

# montessori center room

## Commonly Asked Questions

The Montessori approach to education is different from the educational approach many adults experienced as children. The Montessori philosophy contradicts the "be seen and not heard" ethic of past generations. The materials expose children to concepts that often were not introduced until a later age. Therefore, parents are puzzled and confused about the Montessori environment and the roles of the child and adult in the environment. Often, observation of a Montessori classroom prompts many questions.

### **What equipment is in a Montessori environment?**

The Montessori environment is equipped with a wide variety of activities. Marie Montessori designed materials to develop children's skills in many ways. Some activities encourage skill development in daily living activities, the tasks that each of us performs on a regular basis to care for our environment and ourselves. This area includes activities such as pouring, toothbrushing, comb washing, dishwashing, polishing, hammering, scrubbing, and many others.

The sensorial materials stimulate awareness of size relationships, colors, sounds, and tactile qualities. These activities refine the child's senses and organize the information received through the senses.

Math, language, geography, and science activities provide academic stimulation. The math and language materials develop visual discrimination skills, math concepts and facts, and phonetic and reading capabilities. The science and geography areas contain activities that increase the children's understanding of their world.

Movements, music, and art contribute to the children's growth. Each child spends time in the gym daily, refining coordination skills through movement. Puppets are available to enrich the fantasy experience. Children sing and move to music during line time, and, through art materials, they express their thoughts and experiences graphically.

### **How do the children learn to use the equipment?**

The adults demonstrate the use of the materials to the children. The purpose of such demonstrations is to provide a beginning, a guide, to insure the child's success. The adults do not expect the children to use the materials in precisely the way they are shown, but rather to explore the activities in a constructive manner. "Misuse" or destructive use of materials includes anything that destroys the material, or hurts or disturbs another child. Within this limit, the children are free to use the equipment in accordance with their own rhythm and needs.

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### **How does the Montessori approach differ from that of the traditional nursery school?**

The traditional nursery school approach is familiar to many adults. The primary emphasis is on social skills; acquisition of academic skills is secondary. Children generally are grouped according to age, with three-year-olds in a group and four-year-olds in another. Five and six year olds are not present, but rather attend a kindergarten program. Often, children attend the traditional nursery school two or three days a week, occasionally more. The adults plan activities for the children as a group, and they direct the children through the activities, creating an adult-centered environment.

Montessori schools are different from traditional nursery schools. Montessori schools place emphasis on both social and academic skills. Children of different ages (sometimes from ages 2 -1/2 up to 6) share the environment and interact with each other spontaneously. Since Montessori programs include activities for the kindergarten-age child, most children enter first grade after three years in a Montessori preschool. Most Montessori schools operate five days a week.

The Montessori-trained adults prepare activities for the children to use individually and independently. The adults guide and support as needed. Instead of directing all activities, they spend some time observing the children and their interactions with each other and the environment. Using these observations, the adults assess the needs of each child. The observations guide them as they plan and introduce new materials into the environment. Thus, the adults respect and follow the child's direction, creating a child-centered rather than adult-centered environment.

### **Do the children use the materials individually? Do they learn to share?**

The children need freedom to explore the materials without interruption. Just as adults dislike distractions when involved in a task, so children prefer to complete their activities without distractions. In the environment, they develop the ability to focus their attention. Without unnecessary interruptions, their attention spans increase and they develop concentration.

Before children spontaneously share, they must feel free not to share. In the Montessori environment, the adults protect their right to explore an activity by themselves at their own paces. Any adult would resent being forced to relinquish the newspaper while in the midst of an interesting article. Children experience similar feelings. Sharing evolves naturally from the classroom experiences. When they desire, they share by communicating and helping others. The sharing is natural and spontaneous because it comes from within the child, rather than being forced arbitrarily by an adult.

### **Are the children free to do anything?**

The children are free to explore the environment and interpersonal relationships in constructive ways. The adults guide the children to insure that over a three-year period, each child experiences all areas of the environment.



The underlying theme is respect: the adults respect the individuality of each child. The children learn that others have needs and rights, and that they must respect those needs and rights. The children are free to explore only so long as their exploration does not include actions that hurt or disturb any other child. The children learn that what is good for the group is acceptable and what is not good for the group is unacceptable.

#### **How are the children disciplined?**

The most effective means of discipline involve communication among the children. The adults help the child whose rights have been violated to verbalize their feelings to the offender. The adults encourage the offending child to acknowledge these statements with either "I'm sorry", or "I'll try not to do that again".

When children continually disrespect others' needs and rights, they are removed temporarily from the group and their right to participate is terminated temporarily. During the "time out" period, they sit quietly with an adult in the environment. They observe other children continuing their activities in constructive ways. After several minutes, the adult invites the child to re-enter the activities.

However, "time out" occurs rarely because the children express their feelings openly to each other. Children respond to the demands of peer pressure and their own social needs to be part of the community. They choose to monitor their behavior so that they do not infringe on others rights.

#### **The children are so quiet; do they have enough opportunities to socialize?**

##### **Does the day include ample group activities for socialization?**

The children speak quietly so that they do not disturb others who are concentrating on a task. The children may interact freely, but quietly, according to their individual needs. Young children need time to observe the five and six year olds; they observe the work and interactions of these older children. The kindergarten-age children have very high social needs and spend much time in conversation with one or several children.

The day includes group activities at the beginning, during gym time, and at the end of the day. However, group activities do not encourage spontaneous interaction among the children. During group activities, the children's attention is focused on a specific task, and communication relates to the task. Group activities help develop listening skills and confidence to speak in groups, but the children need something different to develop social skill.

They need periods of time that are less structured than group activities for spontaneous communication. The work period provides the kind of setting that encourages communication and sharing that are spontaneous, personal, and pertinent to what is happening in their lives.



### **Is three too young for my child to start school?**

Maria Montessori found that three year olds are particularly eager to bring order to their minds and surroundings. They readily absorb the order in the materials and environment. The ability to organize an activity begins with this desire for order, and organization is the foundation of problem solving. At no other age is a child as eager as at three to have order. Therefore, three is the most desirable age to begin.

### **Will my three-year-old be able to handle five days of school each week?**

Children need routine and predictability in their lives. They do not understand the concept of time (yesterday, today, tomorrow; three hours from now; etc.) until around the age of five. When their lives lack routine and predictability, they feel out of control and insecure. Having school each weekday gives them the security of knowing what will happen next. In fact, often parents make a special trip to school on the weekend to prove that school is closed. Young children do not understand why they do not attend school every day!

Initially, some three-year-olds are tired at the end of the school day. Lunch or a substantial snack and a rest period help them and their families survive the remainder of the day. Their bodies do adjust with time and patience.

**Why are three, four, five, and six year olds mixed together?** The children learn from each other. When children are grouped by age, the range of capabilities is considerably smaller than when several ages are grouped together. The young children learn academic and social skills from observing the five and six year olds. The older children learn patience, tolerance, and leadership skills from interacting with the three and four year olds. Our society is not segmented into age groups as adults; we have friends and acquaintances of many different ages. The Montessori classroom reflects our society with the mixture of ages.

### **Isn't Montessori only for gifted children?**

Maria Montessori first worked with mentally-challenged children. By using her materials, these children surpassed "normal" children in many areas. This finding led Montessori to question the teaching techniques in traditional schools, and prompted her to open classrooms for "normal" children. She saw patterns of learning that transcended intelligence and other personal characteristics. As a result, she designed activities that are appropriate for a broad range of children.

### **If I choose a traditional first grade for my child, how will he/she adjust?**

Our goal is to prepare children for life's experiences. We prepare them in the academic area so that most children enter the first grade reading or on the brink of reading. They have a firm understanding of the decimal system. Their abilities to organize themselves and to solve problems are excellent. Their listening skills and their abilities to respect others and participate in the community are remarkable. Their confidence and communication skills are



very high. Most important of all, they love school and learning, and they have very positive feelings about themselves. These qualities are assets in any kind of setting.

### **How long has Montessori Center Room existed?**

Montessori Center Room was founded by a small group of parents and a woman, Jeanine Schmid, in 1966, in Lower Price Hill. After the school operated successfully for several years, the parents opened a second site in the East End Community, in 1969-70. During the mid 80's the Price Hill location closed. The purpose of founding the school was to provide a cross-cultural preschool experience in a Montessori environment for children of varied socio-economic backgrounds. The school remains in its original site in the East End next to historic St. Rose Church. Parents participate in the operation of the school in order to minimize the tuition costs.

### **What are the specific goals of Montessori Center Room?**

1. To provide the children with specific skills in the intellectual, physical, and social areas.
2. To encourage independence and responsibility for self.
3. To help the children learn respect for others' rights and needs so that they are able to participate in and contribute to the community.
4. To build confidence and self-esteem through the above goals and through the warm, accepting, caring atmosphere in the environment.

### **Suggested reading:**

Montessori: A Modern Approach

by Paula Polk Lillard

Primer for Parents

by Terry Molloy

Learning How to Learn

by Nancy McCormick Rambusch (available only at the library)

The Child in the Family

by Maria Montessori

Montessori's Own Handbook

by Maria Montessori



## **SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM OBSERVATION**

Look at the environment and note:

- 1) The beauty and order in the classroom;
- 2) The different materials available to the children;
- 3) The movement and noise levels of the children.

Watch the group as a whole, and then focus on a few specific children:

- 1) Observe children initiating their own activities;
- 2) Observe children working independently;
- 3) Observe children concentrating on their chosen work;
- 4) Observe children returning to work after distraction;
- 5) Observe children using the materials carefully;
- 6) Observe children finishing work;
- 7) Observe children returning equipment to its original location;
- 8) Observe children socializing.

Notice the roles of the adult:

- 1) Observe adults inviting children to use the materials;
- 2) Observe adults presenting materials;
- 3) Observe adults reading stories to the children;
- 4) Observe adults facilitating conflict resolution;
- 5) Observe adults watching the children and recording their observations.