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Q | A AMY SHEN

MONTESSORI SCHOOL HEAD OF SCHOOL

BY HOLLY KELSEY-HENRY

Born and raised in China, Amy Shen took residence and was educated in six countries. As an educator, Amy is passionate about instilling in students a global mindset and building informed and responsible 21st Century global citizens — ideas central to Montessori education. Minnesota holds a special place in Amy's heart as she obtained her B.A. from Carleton College. She also obtained a Master of Arts in Teaching from the School for International Training, and a Master of Education from Columbia University. Amy specializes in curriculum design and independent school development.



HH: From New York to Duluth? What happened there?

AS: Last year, I obtained my Masters in Education in Independent School Leadership at Columbia University in New York City. This is the top program that trains independent heads of schools. I was born and raised in China and was educated in six countries to look for the holy grail of what my ideal version of education can look like. Education, schools, in my view, are a place where people come to experience being loved right—being empowered to find their alignment to their life contracts. When we live from a place of authentic power, as the Chinese I-Ching says: “We can walk the earth with independence and detachment—the ultimate form of freedom and peace.” Also, only when we know and are in touch with our core and live from a place of healthy power, we can be true contributors, to others, to the community, and to the planet.

The independent school market in the United States is unique in the sense that nowhere else in the world have I encountered a professional community that gives this much permission for innovation. This community has continued to impress me by the vision and standards it holds for what K-12 education should, and can, look like and be practiced in reality.

I applied for 96 jobs while I was at Columbia looking for my next position to serve. When I visited Montessori School of Duluth, I was awed by the quality of Montessori education being practiced in the classroom—it is the best I have ever seen. The teachers at the school are incredibly hardworking and loving, yet incredibly humble. On my interview, I asked the school faculty and staff about marketing. Their answer was: “We just love these kids here. We don’t really do marketing.” I had to remind myself to pull up my chin to close my mouth and put my eyes back into my New York sockets. “Ladies, you need to get some ego!” I was moved to take the headship at this school to help it grow, make its good work known to the

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MONTESSORI
SCHOOL of DULUTH

Duluth community and the Montessori community.

HH: What do you love about Duluth?

AS: *The Lake: it is so calming. Every time I drive by it or see it, it puts me in a trance of some kind. Magic.*

HH: Who would you most like to have lunch with?

AS: *Kids at the school. You should see the lunches our parents prepare for our kids here: homemade potato chips, tomatoes and strawberries from mom's backyard, honey covered almonds clusters, roasted chicken drum sticks ... Our kids here are healthy eaters too: they enjoy their food and clean up their plates most of the time, and they are happy! Don't you want to eat around happy people? I do—it make my stomach work much better, makes my day.*

HH: What cracks you up?

AS: *A lot of things: Duluth (it's a new town to me), me in Duluth (I cannot get anywhere without a GPS) ... I have to say that kids here at school make me chuckle the most. The way they see and interact with the world is so fresh, innocent and true. They express their desires in such a direct and authentic way. They never compromise their joy and refuse to put up with anything less than happiness.*

Every moment is driven by love, curiosity, the pursuit of pleasure and nothing else. Give you an example, my office is right next to the nap room. Before naps, kids are asked to take off their shoes, and the nap teacher reads them a story. One day, I heard a teacher's voice gently disciplining a student: "You cannot just kick off your shoes and then run!" A cute girly voice replied in slight frustration: "I am so sorry, but I really, really don't want to miss the story!"

I couldn't help but stop my emailing to chuckle. Then, it dawned on me: when was the last time I had to kick off my shoes to rush to do something because it made me that happy?! When was your last time?

Kids are unstoppable at pursuing joy. When do we stop? Why do we stop? Kids here remind me to give space to that inner child within myself and within everyone.

HH: What is your biggest struggle?

AS: *Falling asleep at 9 p.m.! I am a morning runner, so I like to go to bed at 9 and get up around 4 or 5. The sun here in Duluth doesn't go down until 10 p.m., and I cannot fall asleep until 11 or midnight. It makes me feel that I have moved to Alaska or the North Pole. I cannot wait for the winter, so I can get back to my regular sleep schedule.*

HH: Where would you like to be in 10 years?

AS: *To be an educational thought leader and an author while continuing to work in schools to empower young people and teachers.*

HH: How do you handle stress?

AS: *I stay physically active. That is the most effective way I have found to combat stress. You would be surprised by how much a little run and sweat can help turn one's mental outlook from tragic drama to romantic comedy. I highly recommend it. Go for a run! ❖*