

Environments for Learning, Inc.

Parent Handbook



Montessori on the Lake

AppleTree Montessori

Sunflower Montessori

Environments for Learning, Inc. Parent Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Montessori School is to provide a prepared environment scaled to the child's size and designed for structured learning where the children are free to explore and interact. The program is based on the philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori, a noted Italian educator and physician (1870–1952), who revolutionized early childhood education by advocating that children be allowed the freedom to explore and develop their own creative potential through a wealth of self-teaching educational materials. Much of the educational equipment found today in the Montessori classroom was developed by Maria Montessori over 100 years ago including hands-on mathematics materials, phonetic reading systems, a wide variety of materials and experiences to develop the child's sensory perceptions and refine his sense awareness, and many exercises designed to allow young children to practice skills they would need for daily living and self-help. The child's avid interest in the real world is nurtured by materials illustrating principles of geography, zoology, botany, archeology; all of these areas are explored with concrete objects, tactile experiments, collection, classification, and identification. The children readily take up this reality based purposeful "work" – creative work designed to develop the mental and manual dexterity and to prepare the children with the tools for a lifetime of creative learning.

PROGRAMS

INFANT PROGRAM

The infant program is designed for children ages 3 months - 2 years. Maria Montessori believed that education must begin at birth. The infant program allows each child the opportunity to explore and become autonomous, while still having their needs met by loving, experienced caregivers. The teacher/child ratio is 1:3 for under 12 months and 1:4 for 12 months - 2 years.

THE TODDLER/TWOS PROGRAM

The toddler/twos program is designed for children aged 2 to 3 who have exhibited signs of readiness for a preschool program such as verbal development, an active desire to explore materials and the interest in starting social interactions. The toddler/twos program differs from our traditional preschool program in teacher/child ratio (1:6) due to caregiving needs of the younger child and in the age-appropriateness of the materials.

THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

The preschool program is for children from 2 ½ through 5 years of age. The curriculum follows the educational philosophy and method of Dr. Maria Montessori. The environment is carefully prepared to meet the child's learning needs. The child uses materials designed to assist growth in practical life, the development of the senses, language, mathematics, music, art, science, geography, etc. Section II of this handbook presents a description of the Montessori philosophy and method.

THE ELEMENTARY PROGRAM

This program is designed for children ages 5 through 13 years of age who have attended Montessori programs during their preschool years or whose parents choose to continue their education with academics based on the Montessori method. Children who would benefit from individual education programs, small class sizes, hands-on materials and advanced academics are encouraged to continue into the elementary classes.

SCHOOL POLICIES

ADMISSION AND REGISTRATION

Admission is based on class availability and determination by the parent and director that a child is ready. Priority admission is given to siblings and continuing students. The enrollment procedure is as follows:

1. Parents should plan to observe a class in session. The lead teacher or the director can answer questions at this time.
2. An application for admission along with a non-refundable registration fee is required and may be submitted prior to or after the observation. The child's name is placed on a waiting list and when space becomes available in one of the classes, the next applicant is contacted. If the offered opening is accepted, a non-refundable registration fee and completed set of health forms and admission documents will hold the child's place in the class.

TUITION

PRESCHOOL TUITION

Two tuition plans are available. PLAN A offers the parent a year-round enrollment program with tuition payments based on the current fee schedule divided into 12 equal monthly payments. PLAN B is an enrollment plan for the school year Sept. to June only (see calendar). Tuition payments are divided into 10 equal payments.

Tuition is due on the 15th of the month prior to attendance. If the tuition is not received by the 25th of the month prior to the child's attendance, a 10% late charge is applied. A child whose tuition has not been paid by the first of the month will incur further charges or be dropped from the program and must pay a re-registration fee to return to school.

ELEMENTARY TUITION

Academic annual tuition may be paid as an annual payment in advance or it may be paid in 11 monthly installments. There are discounts offered for annual payments if they are made by specific dates. The annual tuition discount applies to the academic tuition portion of your payments only. All other fees including registration, enrollment, books and materials and extended daycare are due in full. Annual tuition paid in 11 monthly installments will commence on August 5th of the current school year and will be

due monthly on the 5th of each month through June. Payments made after the 10th of each month are considered late and subject to a 10% late fee.

RE-ENROLLMENT

Prior to March 1st of each year, the children attending the school will be given an opportunity to re-enroll. After that date, enrollment will be opened to the waiting list applications and new applications.

WITHDRAWALS

If you wish to withdraw your child from preschool, you are required to give a 30-day written notice or further tuition charges will accrue. If you wish to withdraw from elementary school, you are required to give a 45-day written notice. Please see the elementary admission agreement for more information about tuition charges when withdrawing. Please speak to the director if you have questions regarding withdrawing.

ADJUSTMENT TO SCHOOL

In order for the Montessori environment to function effectively, it is necessary that each child be able to work well and independently. Occasionally, a child has difficulty adapting to the Montessori process. Therefore, there will be a six-week adjustment period for each new child during which the teacher will observe the child's adjustment to the program. During this period, if a child is not adjusting, the teacher will: (1) confer with the parents, (2) confer with the director of the school, and (3) confer with the parent and the director on a regular basis regarding the child's progress. If there is no progress at the end of the adjustment period, the teacher, director, and parent will meet to evaluate whether the program is meeting the child's needs.

If at any time a child's behavior becomes disruptive to the classroom, or a child begins to exhibit aggressive behavior (biting, etc.) towards others, the Montessori school reserves the right to ask for the child's withdrawal from the program.

STAFFING

Each child is an individual with his own distinct personality, inner development timetable, and potential. Our staff of experienced Montessori teachers respects the uniqueness of each child. All Montessori teachers have completed a minimum of an intensive training program in the Montessori philosophy and techniques for the Montessori classroom. Many teachers do not undertake this training until they have completed their college Bachelor's degree. Our teachers are fully Montessori certified. The support staff of teaching assistants meets or exceeds the requirements for education/training as outlined by the Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing. Frequently, the assistant teachers are undertaking their Montessori training and are working in a Montessori classroom as part of their practicum.

HEALTH OF THE CHILD

Health forms, along with other forms required by the Department of Social Services, are provided to all parents upon enrollment. These records must be completed, and immunizations must be up to date by the child's FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL or as soon as possible thereafter.

Please report any contagious diseases in your family so that all parents can be alerted. When a child has a fever, diarrhea, vomiting, or other symptoms of illness, please keep them home until free from these symptoms for 24 hours. Please call the school to report any absence or unusual illness which might spread through a class. (See Illness Policy Handout).

Do not bring your child to school when they have symptoms of illness. You will be called to pick up your child immediately if they become ill at school and are expected to pick up within 30 minutes. We do not have a nurse on staff or a facility for ill children. If your child is sent home from school for any reason, they must be home for 24 hours before they can return to school. Parents whose children have never been in school before should expect that their children may be ill more than usual during the first two or three months.

If your child attends school half day, please do not send any medications to school. Medications will only be given twice a day—at lunch and at 3:00 pm. Please try to arrange your home medication schedule around this. The school will dispense prescription medicines according to the following guidelines:

1. Medicine must be in a prescription bottle with your child's name and a label detailing dosage and frequency.
2. Parents are to hand deliver the prescription medication to the office.
3. Parents are required to fill out a medication permission form and sign it (available at the front desk).
4. A measuring spoon or syringe for medicine must be included with the prescription.
5. Medicine can be retrieved at the end of the day from the office staff.
6. Over the counter medication will be given at school only if (1) the original container is brought to school, (2) the dosage the parent indicates on the medication form is as listed for the child's age/weight on the container, or (3) if an alternate dosage is to be given, a prescription or doctor's note must be provided that indicates the alternate dosage amount.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Please be aware of the time your child's class begins. It is important that your child arrives on time to have the full benefit of the Montessori environment. Per our licensing requirements, when bringing a child to school, the person transporting the child must remain with the child until they have contact with a staff member and the child is accepted by that staff member. Upon drop off all children will be inspected for obvious signs of illness, with additional attention paid to children who have been absent because of illness or have been exposed to a contagious disease. The person transporting the child must sign the child in and out each day and a full signature must be used (no initials). If your child is not signed in or out you may be required to return to campus and incur a \$10 fee for each occurrence. If your child normally leaves school at noon or the end of the full day and you know that you are going to be late, please call the school. It

saves your child the anxiety of wondering why he/she has not been picked up at the usual time. In regard to daycare hours, the school closes promptly at 6:00 pm. We are not authorized or licensed to remain open after that time. There will be a late pick up fee of \$15 for every 15 minutes past closing time. There is only a 5-minute grace period to allow for minor traffic delays. A child who is repeatedly left past the closing hour will be asked to leave the program. Late pick-up fees are non-waivable and will be charged to your tuition account.

After being signed out, children must remain with their parents or guardians. Everyone must be accompanied by a staff member in the classrooms and on playgrounds. Siblings or other family members of enrolled students are not permitted to play on playground equipment.

RELEASE FROM SCHOOL

We will not release a child to anyone whose name does not appear on the emergency release form. Please send a written notice with special instructions if information on the release of your child changes or your child is to be picked up on a single occasion by another person.

DISCIPLINE

We constantly strive toward the goal of creating a self-disciplined child, and believe that self-discipline is an aspect of growth and maturity and not the result of punishment. We make every effort to provide the child with an environment conducive to learning and work with positive correction of faults and acknowledgement of desirable behavior. We require firm, consistent, kind and respectful treatment of all children from our staff, with no corporal punishment or language inappropriate to the child's individual right to dignified treatment. Like Maria Montessori, we believe that in the child's innermost being is the desire to become a more perfect human being, and this desire is constantly encouraged.

When discipline problems arise, the school works with the parents to help the child achieve the necessary control. Many patient explanations are necessary to assure that the child understands the expected behavior. Deliberate misconduct or mischief is dealt with by removing the child to a quiet spot until he/she is able to regain composure, understands the error, and is able to return to activities in a more composed state.

If a child's repeated behavior exhibits an unwillingness to respect the personal rights of the teachers and other children at the school, parents may be called or a child may be asked to withdraw.

COMMUNICATION

Twice a year, parent/teacher conferences are held so that we may discuss the child's progress and development. Conferences are very informative and helpful and we sincerely urge both parents to attend. If you have a question or concern, you do not have to wait for the conference time. A conference with your child's teacher or with the school director can be arranged at any time by calling to make an appointment.

Important information regarding school activities is communicated through our parent bulletin boards, the Procure app, and through newsletters/emails. The teachers prepare a monthly newsletter to keep parents

informed of classroom happenings and activities. Notices and newsletters from the office keep parents abreast of school wide news. Back to School Night and Open House are special events that are opportunities for you to share your child's world at school. The teacher also prepares a progress report for each student twice a year. These reports are strictly informational showing the progress the child has made.

We welcome parents who might wish to observe their child's class. Please call, and the director will suggest a time for observation when your child's class will be working or having presentations.

The teachers welcome and encourage any special talent or hobby that the parents might be willing to share with the class or the school.

FIELD TRIPS

During the academic year, field trips are held for both academic enrichment and as an occasional recreational outing in our preschool and elementary programs. In order for your child to participate in these events, a field trip permission form must be filled out which includes a consent for medical treatment form in case of a medical emergency away from the premises. In cases where admission charges or other fees are involved, a field trip fee may be billed to your procare account. Parental assistance is required for off-campus field trips in our preschool program, and may be requested in our elementary classes; the class teacher will communicate the details. Appropriate car seats and seat belts are required as well as proof of insurance for all field trip drivers.

CLOTHING

Please dress your child in comfortable "play clothes" that he/she can manage alone in bathrooms. Sometimes messy art materials are used so please do not send your child in his/her best clothes. Please do not let your child wear crocs, flip-flops or sandals – a tennis shoe is safer for climbing on the bars. Children who cannot tie their own shoes yet should wear velcro or slip on shoes. The Montessori class teaches the child how to care for himself and his own needs. Clothing items which are frustrating to a child learning to self-help (no matter how cute these seem to an adult) include: high-top sneakers, overalls or coveralls for very young ones who can't handle the fastener, jumpsuits or outfits which must be unfastened in the back or untied at the shoulders, tie shoes for young children (Velcro fasteners are best, slip-on shoes or buckle-type are easy too). Children may take shoes on and off during the day and must endure a long and frustrating wait if adult assistance is required each time. Please mark all removable clothing with your child's name, especially coats. Please mark all lunch boxes and Tupperware. It is surprising how many coats, sweaters, shirts, and even socks turn up unclaimed. A laundry-proof ink pen easily adds your child's last name to a clothing label.

Each child under the age of five must bring a change of clothing in a clearly labeled plastic bag. Please include underwear, shirt, pants or shorts, and socks. Younger preschool children may need two changes of clothing at school and should bring a supply of disposable diapers if required. If an accident occurs (even potty-trained children have accidents with milk, water, or art materials), the soiled clothes will be sent home with your child. Please send a fresh supply the following morning for we do not have a large supply

of “school clothes” and do not borrow from other children. A child without a spare set of clothes who has an “accident” will be sent home to be changed.

TOYS - DEVICES - PETS

Experience has shown that toys are better left at home. Toys tend to generate unnecessary social disturbances or become lost or broken. Small cars and items with small parts are dangerous if found on the playground by a two-year-old. Please help your child to comply with this rule. Instead of toys, encourage your child to bring a book, objects from nature or educational merit, a photograph, or a special piece of artwork. Your child’s teacher will communicate to her class which day is “share day.” With the advance approval of the teacher, a pet for the day (in a suitable container) will be welcome.

NEW CHILDREN—PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL

Try to familiarize your child with the school by visiting in advance of the child’s first day. Most children are helped by the positive anticipation of what is coming up soon in their lives. A class visit with the parent a few days prior to attendance is very helpful. If your child is reluctant to leave you for the first few days (or first few weeks for a very young child), take your child to his teacher and reassure your child that you will return when school is over. The following list of suggestions will help:

1. Give your child an alarm clock. Set it to give your child enough time in the morning to prepare for school. RUSHING upsets young children.
2. Have a quiet breakfast. Television in the morning can over-excite young children.
3. Talk to your child about school. Explain how you expect him/her to behave (respectfully and kindly). Discuss the school classroom, the children, and the teacher. This helps the child anticipate what will happen when he/she arrives at the school.
4. Encourage your child to do something restful, such as looking at books, doing simple chores or quietly playing until it is time to go.
5. Do not come up to your child suddenly and say it is time to go. Tell your child before he/she begins to play or after breakfast time that “it will be time to go when...I am dressed, your sister’s bus comes, etc.”
6. Be loving and positive with your child. When you arrive at school, walk your child to his/her class, help him/her put the lunch box and coat away, tell your child when you will be back and say “goodbye.” Do not linger if your child begins to cry. Usually, the crying only lasts until you are out of sight. Your child’s teacher will handle the matter gently and will set up a comforting situation for the child. The school staff will telephone you if the crying continues, or you may feel free to call the office to check in.

NAPS AND REST TIME

Following lunchtime there is an opportunity for children in the infant, toddler/twos, and preschool programs to nap or rest. The school provides cots with sheets and blankets for each child. The school staff washes sheets weekly. If your child has a special blanket or object which helps him rest, he is welcome to bring this to school. We encourage children to rest daily so that each family can enjoy a pleasant dinnertime and evening. However, children who no longer need a nap are not required to sleep and will

enjoy a quiet work time in the classroom after resting quietly for 30-minutes. If a parent feels a daily nap is necessary for the child, please make your wishes known to the teacher. Elementary children do not rest on cots unless the child is very tired and wishes to nap. Rest time for these older children is usually a story time after their lunch.

SPEECH AND SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPHS

If the parents and teachers are concerned about the child's speech, the school will provide a list of resources, recommendations, and contact information for the parents.

School pictures are taken each fall at the parent's option. The professional photographic service will provide information and fees in advance.

LUNCHESES

Children enrolled in the program will bring their lunches and snacks to school each day. If your child is staying for the full day program, please send two snacks, and if your child is staying for the half day program, please send one snack. It is the responsibility of the parent to see that the lunch provides approximately one-third of the child's daily nutritional requirements, as required by state law. Both half and full day children are encouraged to bring fresh fruit to school. If you would like to send a food item to be warmed up, please pack it in a separate microwave safe container.

NO SUGAR POLICY

Food containing sugar as one of the first five ingredients IS NOT permitted at school.

Please be aware that sugar may be listed in several different forms. The following sweeteners are not acceptable: fructose, maltose, sucrose, dextrose, honey, turbinado sugar, raw sugar, brown sugar, corn syrup, high fructose corn sweetener, sorbitol, saccharine, or aspartame (Equal or NutraSweet). Please read labels carefully.

Many foods labeled as "natural" are still high in sugar. Granola bars, Fruit Rolls, and many "natural" snacks can be loaded with sugar. Chocolate milk and Jell-O are not permitted at school. Sugar free desserts are also not permitted due to confusion caused by defining desserts for young children.

Fruit juices must be 100% juice with no sugar added. We do not permit "natural" or diet sodas. If you are in doubt, check with us. Please send a reusable water bottle for your child to use. We have

We encourage the children to bring their lunches in a labeled, standard size lunch box unless there is an all day field trip. For field trips, lunch should be packed in a labeled disposable lunch bag including a canned or boxed drink. Any uneaten food will be sent home to help the parents determine the appropriate amounts needed for their children. Lunches should include a main course that includes protein, one or two snacks (chips and crackers are allowed), fruit, veggies, etc.

Education on good nutritional habits and the damage that sugar does to one's teeth is part of the school curriculum. Lunchtime discussions frequently center on eating "protein" first, the calcium in the milk and

cottage cheese, or the vitamin C in the orange. Your child may be away for up to 10 hours during the day and it is extremely important that the food which he consumes fosters excellent growth and development. Many recent studies have shown that sugar may create a certain amount of hyperactivity in young children which causes limited concentration and increased agitated activity. Artificial colors and additives also produce hyperactivity in certain children. Although we realize that it is difficult to avoid sugar in many typical snack foods, we ask you to make an added effort for the sake of your child's growth and development.

Also, please note:

1. Do not send foods that require preparation at school - foods can be warmed but not cooked to temperature and then cooled to a safe temperature.
2. We do not have available space in the refrigerator for storing cold foods for all the children. Yogurt, cottage cheese, meats, etc. will remain cool if packed in an insulated lunch box with a "blue ice" cold pack found in most drug and grocery stores. Yogurt (placed in the freezer the night before) will have thawed to a cool temperature by lunchtime.
3. Breakfast foods are allowed if your child arrives at school before 7:15 am. Again, sugared breakfast foods are not acceptable and breakfast must be in a disposable container or Tupperware type container that can be returned home in the lunchbox. Please provide milk for cereal if you are bringing breakfast.

LUNCH SUGGESTIONS

Sandwiches

- Peanut butter with jelly, raisins, or banana (ask your child's teacher about nut allergies in the class)
- Bacon, lettuce, and tomato
- Cold cuts with cheese
- Egg or tuna salad

Try using 100% stone ground whole grain bread, rye bread, whole-wheat English muffins, croissants, sourdough, and pumpernickel.

Warm Up Lunches

Leftover spaghetti, macaroni and cheese, or any casserole, rice with veggies and meats, chow mein, curry – any dinner leftover! We do not recommend soup for young preschoolers.

Cold Lunches

Yogurt with fruit, cheese cubes or cottage cheese with pineapple or raisins, apples, oranges, bananas, baked beans, vegetables, carrots or celery with ranch dip.

Miscellaneous

- Celery with peanut butter or cream cheese

- Boiled potatoes, sliced leftover baked potatoes
- Cold chicken
- Figs, prunes, raisins, dried fruits, nuts
- Carrot sticks
- Hard boiled eggs, stuffed eggs
- Cheese and cold cuts
- Sour cream or yogurt dip with broccoli or cauliflower
- Corn chips
- String cheese
- Any fruit
- Burritos
- Egg Rolls
- Quesadillas (corn tortilla with melted cheese)

BIRTHDAYS

Each class will have a special ceremony for acknowledging a child's birthday. A traditional Montessori exercise called "Birthday Circle" is used in most classrooms. A "sun" is placed in the center of the circle and the child, holding the globe, circles the sun for the number of years that has passed. Many parents like to bring in something "special" to share with the class. Please speak to your child's teacher about your child's birthday ahead of time. We continue to observe healthy eating habits by suggesting to parents to bring a "special snack" (not cake or cupcakes). Recommended are fruit salad, bagels and cream cheese, mini muffins, etc. Birthdays at school are not intended as the child's primary celebration, so please no party favors, balloons, hats, or gifts.

TECHNOLOGY

Devices such as tablets or cell phones are not permitted at school, and children should not be on devices (even if they belong to a parent) while on campus. To protect the privacy of all children, parents are not permitted to take photographs or videos of other children.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

There are scheduled fire drills, earthquake drills, and safety drills to ensure a smooth response to any situation. In the case of a major emergency all parents will be called to pick up the children. In a minor case, parents will be messaged with further information and details as needed.

DONATIONS

For art projects, collages, and all sorts of classroom applications, we may be able to use all types of odds and ends that you might want to discard. Also, extra clothes are stored for use by children who may need them on occasion. Please ask at the office. Particularly useful are old publications such as Wildlife magazines, buttons, fabric scraps, yarn, small wood scraps, pants or underwear your child has outgrown (for the spare clothes box), rolls of paper or stickers, nature objects with educational merit, etc.

RELIGION

The Montessori school is not affiliated with any religious organization. Religious training is personal to each family and best learned in the home. In our classrooms we stress cultural diversity and encourage the children to share with their classmates those cultural, language, religious, ethnic differences which makes each of us so special. Though we do not teach or preach any particular religious doctrine, we do “celebrate” by recognizing the festive occasions of the various children. However, we realize that because of different religious beliefs, this policy might interfere with a particular parent’s religious training. Please let us know if there are certain activities in which you would prefer your child not to participate. In various years, parents have shared the festivities of Chinese New Year, Persian New Year, Santa Lucia Day, Chanukah, as well as special festivals of Mexico, India, and Japan. Cultural awareness is very exciting to all our children.

The school does not discriminate in the selection of children enrolling in the program or in its hiring policies on the basis of race, religion, ethnic origin, sex, or national heritage.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Secret of Childhood.....Maria Montessori

A Child in the Family.....Maria Montessori

Montessori: A Modern Approach.....Lila Polk Lillard

A Parents’ Guide to the Montessori Classroom.....Aline D. Wolf

Children: The Challenge.....Rudolf Dreikurs

How to Raise a Brighter Child.....Joan Beck

The Hurried Child.....David Elkind

The First Three Years.....Burton White

Six Weeks to Better Parenting.....Caryl Krueger

Positive Discipline.....Jane Nelson

We have a collection of these titles available for parents to borrow. Speak to your child’s teacher or the office if you are interested.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD OF EDUCATION

THE WORK OF THE CHILD – Montessori’s Point of View

A small boy is standing on the beach shoveling sand into a wheelbarrow. Down the road, a construction worker is filling a truck with dirt. Outwardly their actions are the same. But how similar are they really?

If a fellow worker came up to the man who was digging and offered to do the job for him, the man would gladly hand his shovel over and take a break. But what kind of response would the child give to a similar offer of help? Chances are he would refuse and actually fight for his right to continue doing the job himself. Not only that, but when he was finished, he would probably empty the wheelbarrow and start all over again. You wouldn't find the construction worker doing anything of the kind.

So different, in fact, is the work of the child from that of the adult, most people would probably use a different word for what the child is doing. But Maria Montessori has called this type of activity "work" with good reason.

The word "work" expresses the dignity and purposefulness of the child's actions. He is definitely in the act of creation, but with a different purpose that an adult has. The adult works with an external aim to accomplish some change in his environment. The child's aim is an internal one. He works in order to grow. Irresistibly, unceasingly, joyfully, he is working to create the adult he will become.

Of course, he is not conscious of this distant end as he works continually in the present, savoring every action. However, work he must, for he's under the command of powerful inner directives – part of an internal developmental schedule that will lead him from a helpless baby to a useful functioning adult. So essential is it for the child to follow his inner guide that if it is denied him, his deviated energies can result in all sorts of abnormalities. In fact, Montessori's prescription for deviations in general is, you guessed it, work.

A child's rhythm of work is very different from an adult's as well. How slowly he moves, how he lingers over each separate action as he washes his hands or buttons his jacket. It can be tormenting to watch. We can hardly keep from going over and doing the action ourselves just to get it finished. It's understandable that we would feel this way. Our lives are hectic, fast-paced, full of deadlines, and some future end. For the child, however, the end is the action itself. He is in no hurry to finish. He may even repeat it again and again because it is the means by which he is perfecting himself. Those of you who play golf or tennis may have experienced a similar feeling. Though it seems to serve no external end, you hit ball after ball driven by an inner need to perfect yourself.

It takes a real conscious effort to slow ourselves down to appreciate and accommodate the child's slower rhythm of work. But it is essential that we not rush him and by no means take over and do the task for him.

So, what does a child need to carry on his important, self-perfecting work besides patient, understanding adults? He needs a proper environment. While perfecting himself, he uses the environment as a means. He needs many opportunities to do things for himself. Your child has that kind of environment in a Montessori classroom. You can also help provide the same type of environment at home. Ensure that his things are within reach. A wooden dowel hung with a couple pieces of cord from the rod in his closet can make his clothes within easy reach for dressing himself and hanging his things up when he takes them off. Low shelves in his room provide accessible places for toys and books and a way for cleaning up after himself. Let him help with household chores and caring for pets and plants. Show the proper way to do a job and let him do it himself. Above all, don't do anything for your child that he can do himself.

MARIA MONTESSORI

Maria Montessori was born in 1870 into an upper-class Italian family, a descendant of scholars and soldiers. For a career, she was first attracted to engineering but, as if this would not have been a sufficient obstacle to overcome, she changed her mind and decided to study medicine. She ran headlong into opposition of the fiercest kind for even daring to think such an impossible thing. Nonetheless, she was of a very determined nature and not only was admitted to the all-male medical school, but became the first woman in Italian history to become a physician. Additionally, her profound interest in mankind led her to pursue the study of anthropology, philosophy, psychiatry and experimental psychology. This and the experience she gained from her years of work in medicine provided a rich background for her eventual life work in the education of children and her devotion to ending the war between child and adult. However, it would be ten years before she would come to the vocation of liberating children which, at her death in 1952, left her one of the most honored and respected educators in the world.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Montessori was appalled by the conditions suffered by the helplessly insane children for whom it was universally accepted there was “no hope.” Her devotion to humanity and her untiring determination had her refuse to accept the easy pronouncements of “hopeless” and “impossible.” The more she worked with these children, the greater her certainty that these children had no need to be padlocked to idiocy if only the right key were used to open the door to normality. After two short years (1898 – 1900) of work with the “idiot” children, they were reading, writing, and passing state school exams.

An amazed world applauded her efforts, but Montessori’s thoughts were already elsewhere, “I was searching for the reasons which could keep back the healthy and happy children of the ordinary schools on so low a plane that they could be equaled in tests of intelligence by my unfortunate pupils.”

The question consumed her. In 1906, having seen countless children bored, distracted, lulled or repressed in the state schools, she was given an opportunity to establish the first classroom for a group of 60 children, age 3 to 6 in a slum tenement in San Lorenzo in Rome. It was this group of children who demonstrated that spontaneous discipline, “explosion of spontaneous writing and reading” and “free social life” which so astounded the world. In fact, the transformation was so great that there were many who were ready to believe that because she was a medical doctor, the real “miracle” must have been drugs! The facts are quite different.

MONTESSORI PHILOSOPHY

The Montessori method of education grew out of Dr. Montessori’s observations of children. In her clear observations she saw that the child from birth to six is in a state she called the “absorbent mind.” In this state, the child constantly absorbs impressions from his environment and stores them for later use.

Dr. Montessori observed that every child passes through “sensitive periods of growth” during which the child is particularly sensitive to acquiring certain knowledge and skills. From birth to six, the child experiences sensitive periods of movement, language, reading, writing, music, order, and development of the five senses.

Because the child's mind is absorbent, learning is a natural state of affairs. There is no forcing necessary, as the child is naturally interested in and capable of drawing information and skill from the environment. If appropriate materials of learning are available to the child, the child will use them as instruments of growth. A large variety of such materials should be available.

Thus, the Montessori classroom is distinguished by its orderly shelves of appealing, child-oriented materials of learning. This is called the "prepared environment."

The Montessori classroom is furnished with child-size shelves, tables and chairs. Children freely choose materials from the shelves, and return them to their place when finished. The basic ground rules of the class are to respect every child's right to work by him (her) self without interruption and to take care of the environment.

Dr. Montessori recognized that the only valid impulse to learning is the self-motivation of the child. Children move themselves toward learning. The teacher prepares the environment, programs the activity, functions as the reference person and exemplar, offers the child stimulations; but it is the child who learns, who is motivated through the work itself (not solely by the teacher's personality) to persist in his chosen task. If the Montessori child is free to learn, it is because he/she has acquired from his/her exposure, to both physical and mental order, an "inner discipline".

PRACTICAL LIFE (Age 18 months onward)

The preschool child has many needs. Central among these are: a need to develop a sense of order, a need to develop and refine his coordination, and a need to be able to function as an independent being in his environment. Practical Life exercises help to fulfill these needs.

Practical Life exercises help the child develop a sense of order by providing a child size activity that has a beginning, an end, and an orderly progression of steps needed to complete the exercise. There is a sequence within each material, and there is a sequence among the materials. Once the child has mastered a particular exercise, there is a natural progression to the next level of complexity. As the child becomes familiar with the environment and the Practical Life exercises, he develops the ability to concentrate.

In water pouring, the concentration is on pouring the water from one container into another without spilling a drop. The material is clean, attractive, and comfortable for the child. As the child becomes more comfortable with the exercise, he naturally develops concentration.

The child's coordination is developed through Practical Life activities. He learns to choose an activity; he learns how to carry it to and from a shelf. Through his own activity, he begins to become aware of the effect he has on the environment. The Practical Life materials aid the child in refining his muscular movements, particularly hand-eye coordination.

By choosing his own activities and by mastery of the exercises, the child develops independence which helps him become free. Many of the exercises are designed to aid the child in everyday activities: tying shoes, folding clothes, sponging, ladling, pouring, carrying, sweeping, spooning, mopping, scrubbing, buttoning, removing and attaching lids, zipping, cutting, polishing, measuring, etc.

In Practical Life activities, there is a control of error built into the material. The child is able to correct himself and does not need to ask for help from the teacher. Because the material is self-correcting, the child learns to work at a task until he masters it. When he is successful in the simple Practical Life activities, the child feels secure about attempting more difficult tasks.

The Practical Life exercises allow each child to grow according to his own needs and at his own pace. Every exercise begins with a simple presentation and has variations that increase in complexity. The accomplishment of the goals of each exercise allows the child to experience a positive feeling about himself.

The exercises teach skills preparatory to reading and writing, encouraging left to right eye movement and strengthening the fingers for pencil holding. Most important, however, is the fulfillment of a child's inner needs to become a confident, caring, happy person – happy with himself, his environment, and with the people around him.

EDUCATION OF THE SENSES (2 years onward)

Sensorial materials in the Montessori environment are designed to help the young child to order and refine his senses. The senses are visual, auditory, gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), and tactile (touch).

From the time the child is born he absorbs into his mind impressions of his surrounding environment – sounds, movement colors, shapes, etc. The sensorial material aids the child in sorting through these impressions to see the order in the environment, so that he may understand himself and his relationship to the world around him.

The materials are attractive and easily manipulative. Each is designed to isolate and refine a single sense, as well as to aid in the development of vocabulary. Each piece of equipment has a challenge built into it to help the child concentrate. This concentration precipitates normalization, learning, and the joy of fulfillment.

The Sensorial materials help the child to learn particular concepts during his sensitive periods. The geometric forms are helpful to the child of 3-4 years who is in a sensitive period in which he can grasp fundamental geometric shapes, linking language to form. All the materials are designed to aid in the acquisition of language, enabling the teacher to help the child learn vocabulary. The materials help the child in the refinement of his senses as he experiences working with them.

The Sensorial materials encourage the child to be creative and to develop and use his imagination. The young child is learning through his senses. Through stimulation and refinement of each sense, he will become an integrated person, experiencing the joy of self-learning. The concentration he experiences, and the repetition which is encouraged by concentration, will lead him to become happy with his own inner self and with his relationship to the work around him.

MATHEMATICS (Approximately 3 years & up)

The areas of Practical Life and Sensorial Development help prepare the child for the understanding of Mathematics. These exercises help the child to form impressions of geometric shapes, of the concept of

line, form, sets, etc. Most importantly, he learns to order and organize his work to proceed towards a goal. He is thereby prepared to encounter other more complex learning materials.

The basic concept in Montessori Math is that the child needs to experience quantity, then number symbol, and then to associate the quantity and symbol. He needs to understand what a “5” is before he can use “5” in operations. The child is introduced to the quantities of 1 -10.

Montessori Math is based on the decimal system. The child is taught concepts of place value; then he experiences the process of operations. The child moves from concrete to abstract. Within the decimal system there are progressions from the large-scale golden bead material to the smaller stamp game, to beads on a frame and finally to use of a pencil to record dots on a paper. After experiencing the decimal system, the child moves on to further abstraction, using various manipulative materials to understand addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

One important aspect about Montessori Math is that it involves both visual and tactile senses. The child touches and manipulates the material as well as visually experiencing it. Also, the child learns to memorize math facts through his manipulation of many math materials – the golden beads, strip boards, charts, etc.

Montessori Math recognizes the individuality of children with regards to mathematics; some are interested in counting and ordering; some are interested in the process of operations. Most of all, Montessori Math materials are attractive and manipulative, and thus appealing to the child as he explores the world of numbers and operations.

LANGUAGE & BEGINNING READING (Approx. 4 years and up)

All areas of the Montessori classroom aid in language development. In Practical Life, the child acquires the concentration and coordination needed to read and write. In Sensorial, the visual and auditory senses are strengthened for writing. In Math, the child learns concentration and order.

In the Language area, the child is exposed first to readiness materials which develop visual discrimination, auditory discrimination and memory, body awareness, and motor skills. From these activities the child builds skills of listening, left to right eye movement, coordination, etc. His introduction to letters is phonetic, tracing sandpaper letters and pronouncing the sounds, then combining these sounds to make simple phonetic words. The next step is to increase vocabulary by using an alphabet of moveable letters to form words. In this way the child builds the basic skills necessary to read.

Once a child is reading, it is important to keep teaching new words and comprehension skills. Children are encouraged to be creative by writing their own stories and by interpreting stories they read.

Writing in Montessori is encouraged through muscular development. The child strengthens his pencil control by tracing designs using metal geometric insets. He learns the correct form of letters by feeling the sandpaper letters with his fingers.

The Montessori classroom abounds with the love of language. Vocabulary is taught with many materials; there are oral language experiences, music, and daily communication with every child.

CULTURAL SUBJECTS (at all ages)

The Cultural Subjects include art, music, geography, anthropology, and science. Montessori believed that the young child would form a true appreciation of the world around him if introduced to the wonders of nature and elements of other cultures at a very early age. Thus, in the Montessori classroom children experience art and music from around the world. They learn about children of other cultures. Basic botany, zoology, and geology are also introduced. Children learn both to respect living things and to understand their needs.

Cultural Subjects are reinforced with continent and human cultural packets, botany cards, animal cards, history timelines, landforms, maps, globes, and flags of the world.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. All ages are approximations - every child is a unique individual!
2. No child will do all the activities when they are age appropriate. There is so much material available that the child may never get to everything.
3. Every child moves through each area at his individual speed. He will amble through some things and charge through others. HE IS NORMAL IN BOTH APPROACHES.
4. If your child is not within the “normal” range of academic, physical or social sequence according to Dr. Montessori, we will share our thoughts with you.
5. Through the school year we will provide ample opportunity for you to become familiar with these materials and our teaching methods.
6. Contact your child’s teacher immediately if you have a question. Do not be afraid to ask. Your child is best served when all of those who surround them are comfortable and knowledgeable.