

Overview

“Bridges Montessori is much more than a school. It is a community that fosters each student's unique gifts and talents so that they not only achieve their highest individual potential but also develop into engaged, proactive participants in society” (school website). Grace and courtesy is part of the curriculum, and classrooms participate in service learning projects to serve either the school community or the community at large. In multiage classrooms, students learn service at an early age by caring for each other and acting as mentors.

Developing a strong sense of place and learning to love and respect the environment is the first step to protecting it. A key Montessori principle is that we are all stewards of the Earth, and teachers at Bridges apply it to their classes in developmentally appropriate ways. One big concept is that we are all a part of nature, and we can either hurt it or help it. Teachers are constantly guiding students to learn various ways of how we can help the Earth. As described on the Bright Horizons website, Montessori outdoor classrooms, “help children develop an understanding of and appreciation for the complexity and interdependence of our living world. The children develop the scientific skills of exploration, observation, experimentation, and conservation.” Students at various grade levels also use the garden as an interdisciplinary lens to learn about plant, food, science, and social science topics. This year they have even helped turn our campus into a refuge for butterflies. The Sustainable Studies students also use the garden as a platform from which to study, reflect on, and raise awareness of various environmental issues.

The entire school follows an interdisciplinary approach to learning. The curricula at the infant, toddler, and pre-primary levels follow monthly themes, most of which are environmentally focused. Lessons, activities, and projects are taught through these themes. Elementary projects and activities use cosmic education, the foundation of the Montessori elementary curriculum, as the organizing theme. Teachers work closely with the art teacher to produce unique collaborative projects, made mostly from recycled material, which are displayed at the Gallery Night in February.

In order to create a safe environment, where students work well and effectively with others, the entire campus has adopted the Conscious Discipline approach to creating positive peer relationship skills. Health and well being is also embedded into the Bridges Montessori curriculum and practices. Engaging in physical activities is highly valued, and healthy eating is part of the school policy. Healthy food preparation is also considered one of the key components to the practical life aspect of the Montessori curriculum.

The school director is very supportive of the school's “green” endeavors, from funding professional development to making smart purchasing decisions. She is especially supportive of our green team, which consists of the director, two outdoor classroom/garden teachers, two lead teachers, a UF Master Gardener and Sustainable Studies teacher, the founders of Ground Floor Farming, and the Sustainable Studies students, who meet every Friday.