

## CURRENT TRENDS IN THE CLASSROOM

We are proud of our impressive West Side Montessori School Teacher Education Program (WSMS-TEP), which plays a critical role within the WSMS community and has a direct impact on what goes on in our classrooms. WSMS-TEP also delivers professional development for our teachers and administrators and provides us with a wonderful pool of candidates whom we can welcome into our faculty yearly.

As part of their TEP training, six of our student teachers in the 2022-2023 academic year were each tasked with exploring a current trend in the classroom. The topics our student teachers chose were varied, as you will see, and reflected their interests and their enthusiasm for learning. Each of them evaluated the impact of their chosen topic on children's learning and development and investigated ways to improve our practices.

At the end of the school year, the student teachers presented their findings to the WSMS faculty. In their presentations, they reflected on how they incorporated their academic training in the classroom, and they expressed their gratitude for the mentorship and support of their fellow teachers. The research and investigations conducted by our student teachers were grounded in facts and observations, and the resulting activities and practices that were implemented proved to have positive effects in the classrooms.



### ALESSANDRA CASTAÑEDA – 4W

What happens when a teacher speaks Spanish in a classroom that generally is English-only?

Alessandra grew up in Peru and her investigation was in response to the children in 4W who wondered about the “special language” they heard her use with Spanish-speaking children and families. Alessandra implemented Spanish in several ways, including having the children create their own Spanish book with pictures and names in Spanish, and matching colors with both English and Spanish words. She taught the children songs in Spanish, and as she used *las palabras* throughout the day, she also invited the children to use them. The children were intrepid learners and became increasingly comfortable with the new language.

Alessandra found that these new lessons and activities enabled connections to something beyond basic *vocabulario* and *canciones*. Children were learning a language that wasn't their *first* language. By the end of the school year, many 4W students could name the world's Spanish-speaking countries. Incorporating Spanish into their play, they built a ship with blocks and pretended they were going to Peru to speak Spanish. They were proud to show their families that they spoke *two* languages. The true magic of this project was that the emergence of language facility in 4W occurred organically. Our children's interest and fascination with their teacher's “special language” allowed them to explore new cultures, languages, and continents.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF WSMS-TEP

In 1967, Project CHAMP (Central Harlem Association of Montessori Parents) was founded by Roslyn D. Williams to prepare parents to become active participants in their children's education and to increase the pool of Montessori teachers in New York City. CHAMP was the first American Montessori School (AMS) Teacher Education Program affiliated in New York City and the first African American-established Montessori TEP in the US. WSMS faculty and administrators and faculty from other Montessori schools taught at Project CHAMP in those early years.

In September 1994, the WSMS Board of Trustees voted to move Project CHAMP under the umbrella of WSMS to ensure the legacy of Montessori teacher preparation in NYC. The name was then changed to West Side Montessori School—

Teacher Education Program. For many years, WSMS-TEP offered a program to prepare adults to earn the AMS Early Childhood credential. In 2012, the Infant Toddler level was added in response to local needs. Crucially aware of the expanding worldwide need for high-quality Montessori educators over a broader range of ages, WSMS-TEP expanded to add the Elementary I (6-9), I-II (6-12), and II (9-12) levels in partnership with Metropolitan Montessori School. The first cohort of Elementary began in 2016. The Administrator program, which prepares adults for leadership positions in Montessori schools, accepted the inaugural cohort in 2017. WSMS-TEP was one of the first programs in the US to add the Montessori Inclusion Endorsement to prepare credentialed Montessori teachers to serve children with exceptional needs.

## YIBEI LI – 4E

How can you use puppets to explore diversity?

Yibei was intrigued by some of the comments that children made as they explored the 4E classroom and the many ways in which their observations and discoveries sparked wonderings about themselves and their connections to each other and to their teacher.

The children made many observations: while one child was fascinated by the color and length of her teacher's hair, children at a different table placed their hands next to each other's and wondered aloud why their skin color differed. At home, another child asked her mom if she could change her eye and hair color to match her friend's. Yibei understood this wide-ranging curiosity about these surface, skin-deep differences within the community and saw it as an opening to explore the themes of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB).

As these observations sparked Yibei to do some research, she explored her ideas with 4E head teacher Kira Walker and art teacher Margot Mack, and she attended meetings with the WSMS DEIB group and TEP head Lianne Pinciotti. Yibei learned to:

- use art and familiar activities to teach complex concepts
- use student-centered activities and scientific vocabulary
- focus on one concept at a time
- encourage inclusiveness through discussion

The classroom began its journey by focusing on skin colors, reading an array of books on the subject. Students and teachers talked about DNA, melanin, and how skin color is an inheritance from children's parents and their ancestors; they also noted that it contributes to a person's identity. This conversation was followed by a unique painting activity where children



mixed different pigments to create paints that matched their skin tones, and then used that paint to make handprints.

Finally, the teachers created an absorbing multi-step cultural shelf activity—making puppets! Children used mirrors to literally get a better look at themselves, as well as to observe their peers. The next step was a dramatic play segment—the creation of a “puppet theater” in a recycled box and interactions among the puppets the children had created. The puppets and puppet show were a great way for the children to have discussions that resulted in increased awareness of the classroom's diversity, promoting broader perspectives and a deeper understanding of DEIB values.

Books used in the classroom

*Mixed* by Arree Chung

*Mixed Me!* by Taye Diggs

*Skin Again* by bell hooks

*The Skin You Live In* by Michael Tyler



## FLOR MACAUDA – 3W

How does imaginative play help children understand what is happening in the real world?

Flor’s understanding that by nurturing thoughtful global citizens, we can help shape a world more filled with empathy and respect for all, helped her formulate this line of inquiry. Inspired by peacemakers like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, Flor decided to explore ways to help the children in 3W better comprehend some real-world scenarios. Using books, group discussions, and a variety of other materials, Flor was able to convey to the children the significance of an important time in our not-so-distant past. To provide a more “hands-on” understanding, head teacher Robyn Mernick suggested replicating a march, which was then orchestrated in the classroom, where small dolls carried protest signs on a “road.” This creative activity opened the children’s eyes to a critical slice of our ongoing history, and they were able to comfortably express their feelings and thoughts on a range of subjects in the safe space of their classroom.

Books used in the classroom

*If You’re Going to a March* by Martha Freeman

*Sometimes People March* by Tessa Allen

*Love Is Powerful* by Heather Dean Brewer



## MEGAN TURMON – GARDEN

How can we make clean-up time more successful?

In her time in the Garden classroom, Megan noticed that cleaning up the area designated for block play was a major challenge, despite efforts to guide and support the students. A fundamental part of the West Side Montessori classroom, block play fosters social and emotional development, math and pre-literacy skills, problem-solving, and motor skills. Block work also develops a child’s sense of order, coordination, concentration, and independence, making this a very popular and important staple in the classroom.

Megan observed that the children tended to take out all of the materials available—blocks, Legos, and Magna-Tiles—simultaneously, but then were resistant to cleaning up. During circle time, she asked the children for their input to find a solution, and they came up with a plan:

- Take out the materials as you are going to use them, not all at once.
- When it’s time to put things away, ring the bell and ask other children for help in cleaning up.

Their approach was successful! Allowing the children to sit together, focus on the problem, and envision the possibilities produced an excellent result! The children were able to take responsibility and implement the plan—because they had created the solutions.



## MARINE DALLA SANATA – 2W

How can we support a child who is just learning English?  
A child who arrives at school without speaking English faces academic and social challenges, which, understandably, can result in anxiety, isolation, and behavior issues. Marine wanted to help a new child in 2W whose native language was not English, and who came to school in the process of learning English as their second language.

This investigation explored multiple ways to create an atmosphere that was welcoming and find practical ways to promote English comprehension. Adapting the environment to enhance communication included creating picture cards that portrayed feelings and emotions, using props along with songs and stories, and providing teachers with key words spelled phonetically in the child's home language. Teachers focused on providing a positive and warm community through their availability, their consistently reliable comfort and security, and, very importantly, their sense of humor. The emphasis when working with the child was to be face-to-face, providing "thinking time" and repetition, as necessary. The other children in the classroom also were invited to understand that their empathy and respect were critical because their classmate was "just learning."

As hoped, over the course of the school year, the child who was just learning English became more independent, happy, and comfortable. Their language abilities flourished, thanks to the care, support, and patience of encouraging teachers and classmates.

### Books used in the classroom

*Danbi Leads the School Parade* by Anna Kim  
*We're All Wonders* by R.J. Palacio  
*Home* by Carson Ellis



## SUZANNA DVORAK RAMJOHN – 2E

Can circle time and group experiences stimulate children's interest in nature studies?

Suzanna examined children's curiosity and responses to nature studies with multiple and varied group studies and experiences.

Group experiences such as circle time give children opportunities:

- to develop listening skills
- positive behaviors can be modeled
- taking turns helps model how to respect for their peers
- help develop children's self-esteem in a positive way
- help develop new friendships
- discover that their peers have other ideas that might be different from their own

Suzanna found there was a strong correlation between opportunities teachers provided in groups and children's interest in learning, particularly when nature study was combined with authentic outdoor experiences. Park time, for example, provided more hands-on opportunities to connect with nature. Children were more engaged with each other about their discoveries, and used the knowledge they had acquired in groups as a springboard. The group activities coupled with outdoor experiences increased the children's interest; they did more exploring and gravitated towards the nature materials/activities on the shelves independently.

### Books that were used during circle time

*This Is the Tree We Planted* by Kate McMullan  
*Planting the Wild Garden* by Kathryn O. Galbraith  
*A Tree Is Nice* by Janice May Udry  
*Everybody's Welcome* by Patricia Hegarty  
*The Salamander Room* by Anne Mazer  
*Up in the Leaves* by Shira Boss

### Books that were used on the shelves

*Paperwhite* by Nancy Elizabeth Wallace  
*What Are Bulbs and Roots?* by Molly Aloian  
*Plants Are Alive!* by Molly Aloian



