LEXINGTON MONTESSORI SCHOOL

ANTI-BIAS CURRICULUM
(2004, updated 2009)

LMS aims to nurture in each student the construction of a knowledgeable, confident identity as an individual and as a member of multiple cultural groups (such as gender, race, ethnicity, or class). We enable children to have comfortable, empathetic interactions with people from diverse backgrounds. We also foster each child’s ability to recognize bias and injustice, and cultivate each child’s ability to stand up, individually and with others, against bias or injustice.

Learning Objectives and Activity Examples Include: (The four objectives listed below are adapted from the goals proposed by “Start Seeking Diversity,” Redleaf Press)

1. Nurture the construction of a knowledgeable, confident identity as an individual and as a member of multiple cultural groups (such as gender, race, ethnicity, or class).
   a. We create conditions (prepare environments) so that all children are able to like who they are without needing to feel superior to anyone else.
   b. We challenge “internalized superiority” and “internalized oppression”?
   c. We help children of non-dominant cultures develop abilities to operate in both their home culture and the dominant culture.
   d. We help children develop the ability to negotiate and problem solve when issues arise from difference between home cultures and the dominant culture

   • A child in the Toddler classroom is celebrating the Chinese New Year. Her parents join the circle time to talk about the Chinese New Year, show pictures, share food, and sing songs.
   • Children’s House teachers read “Who’s In A Family,” by Robert Skutch. They then lead a circle discussion about varieties of family structures.
   • Children’s House children explore photographs of all the class’ families, and then draw a picture of “all the people that make up their family.”
   • After reading “All the Colors We Are,” by Katie Kissinger, Children’s House children discuss where they get their skin color. They then bring their hands all together in a circle, noting the various shades of brown.
   • Children’s House children use tempera paints to mix a tint that matches the color of their skin.
   • Children’s House children use circle templates and tempera paints to create designs that resemble crowds of people in various sizes, in various shades of brown, and with various emotional expressions.
   • Elementary children gather weekly in affinity groups to share commonalities such as Hispanic heritage, Asian heritage, African-American heritage, families of divorced parents,
   • Lower Elementary students read “Oliver Button Is A Sissy,” by Tomie diPaola, and they discuss gender stereotypes.
   • Lower Elementary children learn about and build a Sukkah together to explore the Jewish holiday of Sukkoth.
• Lower Elementary students learn about calendars as human-created, arbitrary tools, studying about AD/BC and the alternative CE/BCE. They also learn about Chinese and Jewish calendars.

• Lower Elementary teachers read books about a variety of religions (“I Am A Sikh,” “I Am A Jew, etc.) and they discuss similarities and differences. They also speculate about why people have religions, and they talk about what happens when people disagree over religious beliefs.

• In the opening days of the school year, Upper Elementary students complete Learning Style Inventories to identify their individual tendencies and to celebrate the class diversity.

• Upper Elementary students discuss issues of body image and stereotyping during Life Ed curriculum sessions. A local high school student leader visits to discuss her own struggles and decisions in this regard.

• Upper Elementary students research and report on individuals living in the Revolutionary War era who were not members of the dominant culture.

• Spanish classes study the Spanish origins of the names of geographical places in the U.S. south and west.

• Spanish classes explore the geographical, historical, economic and social class similarities and differences among nations of North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean region.

2. **Promote comfortable, empathetic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.**

   a. We foster children’s interest in and empathy with difference.

   b. We counter children’s fear or judgment of difference.

   c. We help children learn to negotiate day-to-day natural discomfort, tensions, problems or conflicts that can arise from difference.

   d. We engender in children recognition of commonalities that all people share.

   • A toddler picks up a photograph and says, “My family! I have two mom’s” Another child finds her family picture and carries it over to the child and says, “This is my family. That’s my brother and my sister.”

   • A toddler approaches the book corner and sees a newly added book. He sits down and flips through the pages, viewing photographs from around the world.

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   • Lower Elementary children explore the history of writing and it’s importance to individuals of all cultures. Special emphasis is placed on how English writing came about, but children explore the use of charcoal, papyrus, a stylus on clay, and other historic methods. They also discuss the power that reading and writing
gives a learner, including how and why dominant cultures have tried to prevent oppressed people from learning these skills.

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- Lower Elementary children learn about and build a Sukkah together to explore the Jewish holiday of Sukkoth.

- Upper Elementary students use literature circles and read aloud sessions to explore lives of people of diverse backgrounds. These have included Carol Fenner’s *Yolanda’s Genius*, about the family of a widowed African American, Joan Bauer’s *Stand Tall*, about a very tall boy’s struggles against stereotypes, Roy Eberhardt’s *Hoot*, about ecological activism, Paterson’s *Lyddie*, about the poverty of a 19th century Lowell mill girl, Mazer’s *America Street*, an anthology of multi-ethnic stories of children of immigrants to America.

- Upper Elementary teachers share with students a taste-testing of items of a food group from around the world. The students learn about the similarities and differences among the various samples, and they are introduced to the histories and cultural traditions connected to each. Taste-testing consist of a banquet of rices and other grains, or fruits and vegetables from around the world.

- For an all-elementary celebration of peace, Upper Elementary students learn their lines for a play in ASL and take on cross-gender roles to “experience life in another’s shoes.”

- Upper elementary teachers orchestrate a “Hunger Banquet,” which is an experiential study of world hunger and its cause by inequitable distribution of the world’s food. The dynamic role-play includes changes in individuals’ economic status due to events beyond their control.

- Students in Spanish class cook arepas, learning the skills and process, as well as the significance of corn in various cultures of Central and South America.

- Upper elementary students read *The Watsons Go To Birmingham - 1963* in literature circle and discuss the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

3. **Foster each child’s ability to recognize bias and injustice.**

   a. We help children develop the knowledge and analytical skills to identify unfair and untrue images (stereotypes) directed at one’s own or another’s identity.

   b. We help children develop the knowledge and analytical skills to identify unfair and untrue comments (teasing and name-calling) directed at one’s own or another’s identity.

   c. We help children develop the knowledge and analytical skills to identify unfair behaviors (discrimination) directed at one’s own or another’s identity.

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• Upper elementary students read My Louisiana Sky in literature circle and discuss the use of words they consider offensive but were once acceptable.

• Upper elementary students read Homeless Bird and discuss the treatment of widows in India.

4. Cultivate each child’s ability to stand up, individually and with others, against bias or injustice.
   a. We help every child learn and practice a variety of ways to act in the face of bias expressed by other children and adults.
      • LMS elementary children use formal community meetings to raise and correct issues of perceived unfairness in their communities.
      • All LMS children participate in annual discussions of the ways that UNICEF seeks to counter inequitable distribution of goods and resources. They are encouraged to help raise funds during the Trick or Treat for UNICEF campaign.
      • Lower Elementary students read and act out stories that highlight people who actively resist expressions of bias. For example, LE students performed “The Story of The Araboolies” and also “The Duke Who Outlawed Jellybeans."
      • Upper elementary students read a short story called “My Name Is Osama,” and they discuss the life experiences of Arabs in the United States post 9/11.
      • Upper Elementary students read Maniac Magee in literature circle and discuss racial intolerance and building bridges between races.
      • Upper Elementary students read Hope is Here in Advisor Group and discuss the importance of standing up against injustice.
      • Students and their families join faculty and staff in Boston’s Walk Against Hunger.
      • Students and their families join faculty and staff in Boston’s Gay Pride Parade.
      • For Family Day, Upper Elementary students analyze hypothetical situations for prejudice and discuss what they would do in that situation.