

## Exploring the Natural World and Building Community

The first few days of our Montessori "*Erdkinder*" program have set the stage for what promises to be an enriching and dynamic term. Through engaging activities and excursions, students have begun to form meaningful connections, explore key concepts, and develop a deeper understanding of their environment. These experiences have laid a solid foundation and framework for the students' learning, rooted in both the natural world and the community. As we move forward, we will continue to build on these foundations, fostering curiosity, collaboration, and a shared commitment to sustainability, while shaping and expanding our land-based program by following the interests and passions of our amazing young people and the needs of the land—operating in what Maria Montessori referred to as a "***Microcosm of Society.***"

Central to the program is the development of a strong sense of place, which is critical to shaping students' understanding of the world and promoting their emotional well-being. This sense of place encourages an active sense of responsibility and belonging, helping students connect more deeply with the land and the wider society. Our first three days were packed with learning and adventure, as students engaged in a variety of activities that fostered connection, exploration, and personal growth.

The week began with an amazing morning at *Golf Gardens*, where students came together for friendly competition in Supa Golf and Supa Soccer. This fun-filled experience not only fostered laughter and teamwork but also played a crucial role in building strong bonds among the students. In this relaxed setting, they had the opportunity to connect with one another, laying the foundation for collaboration with local businesses and cooperation—central elements of the ***Production and Exchange*** facets of our program.

In the afternoon, the group visited *Gabriel Chocolate*, now relocated to the *Wow Illusions!* venue. This unique excursion offered students the opportunity to witness the fascinating process of transforming cacao beans into chocolate while also exploring mind-bending illusions. It was a perfect chance to spark curiosity and introduce students to the wonders of both science and art, nurturing a sense of wonder and exploration that will continue throughout the year. The visit also helped build connections with local business owners, who welcomed the group with open arms.

The next day we went on an immersive hike from Redgate to Bob's Hollow, where students explored the rugged beauty of the coastline and surrounding ecosystem. As they examined the landscape, they engaged with principles of sustainability and interconnectedness, experiencing geographical concepts like topography first-hand.

This authentic connection with the land allowed students to reflect on the importance of the environment and their place within it.

Midweek, students were introduced to our **Prepared Environment**, both indoors and outdoors, which serves as the cornerstone of their learning. This environment is designed to support their academic, social, and personal development, providing opportunities for hands-on, authentic learning experiences. This is our **Centre of Work and Study**, based on our 100-acre rural property Metricup. This space includes a fully renovated building with a commercial kitchen, a library, science lab and six large classrooms.

We began our academic journey by reinforcing the learning from the previous days and transitioning to our **Centre of Work and Study**. Students will experience a series of **Key Lessons** and choose an aspect of the property to research. For example, students might investigate the impact of invasive species and explore potential solutions or study the forest canopy and observe the birds that inhabit it. The 100-acre property provides endless opportunities for real-world learning, making it the ideal environment for our Montessori adolescent curriculum. This approach aligns with Dr. Maria Montessori's philosophy, which emphasises the importance of a rich, authentic environment where adolescents can engage in exploration, satisfy their curiosity, and develop a deep connection to the natural world.

These early experiences sparked curiosity and a sense of ownership, allowing students to apply their newfound knowledge as they explored the land that surrounds them. These experiences reinforced the importance of environmental awareness, community engagement, and practical learning, setting the stage for the coming weeks, months and years ahead.

AP Staff

### **Terminology Corner:**

**Erdkinder~** is a term used in Montessori education to describe an adolescent program that is grounded in a connection to the land and the natural world. The word "Erd" means "earth" in German, and "kinder" means "children," so **Erdkinder** translates to "children of the earth."

**Centre of Work and Study~** in Montessori education is a place where students engage in hands-on learning, combining academic concepts with real-world tasks. It allows for self-directed projects, collaboration, and the development of practical life skills, fostering both academic growth and social responsibility.

**Microcosm of Society** ~ Dr. Maria Montessori used this idea to describe how an adolescent community, like a school or classroom, can reflect the broader societal structures, encouraging students to understand and engage with social, economic, and environmental systems in a real-world context.

**Key Lessons** ~ In a Montessori adolescent program, students develop independence and responsibility through practical life skills, community involvement, and environmental stewardship. They engage in self-directed learning, research, and teamwork, fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and social responsibility. These lessons are designed to spark their curiosity and provide them with key terms and knowledge, preparing them to specialise / go deeper in related areas of interest.