

Umoja Learning Circle

Umoja Learning Circle (ULC) is a private school nestled in the heart of Rexdale, Ontario that has a focus on Afrocentric and environmental education. The school is open and accessible to all members of the community. Parents and guardians can find information regarding grants, scholarships, and bursaries as well as admissions information on the school's website:

www.umojalearningcircle.com.

By using Africa as the central point for understanding the world, ULC embodies environmentalism, sustainability, and Afrocentricity. The students at ULC, which range from kindergarten to Grade 5, have an opportunity to experience a unique, well-rounded curriculum that develops the self and the mind.

Around the small bungalow where the learning and education at ULC occurs, there are West African symbols that represent love and kindness, unity is strength, hope, awareness, patience, care, et cetera. These symbols reflect virtues that all communities can and should live by. At ULC, Principal Tafari also displays a West African symbol which translates to: "the creator, not humans, makes important decisions." The emphasis on an appreciation and respect for nature rather than consumerism is another focal point of the learning at this school. At the beginning of the September, each student is responsible for the growth and development of a plant for the entire school year. They are also required to create their own compost which is used in fundraising programs for the school as well as the development of their plants. Through these processes the students learn responsibility, collective economics, and the principles of growth and development which are some of the topics that directly connect to the Ontario curriculum.

Along with these initiatives, students are responsible for the creation of the herbs and vegetables for their vegan meals at the school. Students grow garlic, tomatoes, okra, passion fruit, and much more. In addition, students use the herbs harvested to aid them in the wake of a cold or flu. On my visit there, a student who was four years old had the flu and rather than asking for a cold medicine that we can purchase at a local pharmacy she asked for apple mint which is one of the herbs grown in their garden. The student then headed outside to pick the leaf, ate it, and took a nap.

Furthermore, these students have also been given the responsibility for the restoration of twelve city blocks by the Toronto and Region Conservation. In this area the students are responsible for the planting of 100 trees yearly. This opportunity of restoration gives these students the ability to experience education, "beyond the classroom and lab to outdoors, from theory to application, and from indifference to healing," (Orr, 2004, p. 58).

The experience at ULC is one that has the capability to heal the mind by placing the small group of students in attendance at the centre of their learning. The students develop such a strong sense of self in this environment that they foster high levels of respect for themselves, others, the community, and very importantly, the environment. Due to their dependence on nature for their meals

the students have an understanding of the interdependence and inseparability between humanity and nature. They live the experience of nature, science, and all the tenets of humanity by way of their hands and hearts, not simply technology.

ULC encourages all members of our community in the Greater Toronto Area to experience the school. Enrolment for the 2009-2010 school year has already begun.