

A Fly's Perspective

By Suzanne Petkus Becker

I still consider myself fairly new to *The Village School*. My children arrived on the scene two years ago and to our delight the experience they have had here – academically, socially, and emotionally – has been all we had hoped and more, making our long commute barely an issue. Of course, we know what our kids tell us and what we glimpse during observations, events, and conferences. But, oh! To be a fly on the wall to see how *The Village School* functions and breathes from moment to moment – what a joy that would be.

I have recently had an opportunity to be that fly through substitute teaching. As the year is still young, I have only had a handful of opportunities to observe and substitute in several classrooms in the Toddler and Primary Levels. What I can tell you is that the structure of the classrooms, the warmth and respect given to each student, and the purposeful activities that act as a precursor to skills which build upon each other, are all present from age two on up.

Yes, the Toddlers roll out their mats, just like the Kindergarten and Elementary students. The mats are smaller (adorable!) and only stay out for a toddler's typical attention span, but then they actually roll them back up and put them away – most of the time – before moving on to the next activity. In both levels, the children choose their own work at times and at other times are drawn to watch and learn from or work together with another student or two. The children learn through the classroom materials, getting structured lessons and then initiating the work on their own. The music teacher comes into the Toddler room and gives just as full an experience as she does for Primary. The children all get their gymnasium time too!

As I peer into this world, I am also impressed by the individual dynamics of each classroom. We have motivated, intelligent, excited, and warm teachers here at *The Village School*. When I enter the classrooms, each room seems to be an extension of the individuality of those teachers who guide it. There are elements of freshness and possibility in each space, due to the Montessori structure and expansive ideology and also due to teachers who are interesting people who are genuinely interested in each child.

In addition to the materials, structure and teachers, I have witnessed each child being fully celebrated, encouraged, and respected. That is a nice idea on paper but how improbable that it could actually be consistently so. It is so – from allowing one's full attention to be on the child speaking, while quietly asking the next eager questioner to wait a moment; to taking the time to teach a child the materials of a lesson, step-by-step until he/she feels confident enough to try it on his/her own; to asking one student to help another. The children seem to develop self-confidence and self-worth in this, while learning to respect others and their environment.

It has truly been a pleasure to enter these classrooms and work with the teachers and children. The VS experience remains truly remarkable to me from this dual perspective. As Halloween has now passed, I will put my fly costume in the attic but will continue to enjoy my varied experiences here at *The Village School*.