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Maria Montessori School Casa Parent Guide

School Philosophy

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was an Italian physician and educator of extraordinary ability and vision. Through her experience and teachings we have today an education philosophy which responds to a child's natural and intellectual development. The director (teacher) is a facilitator in the child's pursuit of knowledge and skills rather than just a source of information. The class is comprised of a mixed age group, (3-6 years), encouraged to make their own choices in a prepared classroom environment. Inner discipline is encouraged by modeling and maintaining respect for others and the school environment.

'The secret of good teaching is to regard the children's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim therefore is not merely to make the children understand, and still less to force them to memorize, but so to touch their imagination as to enthuse their inmost core...'

~Maria Montessori

A Montessori Education is based on the belief that...

- Education is an aid to life and preparation for it.
- The potential for each individual's development should be respectful and nurtured.
- A complete education involves the integration of intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical and social aspects of life.
- The experience in school should be linked with "the outside world".
- Learning occurs in a variety of ways and should be suited to each child's individual needs.
- Learning is largely active, often self-correcting, individually paced and unlimited in scope.

- There should be diversity of social groupings. The adults role is one of guide and observer.
- The environment "reaches" the child through its richness, order, scale and attractiveness.
- Balancing freedom and discipline results in a larger capacity for self-direction.

CASA PROGRAM: 3-6 YEARS

For 2.5 hours a day, students engage in individual and small group work of their choice. These choices are, of course, guided by the teacher. Children work to develop themselves in the setting of the prepared environment. Montessori materials are designed for use by individual students or small groups, rather than as teacher presentation aides. Another important aspect of Montessori classes is an attitude of co-operation rather than competition. It is common for students to ask other student for help.

GRACE AND COURTESY

Children between 3 to 6 years old are in the midst of a sensitive period for learning precise movements and for learning social skills as well as their need to adapt and belong to their particular culture.

Through grace and courtesy lessons we show how to move and respond to others. These lessons include grace in moving about the room safely and carrying things. They include courtesy in saying please and thank you, excusing oneself, waiting one's turn, making a request, greeting and welcoming a visitor, saying good bye, etc. Grace and courtesy in daily living includes lessons involving table etiquette, bathroom procedures, telephone etiquette, etc. All of these exercises cover the elements a child needs to know in order to feel comfortable and secure in dealing with others. They lead the child to develop respect for his or her environment and all that is within it and enable the child to learn how to be a contributing member of his or her community. Five areas of activity help them to achieve this:

1. PRACTICAL LIFE EXERCISES

These exercises encourage the child's own independence through learning to care for oneself, others and the environment. It also establishes the standard Montessori work cycle: a project is chosen and returned to its location, ready for another person to use.

2. SENSORIAL APPARATUS

Awakens the mind to the stimuli that are received through the senses, which are then named, classified and extended.

3. LANGUAGE PROGRAM

Makes the child aware of the sounds of speech and then associates symbols with those sounds. The concepts of writing, reading and the beginnings of grammar are introduced. This is achieved in a meaningful way that makes sense to the child, rather than simply teaching them by rote. French and Spanish classes are also offered.

4. NUMBER WORK

Materials represent math concepts, such as fractions, the decimal system and its operation. Foundations of geometry and algebra are also laid.

5. CULTURE

Includes:

- Geography - In geography, students work with puzzle maps, in which each continent has been made into a puzzle, the pieces of which are countries. The nature of the earth and its people are explored.
- Biology - The variety of plants and animals.
- History - A sense of progression of time and of current events.
- Art & Music - Experiences of art and music and an introduction to their styles.

THE ROLE PARENTS PLAY

As a parent, translating the Montessori educational approach to the home environment may be perplexing. Dr. Montessori's application to the home can be explained through three key components:

(1) RESPECT

It is important for a parent to model a caring approach to all people, animals, plants, and things. The child benefits from a parent who continues to possess innate curiosity, awe, and dignity with the world around her/him. A child is constantly learning about the world, relationships, and her/his own value from parental processes, behaviours, and communications skills.

It is very important to listen when a child is talking. This requires eye contact and appropriate responses. It is important to not be distracted by house chores, telephone calls, or psychological preoccupation.

Avoid using cynical, witty or demeaning language. At this stage of development, a child interprets language in a very literal manner and certain comments may send messages of incompetence to the child. A parent should restrain from negative commentary about others. The child may feel that she/he may be the next recipient of parental ill will.

A parent's dialogue with a child is another key element in developing respect with the child. It not only increases verbal skills, but also increases the child's level of trust. A child's vocabulary increases from 200 words to 20,000 words from the ages of 2 to 6 years old. A parent can enrich a child's vocabulary through using new words in daily interactions. Parent-child dialogue helps the child with the art of articulation. On an emotional level, a parent is able to help a child begin to label and therefore understand complex emotional states. Communication becomes a cornerstone for a child assessment of availability, helpfulness, and trustworthiness of a parent.

(2) FRIENDLINESS WITH ERROR:

It is important to let the child embrace her/his own experiences. While a parent may want to help the child avoid life's pitfalls, it is essential for a child to personalise her/ his own journey in life. Life's lessons result from natural consequences of a child's actions. It is essential for a child to learn from mistakes. This is extremely important in the area of dress. It is celebrated when a child dresses him or herself, even if the result is a mismatched outfit. Instilling independence in a child will lead to an individual who feels competent and respected.

(3) FREEDOM TO BE INDEPENDENT:

It is important that every room in the house has a designated space for the child. This could be a shelf on a bookcase or a whole section of a room. Here are some great ways to translate Montessori technique into every room of the home:

BEDROOM

- Clothing in an easily accessible place
- Bookshelves, no toy boxes
- Clean out old stuff
- Only clothes in the drawers that are appropriate for season
- Low sleeping place
- Low rod for hanging things
- Low shelf for toys

KITCHEN

- Setting table
- Let use utensils, child-size pitchers, etc.
- Let participate in clean-up, carry bowls, etc.
- Let participate in social life in the family. Every meal at the table. Even infants should eat at the table, ritual & celebration

BATHROOM

- Brush own teeth, adults only need to do brushing once a week
- Towel bar low
- Get own drink of water
- Brush and comb down low
- Mirror at child's height

COMMON AREA

- Own entertainment, books, games, reading, etc.
- Model respect for special things in the home. This will naturally child proof the home.

OUTDOORS

- Area of the yard to run free
- Places to roam and play in nature, dig soil, etc.
- Small, accessible planter boxes
- Child-size tools, rake, shovels, etc.

When your child is enrolled in a Maria Montessori School, you become part of a dynamic community, which will value your opinions, talents and contributions. You will be encouraged to become involved. You will find that you can make a difference. Opportunities to improve your understanding of Montessori education and child development are provided at Parent nights, through the publication of the newsletter and by pre-arranged observation in the school followed by discussion with your child's teacher.

ACTIVITIES A SMALL CHILD CAN EASILY PERFORM IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

- TURNING A WATER TAP ON AND OFF.

- SCRUBBING SINKS

- Materials: a small sponge 2"x3", a small can of cleanser with only one hole uncovered. (CAUTION: The cleanser should be stored out of the child's reach).
- In the first stage the adult applies the cleanser, the child turns on the tap and scrubs the sink with a sponge.

- Later the child applies the cleanser under adult supervision and then carries out the activity as above.

HELPING UNLOAD GROCERIES

- Put bags on floor. Let child hand you things and put away things at child's own level. (CAUTION: Some cans are too large to be lifted safely by a child).

DUSTING

- Materials: pretty flannel cloths cut 6"X6", a small baby's hairbrush, some place to put the dirty cloth.
- Call child's attention to the dust. Ask child if s/he would like to be a helper. Show child how to wrap the cloth around fingers and wipe away the dust in slow careful strokes, changing position of the dust cloth on fingers as s/he notices dust collect. The brush is used for carved furniture, nooks and crannies.
- Child can dust furniture tops, legs, baseboards, corners, ornaments, etc.

VACUUMING

- Materials: a vacuum cleaner.
- Most children love to run vacuums. Show child how to connect the parts of the vacuum. (CAUTION: Make it clear that an adult is to plug it in) Show child how to turn it on and off and how to clean different parts of the rug.

SWEEPING

- Materials: small broom, brush, dustpan.
- Show child how to sweep dirt into a pile with the broom. Hold dustpan and sweep dirt into it with the little brush. Carefully carry the dustpan to wastebasket and empty it. Wash off dustpan.

POURING

- Materials: small attractive pitchers.
- Child can pour milk, juice and water for him/herself and others.
- At first pitcher should contain only as much as the glass or cup 2/3 full. Later pitcher contains more than one glass will hold.

SETTING TABLE

- Child helps parent put out dishes and silver and carries them to table one thing at a time. Later parent sets one place as an example and child sets a place for each family member. Finally child sets table by him/herself, counting out each thing s/he needs. Items should be put down within the child's reach.

SPONGING OFF PLASTIC TABLETOPS AND COUNTERTOPS

- Materials: small sponge 2"x3"
- Show child how to wet and wring out sponge from a tap. Child carefully sponges off counters, etc., putting crumbs in a pile or sweeping them into his/her hand.

PUTTING AWAY TOYS

- This is a habit. Encourage your child to replace each toy on the shelf after s/he has used it. Sometimes children get out so much so fast that they get frantic and impossibly frustrated. If this happens, the adult should put away the toys with a friendly manner and say nothing.

OTHER ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DEVELOP COULD INCLUDE:

rolling socks
folding cloths and linens
storing cloths and linens
weeding
raking leaves
watering plants indoors and outdoors
helping wash a car
helping wrap packages
helping decorate the home for holidays
washing and drying dishes
sorting clothes for a wash
etc.

When your child performs an activity to help care for him/herself or the home environment. PRAISE him/her regardless of the result. Do not redo any part of his project in front of him, and if possible do not correct any part of it at all. As your child gets more practice and becomes able to perform the physical parts of the activity with ease, s/he will begin long cycles of repetition. These cycles or repetition are often annoying to adults. However, they enable the child to work with interest and eventually, concentration.

Socially your child will go through three main stages. First s/he will perform an activity for him/herself and his/her inner needs. Later s/he will be able to perform the task occasionally when asked. At this point the child begins to control his/her will. Finally, (about 1 to 1-½ years later) s/he will perform the task any time asked or whenever s/he sees a practical need.

In the beginning it will be difficult for your child to perform water activities without making a big mess. Have several beach towels on hand to help clean up the water. Several times later there will be very little spilling and the child will be able to do most of the cleanup him/herself. DURING THIS TIME IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE ADULT TO MAINTAIN A FRIENDLY ATTITUDE AND A SENSE OF HUMOR. Remember, praise your child for what s/he does and tries to do.

The most important aspects of a child's personality and intellect develop through participation in the everyday life of the family. They are order, sequence, independence, self-control, self-respect, and the joy of learning and accomplishing something purposeful. A child lives to work. From this vital work of building a man/woman s/he derives the joyfulness that learning through discovery can bring. All of this will result in a man/woman who will enjoy the lifelong feeling of self-respect, independence and concern for others.

A WORD ABOUT TOYS

Toys should be safe. They should challenge your child's interest and imagination without being too difficult or too easy. If your child plays poorly or destroys a toy, it is either too simple, too difficult, or is in such deteriorated condition that it is impossible for him/her to use it with a sense of joy, wonder or fulfillment.

We recommend neutral colored toy shelves because they offer the possibility of displaying a toy in such a way that it attracts and lures the child to it. Each toy should be washed often and have all of its parts. If a toy is difficult to store or keep neatly on the shelf, make an attractive box for it. Each toy that has removable parts should have a beautiful small box for the storage of those parts.

Using a wood awl and making a small hole in each piece can make marvellous handles for wood puzzles. Put a little glue in the hole and insert a mini eye screw. Also it helps if the adult numbers each puzzle and all of its corresponding pieces on the back.

Toy rotation results in better use of toys. Children always feel that some of their toys are "new". Only 8-9 toys need be on the toy shelves at one time. The others should be stored accessibly. As your child tires of some toys they can be replaced by stored toys. Of course if a child asks for a "stored toy" s/he should be able to have it.

Birthdays

On or near your child's birthday, he/she will be invited to participate in a Montessori tradition ("The Earth Goes Around the Sun"). This will be held during our daily class time. Prior to this event, please help your child to prepare the "Time Line" with a display of pictures, stories and artifacts to tell the story of their life.

You are invited to share this moment with your child, telling together his/her life story.

Usually the birthday child brings a present for the class as a symbol of his/her joy of having one more year. Please see the Directress or Educational Assistant for further details.

Phonetic Letter Sounds

These are the phonetic sounds we present to your child at school. Please reinforce these sounds with your child when practicing letters at home. Some children seem confused between letter names and phonetic sounds; this usually will delay their progress into reading materials. Montessori believes that learning letter names at this age is irrelevant to the child. Please present only the sound to your child at home. Once children learn all phonetic sounds, they will advance to phonetic reading material. They will learn letter names at a later stage in our program.

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| a - <u>a</u> nt | n - <u>n</u> ut |
| b - <u>b</u> ag | o - <u>o</u> tter |
| c - <u>c</u> up | p - <u>p</u> ig |
| d - <u>d</u> og | q - <u>q</u> ueen |
| e - <u>e</u> gg | r - <u>r</u> abbit |
| f - <u>f</u> rog | s - <u>s</u> un |
| g - <u>g</u> um | t - <u>t</u> op |
| h - <u>h</u> at | u - <u>u</u> p |
| l - <u>l</u> it | v - <u>v</u> est |
| j - <u>j</u> ump | w - <u>w</u> olf |
| k - <u>k</u> ing | x - <u>x</u> ox |
| l - <u>l</u> amp | y - <u>y</u> arn |
| m - <u>m</u> an | z - <u>z</u> ebra |

