
- Sorting Corn Kernels
- Nomenclature cards matching and labeling fruits and vegetables
- Nomenclature cards matching seeds and plants
- Reading books about Halloween, Harvest and Planting

#### *Classroom Halloween Celebrations*

Each Preschool classroom had a Halloween celebration with children and teachers dressing up in costume. Students were invited to share their costumes with their classmates and then they went on a „trick-or-treat“ parade around the school. They also enjoyed some traditional halloween snacks and activities, such a bobbing for apples.

#### *All School Halloween Event:*

We celebrated Halloween as a school community with a “Family Fun” afternoon. The entire community was invited to wear costumes and we had a wide variety of arts and crafts projects related to Halloween. In addition, families had the opportunity to carve Jack-o-lanterns to take home. A number of seasonal snacks were also provided.





## Values Work in the Preschool Program

In our Preschool classrooms, children are introduced to Grace and Courtesy lessons classrooms as they have a need to know and understand social structures to be more at ease. These lessons give the children the vocabulary, actions, and steps needed to build awareness and responsiveness of those around them. We also utilize Emotion coaching and Emotional Intelligence activities to further guide our students in understanding their emotions and how to apply that understanding to peer relationships and conflict resolution.

We rely on large and small group discussions for much of this work, including role-play, dramatic enactments and guided conversations. Individual projects through independent work, art work and reading, allow students to continue to explore the topics on their own. We also sought out ways to further reinforce lessons through field trips and workshops.

## Lesson Structure and Sample Unit

As with the Cultural project, most of our lessons included an introduction to connect the activity to the overall theme, after which we introduce the activity. The children then have the opportunity to do independent follow-up work through prepared independent activities, reading and stories and guided conversation.

Outlined below is a sample of our Unit on Respect and Appreciation for Nature:

### *Discussions and Lessons:*

- Discussion/lesson: What does it mean to respect and appreciate nature?
- Discussion/lesson: Why should we respect nature?
- Discussion/lesson: How can we care for our environment around us?
- Role-play: ways to respect and appreciate the environment
- Art work project using recycled materials

### *Independent Activities and Follow-Up Work*

In addition to the guided lessons and activities, students have many opportunities for independent work and follow-up activities. These included:

- Read stories about respecting nature and taking care of the environment
- Beautiful Places on Earth Nomenclature (matching and labeling)
- Puzzles: Parts of a Tree, Parts of a Flower, Parts of a Bird
- Animal Matching cards
- Art work projects using recycled materials
- Sorting items into the Recycling stations
- Colouring sheets
- Worksheets

### *Forest Exploration*

We had a series of workshops with a certified naturalist, who took the students on several extended Forest Explorations. She guided them on these forest explorations, helping them discover living creatures and plants during their trips. During the trips, they focused on different topics. One trip, they discussed the Sun and all it provides us. Then they made our own sun to place in the middle of our circle; children could then make a personal sun out of paper for themselves. Another trip they looked at the trees with their different leaves and the children explored the fact that some didn't have leaves, or that some leaves were falling. They also looked for pairs of birds and animals, looking





to see which animals we could discover together. They practiced being quiet and calm so that they could see and hear all around them.

### *Zoo Field Trip*

The children took a field trip to the Zoo to learn more about animals, how they live, and the different needs they have. The children all traveled together to the Zoo and then split into smaller groups so they could discuss with the teacher and ask questions. Following the trip, the children were invited to draw pictures and explore our language cards with animals, books about animals and nature and our various “parts of” puzzles.

## Elementary Program

### Introduction

As discussed in the previous section, it was important for our community to have a connection and ownership with the curriculum. In the Elementary age group, students are extremely focused on peer interaction, social justice and understanding and developing their moral sense. Based on this, the Cultural and Values themes of this project were ideal for our work with the students.

As we started each theme, or sub-theme, we opened with a class meeting and guided discussion of the topic. This allowed the children to share their ideas and begin to understand how they felt about the concepts being discussed. Often as we worked through the topics, students would shift their thinking or discover new feelings and/or understandings. This always led to more discussion.

Our class meetings and guided discussions were inquiry based, full of leading questions that enabled the children to explore their ideas and connect with them.

### Cultural Work in the Elementary Program

As an International school, we have a highly diverse community. We feel it is our responsibility to cultivate a multicultural education that helps develop respect, open-mindedness, and a global world view.

In our Preschool program, children are exposed to the world around them through general geography lessons. In our Elementary program, our aim is to deepen that understanding and further our students' world view.

Using the Montessori materials and set lessons, the students review their geographical knowledge and further reinforce their understanding of the world around them and its varying cultures. Large group and small group discussions and activities develop understanding while concrete material work, such as maps, flags, atlas studies and impressionistic lessons educate them about the countries, climates and habitats around the world.

Montessori Nomenclature (language) activities allow the Elementary students to learn relevant vocabulary through matching, sorting and labeling activities. Creative Writing prompts gives children freedom and space to explore certain curricula ideas. We also focused on providing a number of excellent and relevant books for the children to enjoy, relate to and research about.

In addition to the general studies of culture and geography, each month we set a general monthly theme of a major culture (such as Japan, the US) and then created sub-themes based on festivals, customs or particular aspects of the culture.



As previously outlined, themes are scheduled in advance and designed to coincide with calendar events and festivals, field trip opportunities or other happenings such as guest speakers, that will enrich the curriculum. For example, for the US module we wanted to focus on Halloween and Harvest so we scheduled the module for the fall to take advantage of this.

In addition to the group discussions and Montessori set lessons, we utilized a variety of styles and techniques including writing prompts, research projects, guided reading, Art projects, and Dramatic presentation and role play. We also found ways to further reinforce the concepts through field trips, guest speakers and workshops.

### Lesson Structure and Sample Unit

Most of our lessons included an introduction to connect the activity to the overall theme, after which we introduce the activity. The children then have the opportunity to do independent follow-up work through reading, research, worksheets, and guided activities.

Outlined below is a sample of our Unit on Springtime Celebrations around the World:

#### *Discussions and Lessons:*

- Discussion/lesson: Holi Celebrations in India
  - Story of Holi
  - Salad Spinner Art making Holi Patterns
- Discussion/lesson: Spring (weather, gardening, etc.)
  - Calendar discussion
  - Forest exploration
  - Germinating seeds
- Discussion/lesson: Easter Celebrations
  - Easter Traditions
  - Art Projects: Faberge egg
  - Dying and decorating Easter eggs
  - Classroom Easter Egg Hunts
- Discussion/lesson: Nowruz, Persian New Year
  - Story of Nowruz

#### *Independent Activities and Follow-Up Work*

In addition to the guided lessons and activities, students have many opportunities for independent work and follow-up activities. These include:

- Individual research about Holi, the Coming of Spring, and Easter Celebrations around the World
- Writing Prompts
- Worksheets
- Stories and reading
- Individual art projects

#### *All School Easter Event:*

We celebrated Easter as a school community with a “Family Fun” afternoon. We had a variety of art and craft activities related to Easter and families also had the opportunity to create spring wreaths for their home.



### *Field Trip to the Indian Embassy*

Our students took field trips to the Indian Embassy in Prague 6. They were welcomed by Indian representatives of the Embassy who served them chai and took them on a tour of the Embassy, telling the students a little bit about India. The students also got to try on Indian clothes and learn a traditional Indian dance. The Representatives answered questions and gifted each class with books about India for their classroom libraries. The visit ended with a small performance of traditional Indian dances.

The students loved the opportunity to visit the Embassy and see many beautiful art pieces, learn about Indian history and see some traditional dances.

### *Values Work in the Elementary Program*

In our Elementary classrooms, we were already offering our students Character Education as well as Grace and Courtesy Curriculum, interwoven in our full school year Curricula. These lessons serve as the guiding principle for social justice, peer conflict, and debate and discussion. We also utilize Emotion coaching and Emotional Intelligence activities to further guide our students. Taking this into consideration, the Values Curriculum seemed the natural next step for lessons and activities.

Children are introduced to Grace and Courtesy lessons in the Preschool classrooms as part of their moral development and understanding of values. In our Elementary program, the goal is to further deepen their awareness and guide them in better understanding, relating and acting within values.

In the Elementary classrooms, our focus on Values education is often through large group and small group discussions, including role-play, debate and guided conversation. Individual projects, mostly writing prompts and oral or written presentations, give students the opportunity to further explore these topics and then share their understanding with their peers.

We also utilize Montessori Nomenclature (language) activities to introduce the students to relevant vocabulary and themes through matching, sorting and labeling activities. In addition, we provide an extensive book collection on the themes for the children to enjoy and relate to. We ensured that the topics were integrated into our students' daily work through their general lessons, especially in Art and Drama. Finally, we found ways to further reinforce the concepts through field trips, guest speakers and workshops.

The scheduling and planning for themes followed the same structure as previously discussed in this report. It was important for the topics to be timely and relevant.

### *Lesson Structure and Sample Unit*

As with the Cultural project, most of our lessons included an introduction to connect the activity to the overall theme, after which we introduce the activity. The children then have the opportunity to do independent follow-up work through reading, research, worksheets, and guided activities. Outlined below is a sample of our Unit on Mindfulness:

#### *Discussions and Lessons:*

- Discussion/lesson: What does it mean to be Mindful
- Discussion/lesson: How can we practice being Mindful? Mindfulness exercise with the Calming Jar
- Discussion/lesson: Video – Just Breathe (<https://vimeo.com/114715169>) and discussion



- Discussion/lesson: End of Day Jar (reflective questions as a prompt for student discussion at the end of the day)

### *Independent Activities and Follow-Up Work*

In addition to the guided lessons and activities, students have many opportunities for independent work and follow-up activities. These include:

- Individual research on mindfulness practices
- Reflection through guided questions
- Writing Prompts
- Worksheets
- Stories and reading
- Individual art projects
- Mindfulness Task Cards (a basket with mindfulness task cards that the students can choose and follow whenever they would like. Teachers can also guide students to them as needed)

### *Elementary Art Class Project:*

To tie Art Class together with the theme for the month, the Art teacher taught several classes on Mandala art. While Mandalas have certain religious connotations, they are widely believed to help develop concentration and encourage mindfulness. We utilized this work as a way to help children relax, focus and be in the present. They all had the opportunity to create their own Mandalas

### *Inner Peace Day Workshops*

Our school collaborated with the Inner Peace Day Project (<http://innerpeace.cz/>) to bring a series of small group workshops to our students. The project leaders lead workshops discussing peace in the world, in interpersonal relationships, and within oneself. They guided the children in singing songs, looking at pictures, and learning simple exercises and techniques for inner peace. The children loved receiving messages and pictures from children who had already experienced the workshop in Paris and Berlin and happily shared their messages and pictures for the next participants in Brussels and London.

## Results

### *Observable Results in our Students*

The difficulty to measure, evaluate and define the effectiveness of the program was a challenge to us. Although we can share anecdotal perception of children using the emotional intelligence tools and skills to resolve conflicts effectively and peacefully, or showing an increased appreciation, excitement and positive engagement with the diversity of our community, we do not have hard research data to measure the success of the individual stages of the project or its components.

For this reason the recommendations we share in the document are based on in-the-moment experience with the children: the lessons and activities that we found increased engagement, lead to more follow-up and utilization. Ultimately, our entire teaching team came to view the project as a success and a valuable part of our curriculum.

### *Continued Work with the Project*

As was mentioned previously, the effectiveness or success of the project are challenging to define, much less measure and compare. However, we do believe that we have experienced positive results with the student body, the parent community and the teaching team, and although we do not plan to continue the project work in its full extent in the following school year, we will be incorporating



and integrating its lessons, approaches and techniques into our curriculum, and leaving in place a number of activities and strategies that we have used over the past years.

Ultimately the purpose of the work was to find effective ways to equip and empower students in areas of social and emotional intelligence, cultural literacy and instill attitudes of respect, positive diversity and shared humanity. Over the course of the project, we have observed children eagerly interacting with the curriculum as well as applying concrete techniques and skills in peer interaction, especially in conflict resolution.

## Additional Resources

### Emotional Intelligence Curriculum

Montessori education is already highly focused on positive discipline, helping students identifying their emotions and guiding children through conflict resolution and peer disagreements. However, as we addressed this work further via our Grant project, we realized that we wanted to even further our understanding of Emotional Intelligence.

As such, our school embarked on learning about Emotional Intelligence and how to coach students through dealing with their emotions. We relied heavily on John Gottman's work, particularly his book "Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child." Below, we outline some of the key points we utilized with our students.

Children who have been emotion-coached tend to experience fewer negative feelings and more positive feelings.

The first step to coping with negative emotions, in both yourself and others, is to figure out what they are feeling and to accept those feelings. Even if we don't accept the bad behavior that often accompanies negative emotions, we still want to send the message that all feelings are okay, even the worst ones. Terrible feelings like jealousy and fear and greed are invitations to grow, to understand ourselves better and to become a better person. When you see these "undesirable" emotions in children, think of them as opportunities to both learn more about their inner-world and—importantly—to teach them how to deal with negative emotions now and in the future.

### Step One: Label and Validate the Feelings-at-Hand

Before we can accurately label and then validate our children's feelings, we need to empathize with them—first to understand what they are feeling, and then to communicate what we understand to them. This is simple, but not always easy.

For example: Molly is feeling bad because she got into some trouble at school for talking too much in class. Kids frequently displace negative emotions onto their loving parents and caregivers, meaning that while Molly might be mad at herself, a classmate, or her teacher, it would be normal for her to displace that emotion onto me when she got home. So, when I tell her she can't have a playdate with Claire right that second, it provokes an angry fury, during which she throws her backpack against the wall I've asked her to hang it on and calls her sister a "stupid idiot" she would never want to play with "in a million years."

Instead of dealing with the bad behavior right away via a punishment, this is a terrific opportunity to accomplish the first step in emotion-coaching: validating and labeling the negative emotions.



Me: "Molly, I can see that you are very angry and frustrated. Is there anything else that you are feeling?"

Molly: "I am SO SO SO MAD AT YOU."

Me: "You are mad at me, VERY mad at me. Are you also feeling disappointed because I won't let you have a playdate right now?"

Molly: "YES!! I want to have a playdate right NOW."

Me: "You seem sad."

Through this, we have helped Molly identify and label several feelings: angry, frustrated, disappointed, sad. The larger children's emotion vocabulary is, the easier it is to label emotions in the heat of the moment. Molly also feels validated as through the acknowledgment, she knows it's okay to have felt all those "bad" things.

### Step Two: Deal with the Bad Behavior (if applicable)

Continuing with the above example, at this point, most people would just want to move on and forget about the back-back throwing and name calling. But it is very important to set limits so that children learn how to behave well even in the face of strong, negative emotions.

Choose an applicable consequence, such as a cool-down period (time-out) and make it clear that the consequence is not for the feelings but for the behavior. State that the behaviors are not okay: "It is okay to feel angry and frustrated, but it is never okay to throw things or call people mean names. When the timer goes off, please apologize to your sister and come have a snack."

### Step Three: Problem Solve

Now is the time to dig a little deeper, to help Molly figure out how to handle the situation better in the future. After we've labeled and validated the emotions arising out of the problem, we can turn to the problem itself: "Molly, did anything happen at school today that is also making you feel bad?"

Encourage the children to share about other incidents or worries they are experiencing. Relate to their concerns as best as possible, allowing yourself to empathize with the child. Discuss how the child is feeling and help them dig deeper to identify feelings they might not be able to label yet, such as embarrassed, lonely, etc. The goal is to put the child in touch with their emotions, good or bad. So, even during problem solving, it's important to label and validate feelings.

Next, brainstorm together possible ways to solve a problem or prevent it from happening again. The goal here is to stay in the role of a coach – holding back our own clear ideas and allowing children to come up with their own. When we talk about what Molly can do when she feels angry (instead of throwing her backpack, for example), she is more likely to actually try the solutions if they come from her.

This takes practice for both the coach and the child so don't get frustrated if it doesn't go smoothly the first time. Instead, keep practicing and keep the key steps in your mind: first, label and validate the emotions you see. Second, deal with misbehavior if you need to. Finally, help your child solve the problem.

### Emotional Intelligence Activities:

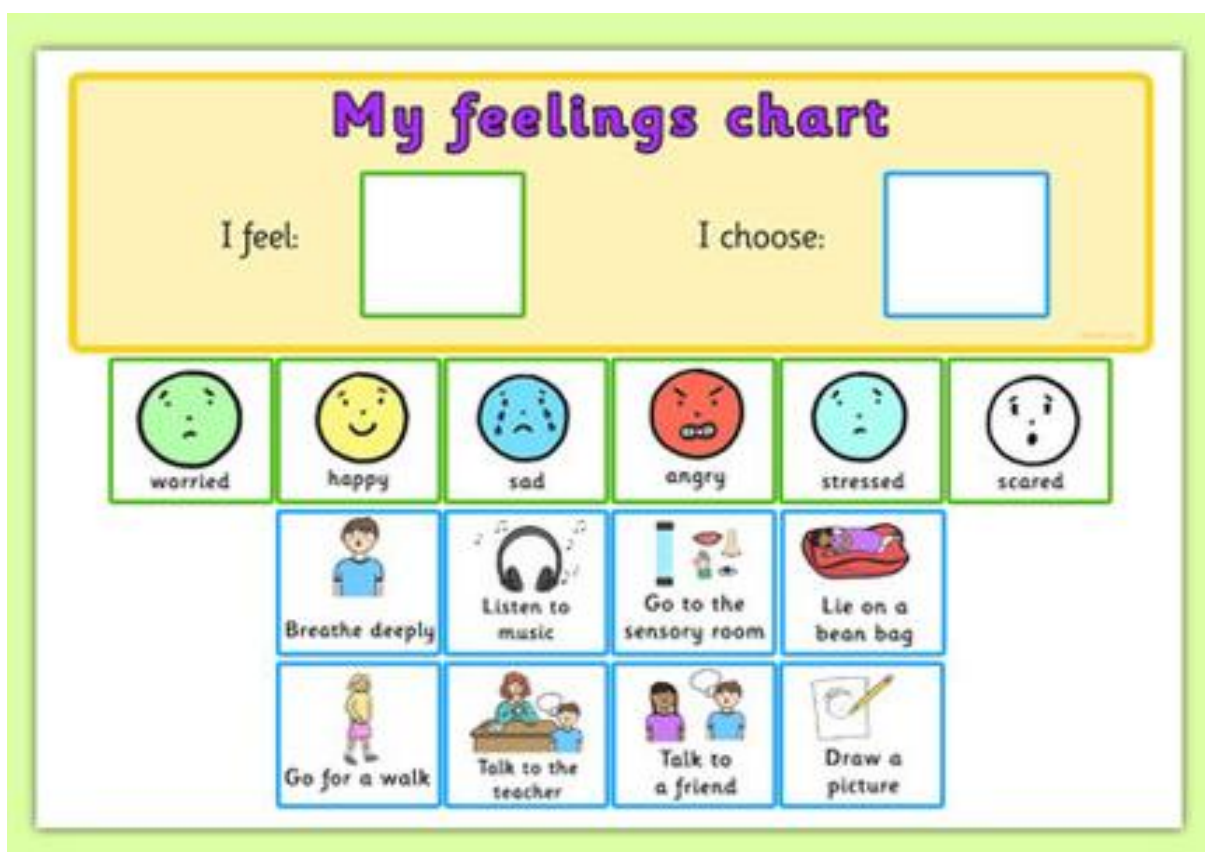
In addition to the Emotion Coaching, we also developed several specific lessons and/or activities for the children. Outlined below are some examples of lessons. Depending on the needs of your students and classroom, they can be easily modified.



### Lesson 1: Community discussion about feelings:

Gather the group of children for a discussion about feelings. Some possible questions/talking points are:

1. Let's name as many feelings as we can.
2. Name feelings that you like and feelings that you don't like.
3. What do you do when you feel happy? What do you do when you feel sad? What helps you feel better when you're feeling sad about something? What about when you are angry?
4. How do your feelings affect people around you?
5. Show Feelings Chart. Ask what they think each face represents. Place feelings chart someplace special in classroom, such as a quiet corner. Direct children to this chart when they are having a hard time expressing what they are feeling. Bring this chart to group discussions when feelings need to be talked about. You can add feelings to it yourself, or the children can.



6. Emphasize that all feelings are ok to feel. We all have them, and they are all important.

### Lesson 2: Calming Jar

Children often require an outside source to help them learn how to regulate their physiological and emotional responses to stressors. This is “learning to self-regulate”.

A Calming Jar can serve as a visual “anchor” to bring a child’s focus into one place when it may feel like their world is spinning out of control. They can shake the bottle as hard as they want and this provides calming proprioceptive input to their body while also serving as a physical outlet that is less destructive than hitting or kicking.





While they hold the bottle and watch the glitter fall, their hands and eyes are brought to midline and this can help organize and center their nervous system as well. Finally, as their heart pounds and they demonstrate fast, shallow breathing from being so upset, the slow fall of the shaken glitter can serve as a visual model that, often unconsciously, can slow their heart rate and respiration.

At first the use of a Calming Jar will likely need to be initiated by the adult. As with most calming strategies, it should be introduced to the children at time when there is no upset, so they know what it is and how it works while they are in a calm mood. Additionally, it will likely be the most effective when given to the child before they are upset, and their emotions escalate. Most calming strategies will be most effective when implemented before children get to that “point of no return”.

The presentation to the class can go something like this:

1. The jar is like our mind, and each color of glitter represents something different in our mind.
2. Let's put in red for thoughts, gold for feelings, and silver for urges to do things. (Pour in a little bit of glitter with each comment.)
3. Now we seal up the jar. (Put the lid on the jar and seal it.) Then we start our day.
4. We wake up, and things are pretty settled. We can see that clearly. (Show how all the glitter has settled on the bottom of the jar.)
5. But pretty soon, things start swirling around. Maybe we are running late (swirl the jar). Our big sister eats the last pancake for breakfast, and it leads to a fight (shake the jar). We hear scary things on the news in the car ride to school (swirl the jar). We get to school and find out something else happened to make you feel angry or even excited.
6. Now it's only a few minutes into the school day, and we can't see clearly because all our thoughts and feelings and urges are getting in the way.
7. So, what is the one thing we can do to get the glitter to settle and see clearly again?
8. Be still! And what happens when we are still? We can see clearly again. There is also no way to rush being still. We can't push all the glitter down to the bottom. We simply must watch and wait. No amount of effort will make it settle sooner.
9. When things become clear, we'll know the wise (or smart, or peaceful....) next thing to do. In fact, that's one definition of wisdom: seeing things as they are and choosing how to act.
10. While we wait, does the glitter go away? No, it stays at the bottom. Our thoughts and feelings and urges are still in our minds, but they are no longer in our way, clouding our vision.
11. Then you can find a place in the classroom to keep the jar and where children can use it when they feel they need to. Direct upset children to use the jar.

#### *Materials to Make a Calming Jar (for one jar)*

1. Empty plastic bottle that is easy to grasp
2. Small bowl
3. Whisk
4. Measuring cup
5. 1 cup hot water
6. 2 fl oz (about ¼ cup or one small container) of regular or glow-in-the dark glitter glue
7. Fine glitter in assorted colors
8. Food coloring that matches your glitter selections
9. Super glue



#### *Directions for Making a Calming Jar:*

1. Wash each bottle in hot, soapy water before using. Let dry and set aside.
2. Pour the glitter glue into the bowl.
3. Add hot water to the bowl. Use the whisk to mix the water and glue until the mix is no longer clumpy.
4. Add glitter to mixture, using the whisk to make sure that it's evenly distribute. Start with a small amount and then keep adding more glitter as needed.
5. Add one drop of food coloring in a color that complements the color of the glitter that you used. Mix well.
6. Add additional drops of food coloring until the mixture reaches your desired hue. It's fun to mix colors too!
7. Pour the mixture back into the measuring cup or use a funnel to transfer the mixture to the bottle.
8. Secure the lid and give the bottle a few vigorous shakes to test it out. Once the bubbles subside, add more hot water if you want the glitter to settle faster.
9. If you want the glitter to settle slower, pour the mixture back into the bowl and add more glitter glue. Mix well with the whisk.
10. Once you're happy with your mixture, apply super glue to the lid and tighten

#### Lesson 3: Feelings and Faces

Here are some situations that you can use at a class discussion time to allow for open discussion of feelings. You can play some game with it, or just use to start discussion. One suggestion is given below:

Give each student a card or piece of paper with his or her name on it. Tape the six emotions faces to a wall/on a rug. Then read each of these situations to your students. After reading each situation, let the students put their name card under the face that describes their feelings related to each situation. Ask the kids to explain why they feel that way. Make up situations relevant to your own

##### Situation 1

It's time for recess! You're planning to play on the swings, but when you get to the playground, all the swings are being used.

How do you feel?

What do you think is the best choice to make when you feel this way?

##### Situation 4

You're at an amusement park, next in line to get an autographed picture with your favorite character.

How do you feel?

What do you think is the best choice to make when you feel this way?

class community.

##### Situation 5

You're at an amusement park waiting in line to go on a roller coaster that goes really fast and high.

How do you feel?

What do you think is the best choice to make when you feel this way?



#### Situation 2

It's the end of the school day. Parents have already picked up all your classmates, but your mom or dad isn't here yet.

How do you feel?

What do you think is the best choice to make when you feel this way?

#### Situation 8

Your best friend invited you to a play date Saturday. But that morning, your friend's mother calls to say that your friend is sick and the play date is canceled.

How do you feel?

What do you think is the best choice to make when you feel this way?

#### Situation 3

You and your friends are playing a board game. All of a sudden your dog runs through the living room and over your game. Game pieces go flying and you lose your spot on the board.

How do you feel?

What do you think is the best choice to make when you feel this way?

#### Situation 6

Your parents are going to go out to dinner and a babysitter is coming to watch you while your parents are gone.

How do you feel?

What do you think is the best choice to make when you feel this way?

#### Lesson 4: Ongoing discussion about your own mistakes and feelings.

Point out to your class when you make a mistake and talk about it openly. Say that you can learn from your mistake and you will try to not do it again next time, if I don't want that to happen again. Create an atmosphere where it's okay and normal to make mistakes and show the class how you can be positive and learn from them.

These are just a few of the lessons that we introduced to our students and then utilized frequent in our classrooms. We found they were effective at opening discussions and encouraging our students to better understand their feelings and emotional reactions. There are many more activities to be done with students to help them identify and regulate their emotions.

#### Choosing Appropriate Books

We used books often as a way to reinforce concepts, remind students of discussions previously had and to spark discussion and interest in our children.



These days, there are a huge amount of books available on any given subject. However, it's important to choose books that will be relevant to the subject and engage the children. Here are some guidelines for choosing the right books.

#### Find Books that are Realistic or Based in Reality

Our younger students are fascinated by how the world works, what it looks like and why people act the way they do. Since young children do not yet have a clear conception of the difference between reality and fantasy, they are best served by books that either are about real things (non-fiction books) or stories that could be real (events that could actually happen, even if they are fictional). When you select books for children younger than 5 or 6 years old, make sure you pick a majority of books about the real world.

#### Choose Beauty

Select books with beautiful illustrations or photography as they will draw the children in. Illustrations should be realistic and detailed, not cartoonish and simplified. Real art illustrations or beautiful photography will add to the enjoyment of the books.

#### Look for Rich Language and Interesting Details

Choose books that use descriptive language and accurate language. Details in both the text and illustrations provide both interesting things to look at as well as things to discuss.

#### Broaden your Horizons

With the books we are choosing, we are striving to *expose our students to world* via books. Introduce a wide variety of books featuring different settings We read about different settings (cities, beaches, forests, mountains, space, the US, China, Japan...), times (pre-history, ancient times, the past century, today), different beings (animals, plants, human beings in different societies and of different ages), different types of stories (historical fiction, non-fiction, poetry). These virtual journeys around the world give us a lot to talk about—and, without an explicit effort on their part, provide children with a wonderful bounty of vocabulary and background knowledge they will draw on later in their lives.

#### Values: Recommended books for Preschool

Depending on your region and budget, you will need to select the books that best serve your program. However, these are some books that we particularly enjoyed.

- General Introduction:
  - It Could Always be Worse by Margot Zemach
  - The Empty Pot by Demi
- Mindfulness and Peace
  - I Matter by Laurie Wright
  - I Am Peace: A Book of Mindfulness by Susan Verde and Peter H. Reynolds
- Respect for Nature/The Environment
  - The Adventures of a Plastic Bottle by Allison Inches
  - Why Should I Recycle by Jen Green
- Generosity and Kindness:
  - Should I Share My Ice-Cream? By Mo Willems
  - Llama, Llama Time to Share by Anna Dewdney



### Values: Recommended books for Elementary

Depending on your region and budget, you will need to select the books that best serve your program. However, these are some books that we particularly enjoyed.

- General Introduction:
  - Whole World by Christopher Korr
  - Counting on Community by Inno Sanot Nagara
- Mindfulness and Peace
  - A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles by Thich Nhat Hanh
  - Buddha at Bedtime: Tales of Love and Wisdom for You to Read with Your Child to Enchant, Enlighten and Inspire by Dharmachari Nagaraja
- Respect for Nature/The Environment
  - Seeds of Change: Wangari's Gift to the World by Jen Cullerton Johnson
  - Rachel Carson and Her Book that Changed the World by Laurie Lawlor
- Generosity and Kindness
  - Kindness and Generosity: It Starts with Me by Jodie Shepherd
  - Lend a Hand: Poems about Giving by John Frank