

## *A Glimpse into the International Montessori School*

by Susan Sears Smith

As I sit at my desk and look out on our spacious playground, I am amazed by a very typical moment; four boys, each from a different country and native language (Austria, Czech Republic, France and Australia), playing and talking to each other in English.

Our school, the International Montessori School of Prague, (IMSP), is in Prague 4. Behind the school is a real local treasure, a huge forest with numerous paths, one of which I take daily to walk to school.

Currently we have 72 children, from 3 continents and more than 20 countries but we have many interests in common: a love of learning, a respect for each other, speaking English, and living in Prague. About 30% of our children are from the Czech Republic.

When children enter our program, they are placed in one of five classes at 4 levels: Toddlers (18 months through 3 years), Primary (3 through 6 years), Lower Elementary (1st through 3rd grade), and Upper Elementary (4th through 6th grade). Each class features a mixed age group spanning three-year periods based on common developmental tasks.

The Montessori method is child-centered so when you walk into a classroom you see a hive of activity, children moving around independently, sitting either on the floor in front of a mat or at



tables placed throughout the room. It is sometimes a challenge to find the adults. They might be on the floor teaching an activity to one or two children, or sitting in a small circle reading.

The teachers take a great deal of care to set up the physical environment with developmentally appropriate materials. The

children are shown which materials they can work with, so during the activity period, they make a selection, and return it to the shelf when they are finished.

Each material has a purpose and a specific place on the shelf. For example, threading a bead is for eye-hand coordination, or rhythm sticks are for tapping to a beat. If a child uses the material for a different purpose such as tossing the rhythm stick to a friend, the teacher would redirect this energy. For example the teacher might say, "It seems that you are finished using the sticks to tap to a beat. Would you like to put them away, and toss something such as a bean bag?"

Visitors comment on the aesthetic beauty of the classrooms and the happy-busy-calm children. The visual quality of each room is very important because children of this age are

absorbing everything around them. Natural light flows through large windows, and a local carpenter makes child-sized wooden furniture for us. The environment is very clean and orderly, because Dr. Montessori discovered that children like it that way! The children are happy because they enjoy learning to use the materials and they have uninterrupted time to use them.



Each class has a child-sized working kitchen and cooking is an important part of our program. In elementary the children do most of the work for themselves including selecting recipes. In one class the young chefs made sushi with fresh crabmeat and lobster. The leftover fish made a delicious seafood quiche for the following class.

Each class has two teachers, a fluent English speaker and a Czech teacher who speaks English well. The language inside the school is English, but out in the playground the children are free to speak their native tongue or English.

All children from 6 through 12 are also offered the Czech elementary program. This ensures that our Czech residents meet government requirements for their particular year and subject. Children from other countries may also learn Czech. For some children it is a third or even a fourth language!

Older children take their learning into the community. A number of times each term they go on field trips. So far they have been to Vysehrad, the Lobkowitz Palace and an Eco-Farm. At the farm the children learned not just to milk a goat but also to make cheese. Nothing stops us from going outside except perhaps learning how to dress for the weather. When snow covers our large hill, children take turns sliding down the hill.

Afternoons are the time to learn more about art, music, and Spanish in the elementary classes; or music and movement, yoga, or art projects in the primary. One of the unusual features of our program is that professionals teach art and music. The music teacher gives individual guitar lessons as well as leading old-fashioned sing-a-longs. Toddlers nap for several hours, wake up and stow their bedding, and then have a snack that includes warm tea, fresh fruit and whole-grain bread.

We hope that you have enjoyed a glimpse into our international school. We would be delighted if you visit us one day. For more information, you might like to see our website at [www.montessori.cz](http://www.montessori.cz).

Susan Sears Smith, M.A., M.Ed. is Head of School for the International Montessori School of Prague. This year IMSP was awarded the AMS (American Montessori Society) accreditation, the first Montessori school in Europe.

If you have an interest in a particular school and would like to contribute to this page please contact Judi Challiner c/o editor@iwa-prague.com for further details. We would be particularly interested in articles about special schools, music schools, state schools, as well as the many independent schools in Prague.