FedEx Days

One of the important goals of a Montessori middle school is to help students discover who they are and what they care about. It is also our goal to help students stretch themselves and grow strong, to help them discover the real satisfaction of working hard at something. Early adolescence is a crucial time for forming attitudes and habits that will shape one's life. If we want our students to be lifelong learners, to be motivated for their own reasons, to know that there are things they care about enough to work hard at, we need to find places that encourage this in our programs. Schools that work hard to create curriculums they are proud of sometimes don't leave enough space for kids to discover who THEY are. FedEx Days are one small way to make clear to our students and parents that these goals are important.

Daniel Pink, in his bestselling book *Drive*, points out that human beings work hardest (and do their most creative work) when they have autonomy over what they do, when they do it, how they do it and with whom they do it. This doesn't happen often enough in most of our lives. Pink's research suggests that creativity can only occur when there is time and space, and when people are working on something they care about.

"FedEx Days" began with Atlassian, a software company with offices in Sydney, San Francisco and Amsterdam. Atlassian's CEO decided to devote one Friday a month so that employees could work on projects that interested them, but were not required. In fact, the projects Atlassian employees worked on could *not* be a part of their mandatory duties. The "FedEx Day" name sprung up because these projects/ideas had to be *delivered* to the group the next day. ("FedEx.....We Deliver") Interestingly, a majority of the innovations that Atlassian has achieved have been a result of these "Fed-Ex" explorations. The practice of FedEx Days has now spread through both corporate (Google, 3M) and educational culture.

"Play is the highest form of research" –Albert Einstein

Pink, Daniel. *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us.* New York: Riverhead Books: 2009.

Tips for creating Fed-Ex Days in your classrooms:

(a one-week structure that can be repeated)

Begin early in the week:

It's the teacher's job to make sure students have the tools and resources they need on Friday, so starting early helps everyone get ready. Help your students choose a problem to solve or a project to tackle. They need time to ponder. After our working Fed-ex Day, students will be expected to "deliver": a new idea, a prototype of a product, a better way of doing something. These products or ideas will be shared. (In our school, we worked on our Fed-Ex projects on Friday and shared them on Monday morning.)

Questions to get them thinking:

"If you could solve a problem that you're having right now, what would that be? What could you do to make it better?"

"If you could spend the day doing exactly what you wanted to do, what would you be interested in finding out about?"

"What would you like to design? to make" that the world might need or enjoy?"

Ideas from one "FedEx Day":

Writing and performing a guitar solo

Creating a model out of wood of the Empire State Building

Creating a Rube Goldberg machine

Designing and creating (out of tin foil) a replica of a suit of Roman armor

Putting together a cookbook

Painting a still-life on canvas of a nature scene

Writing and performing a one-person comedy routine

Creating a video highlight reel of basketball moves and plays

Creating a video documentary of Fed Ex Day

Choreographing and performing a dance

Researching World War II battles

Building a model of the Eiffel Tower

Power Points, Papers and Posters on a variety of topics

Painting a Celtic Fortress

Exploring snowflakes and their patterns

Making a commercial for "fleets" (flats that can be converted to high heels)

Creating a paper zoo

Setting up a tutoring network for kids who need help with math

Writing a graphic novel

Writing a backpacking guide for teenage girls

Designing a class (or school) T shirt