A Parent’s Perspective: Educating Global Citizens

An interview with Frances Rosenfeld (Rebecca ’07, Nora 2E)

On the walls of the classrooms you see maps and photos that teachers and students have brought in showing countries they have visited. You see children working with world map puzzles, globes, and flags of various nations. You hear children singing songs in different languages such as French, Japanese, Spanish, and Korean. One of the things that makes WSMS such a special place is the way this internationality is so effortlessly incorporated into the daily lives of its students. As a result, the children learn about other countries and cultures organically, and learn to view themselves as part of a global community.

WSMS parent Frances Rosenfeld recently had this to say about WSMS’s approach to global education:

“I love that the curriculum uses geography as an organizing principle. To me, that’s a great way to start introducing the concept of a wider world to young children...the approach is not to introduce children to different cultures right away, but rather to start objectively with the concept of geography—continents and countries. It’s a way for kids to begin organizing their sense of the world spatially.”

For example, even the youngest students at WSMS can sing along to this song:

CONTINENTS, CONTINENTS
DO YOU KNOW YOUR CONTINENTS?
NORTH AND SOUTH AND EAST AND WEST
AND ALL AROUND THE WORLD
ASIA, AFRICA, NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA
OCEANIA, ANTARCTICA, AND EUROPE, TOO

In addition to learning this song, this year the children of the Garden class took a more hands-on approach to mastering the continents. For their annual project for the WSMS Auction, the class created a quilt of the world using the technique of finger knitting. Using their fingers, the children knitted representations of the seven continents out of orange, pink, white, red, yellow, green, and brown yarn, in accordance with the traditional Montessori continent color palette. Their work was then sewn onto blue fabric, resulting in a handmade map of the world.

As Frances points out, “If you start with the whole globe, you get a broader perspective...This gets kids interested in other countries and they are able to focus on more than just what’s right around them. Little kids who have never traveled start noticing things, but in a very objective way, without judgment.”

Here’s another popular song you hear in the classrooms at WSMS:

HELLO, BONJOUR, BUENOS DIAS
NI HAO, GUTEN TAG, KONICHIWA
CIAO, SHALOM, DO-BREY DIEN
HELLO TO ALL THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD!
WE LIVE IN DIFFERENT PLACES
FROM ALL AROUND THE WORLD
WE SPEAK IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS
THOUGH SOME THINGS MAY BE DIFFERENT
WE’RE CHILDREN JUST THE SAME
AND WE ALL LIKE TO SING AND PLAY!
This ultimate “big picture” dovetails with Dr. Maria Montessori’s holistic view of the child, which regards each human being as a uniquely endowed whole individual living a whole life in a whole world. Just as all aspects of a person’s life are intertwined, so are that person’s self, family, neighborhood, and global community interconnected. As Dr. Montessori herself once said:

“Let us give the child a vision of the whole universe…for all things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity.”

And therein lies perhaps the most important aspect of WSMS’s mission: providing children with the skills and attitudes to become caring and responsible global citizens. Or, as Frances sums it up: “I wish everyone could be sent back to preschool to learn to think globally!”

Frances Rosenfeld holds a PhD in History from Columbia University. Her younger daughter, Nora, is three and is currently a student at WSMS; her older daughter, Rebecca, is a WSMS alum and is now in second grade at a public school on the Upper West Side.

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