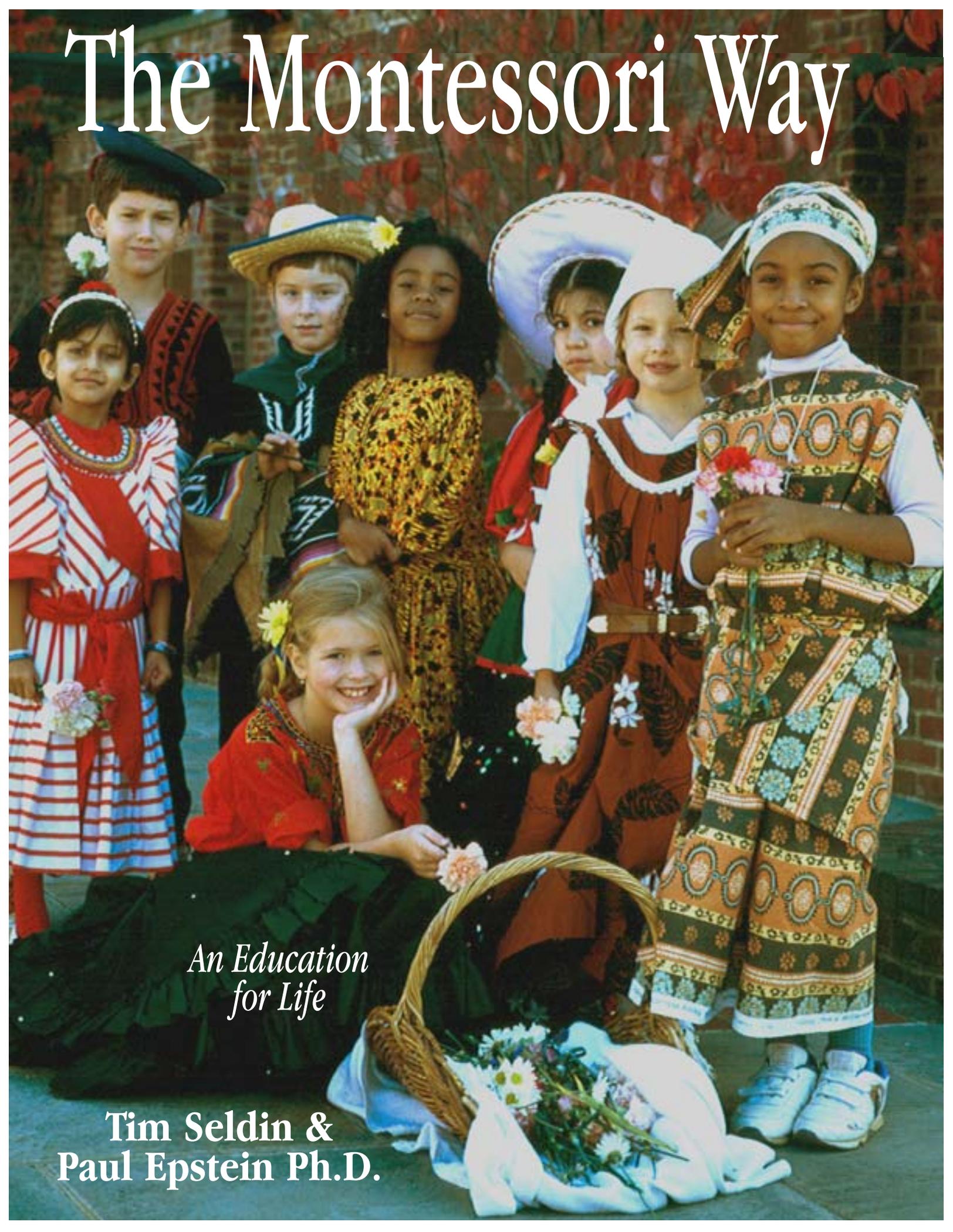


# The Montessori Way



*An Education  
for Life*

**Tim Seldin &  
Paul Epstein Ph.D.**



*The* **Montessori Foundation** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of Montessori education around the world. Its mission is to nurture, inspire, and support the development of strong, successful Montessori schools throughout North America. The Foundation is committed to promoting Dr. Montessori's dream of a worldwide community of children and adults working together to teach peace and global understanding, cooperation rather than conflict, and to celebrate the universal values of kindness, compassion, and nonviolence.

## *The Montessori Foundation*

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The Montessori Foundation works with the international Montessori community, providing programs, services, resources, and lines of communications among parents, educators, and schools who are interested in learning more about the insights, research, and approach pioneered by Dr. Maria Montessori.

#### **The Montessori Foundation's programs include:**

*Tomorrow's Child magazine*, an international journal enjoyed by Montessori parents and educators around the world.

The Foundation's **Publication Center** offers hundreds of difficult-to-find books and other resources of interest to Montessori teachers, parents, and heads of schools.

**The Montessori Leadership Institute** offers a broad program of in-depth and practical courses in Montessori leadership on a wide range of topics — from school design to fundraising, recruitment, internal communications, and curriculum development.

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The Montessori Foundation inspired the development of the **International Montessori Council**, a membership organization for Montessori schools, parents, and educators around the world. The Council was formed to offer accreditation to Montessori schools, programs in professional development, school self-assessment and improvement, parenting centers, and to assist with the development of Montessori Councils at the state/provincial and grassroots level. The Council publishes *Montessori Leadership*, a magazine written specifically for heads of schools, educational coordinators, key parent leaders, and trustees.

# The Montessori Way

The  
Montessori  
Foundation  
Press



**Tim Seldin**  
**Paul Epstein, Ph.D.**

# Acknowledgments

October, 2003

**E**ver since we first established The Montessori Foundation, we have said to one another that one day we would write a book that introduced Montessori as clearly as the articles in our magazine, *Tomorrow's Child*.

Thanks to an extraordinarily generous contribution by **Tony Low-Beer**, a wonderful man who has become very supportive of our work at the Foundation, this book has been made possible. The authors wish to express their deepest appreciation to Mr. Low-Beer and his family. We also wish to extend our commitment to the role that The Montessori Foundation continues to play around the world in helping to spread the insights and approach to educating the world's children that was developed by Dr. Maria Montessori.

The authors have contributed all rights to this book to The Montessori Foundation. We hope that, in addition to helping to spread the word of the Montessori approach to parents and educators around the world, the proceeds from the sales of *The Montessori Way* will help to ensure the Foundation's future.

In addition, we would like to express our deep appreciation to everyone who helped to bring this book to life. This loyal band of colleagues and friends includes: **Dr. Ann Epstein** for her excellent chapter on *Children with Exceptionalities*; **David Kahn** of the North American Montessori Teachers Association (NAMTA) for his description of the Hershey Montessori Farm School and his essay on the role of imagination in Montessori Elementary education; **Marta Donahoe** of the Clark Montessori High School for contributing descriptions of their Secondary Programs; **Susan Tracy** for her assistance in preparing the chapter on Infants and Toddlers; **Melody Mosby** of the Athens Montessori School for her description of their Montessori Middle School; and **Eileen Roper Ast** of the American Montessori Society for her help proofreading this publication.

We also want to thank the teachers and children of **A Love of Learning Montessori School** (Columbia, MD); **Athens Montessori School** (Athens, GA); **Montessori School of Anderson** (Anderson, SC); **Lake Norman Country Day School** (Huntersville, NC); **Oneness Family School** (Chevy Chase, MD); **Chiaravalle Montessori School** (Evanston, IL); **Henson Valley Montessori School** (Camp Springs, MD); **Montessori School of Raleigh** (Raleigh, NC); **New Gate School** (Sarasota, FL); **Montessori Children's Center at Burke** (White Plains, NY); **Mater**

**Amoris School** (Ashton, MD); **Montessori Educational Center** (Alexandria, LA); **Raritan Valley Montessori School** (Bridgewater, NJ); **Montessori Children's House** (Dunedin, New Zealand); **Westwood Montessori Schools** (Dallas, TX); **Washington Montessori Charter Public Schools** (Washington, NC); **Century House Montessori School** (Tortola, BVI); and **Renaissance School** (Oakland, CA) for allowing us to capture the magic of their classrooms on film.

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**Paul Epstein**  
Evanston, IL

**Tim Seldin**  
Sarasota, FL

## Dedication

**M**y involvement with The Montessori Foundation and *The Montessori Way* project stems from two sources. Looking back, it is clear that my children, Susanna and Nick A., could have benefited greatly from a Montessori education; because of my ignorance and stubbornness when they were young, I regrettably did not provide them with the opportunity. It took my wonderful friend and business partner, Dominique Lahaussais, and her son, Pierre Alexander, as well as two other dear friends, Peter Cherneff and Rachel Lorentzen, to open my eyes. It is to these four people I love so dearly, that this book is dedicated.

— Tony Low-Beer

# Foreword

**W**hat is education for? How we answer this question is critical for the future of our children, our nation, and our world. Yet all too often it gets lost in debates about standards, testing, and other procedural reforms that treat education as something to be *done* to children rather than *for* and *with* them.

*The Montessori Way* shows that we can, and must, go back to basics – to the real purpose of education as drawing forth from each one of us our full human potential. It is a highly practical book. But it is much more than that. It describes a way of life – a way of thinking about the nature of intelligence, talent, and the potential for goodness and greatness among all people, a way to nurture and inspire the creativity, curiosity, leadership, love, and imagination that lies within us all. It reminds us that the child is the mother/father of the woman/man she or he will one day become, and that the most important human task is to nurture and educate children.

Based on the pioneering work of Maria Montessori, as well as more recent knowledge about how children develop, learn, and access their full humanity, *The Montessori Way* embodies what I call partnership education. It is designed not only to help young people better navigate through our difficult times, but also to help them create a more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable future.

Rather than relying on a paradigm of domination and submission, of winning and losing, of external rewards and punishments, of top-down rankings, fear, manipulation, indoctrination, and pressure to conform, *The Montessori Way* presents an education that focuses on partnership, independence, mutual trust, and respect, on both individual achievement and collaboration, while developing our minds and hearts.

Explicitly or implicitly, education gives young people a mental map of what it means to be human. Much of what young people worldwide learn through both their formal and informal education holds up a distorted mirror of themselves. When their vision of the future comes out of this limited world view, they cannot develop their full humanity or meet the unprecedented challenges they face.

In *The Montessori Way*, Tim Seldin and Paul Epstein offer sound guidelines, practical tools, and inspiring real-life stories of how, working together teachers, children, parents, and others can create learning communities where everyone can feel safe and seen for who we truly are, where our essential humanity and that of others shines through, lifting our hearts and spirits, empowering us to realize our highest intellectual, emotional, and spiritual potentials.

In her unshakable faith in the human spirit and her fearless challenge to traditions of domination, Maria Montessori is one of my role models. Her legacy, as expanded and enriched by countless others, is the gift of this wonderful book.

— Riane Eisler is author of *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century*, *The Power of Partnership*, and *The Chalice and The Blade*.



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# SECTION

# 1



# THE MONTESSORI WAY

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF THE MONTESSORI MOVEMENT

MONTESSORI'S PHILOSOPHY

CERTIFIED MONTESSORI TEACHERS

# Introduction

In 1907, an Italian physician was invited to open a child-care facility for fifty preschool-aged children in a section of Rome that was avoided and neglected because of its oppressive poverty and crime. The children's parents worked sixteen or more hours a day. In the absence of adult supervision, these children were vandalizing recently renovated housing. Years later, Dr. Maria Montessori recalled her experience of personal transformation in which she discovered something previously unknown about children:



(Above) Dr. Maria Montessori, c. 1934.

*“What happened will always remain a mystery to me. I have tried since then to understand what took place in those children. Certainly there was nothing of what is to be found now in any House of Children. There were only rough large tables.*

*I brought them some of the materials which had been used for our work in experimental psychology, the items which we use today as sensorial material and materials for the exercises of practical life. I merely wanted to study the children's reactions. I asked the woman in charge not to interfere with them in any way, as otherwise I would not be able to observe them. Someone brought them paper and colored pencils, but, in itself, this was not the explanation of the further events. There was no one who loved them. I myself only visited them once a week, and during the day, the children had no communication with their parents.*

*The children were quiet; they had no interference either from the teacher or from the parents, but their environment contrasted vividly from that which they had been used to; compared to that of their previous life, it seemed fantastically beautiful. The walls were white, there was a green plot of grass outside, though*

*no one had yet thought to plant flowers in it, but most beautiful of all was the fact that they had interesting occupations in which no one, no one at all, interfered. They were left alone, and little by little, the children began to work with concentration, and the transformation they underwent was noticeable. From timid and wild as they were before, the children became sociable and communicative. They showed a different relationship with each other, of which I have written in my books. Their personalities grew and, strange though it may seem, they showed extraordinary understanding, activity, vivacity and confidence. They were happy and joyous.*

*This fact was noticed after a while by the mothers who came to tell us about it. As the children had had no one to teach them or interfere with their actions, they acted spontaneously; their manners were natural.*

*But the most outstanding thing about these strange children of the St. Lorenz Quarter was their obvious gratitude. I was as much surprised by this as everyone else. When I entered the room, all the children sprang to greet me and cried their welcome. Nobody had taught them any manner of good behavior. And the strangest thing of all was that although nobody had cared for them*

\* Maria Montessori (1942), *How It All Happened*; <http://www.montessori-ami.org/ami.htm> (January 4, 2003)

physically, they flourished in health, as if they had been secretly fed on some nourishing food. And so they had, but in their spirit. These children began to notice things in their homes: a spot of dirt on their mother's dress, untidiness in the room. They told their mothers not to hang the washing in the windows but to put flowers there instead. Their influence spread into the homes, so that after a while these also became transformed.

Six months after the inauguration of the House of Children, some of the mothers came to me and pleaded that as I had already done so much for their children and they themselves could do nothing about it because they were illiterate, would I not teach their children to read and write?

At first I did not want to, being as prejudiced as everyone else that the children were far too young for it. But I gave them the alphabet in the way I have told you. As then it was something new for me also. I analyzed the words for them and showed that each sound of the words had a symbol by which it could be materialized. It was then that the explosion into writing occurred.

The news spread, and the whole world became interested in this phenomenal activity of the writing of these children who were so young and whom nobody had taught. The people realized that they were confronted by a phenomenon that could not be explained. For besides writing, these children worked all the time without being forced by anyone to do so.

This was a great revelation, but it was not the only contribution of the children. It was also they who created the lesson of silence. They seemed to be a new type of children. Their fame spread and, in consequence, all kinds of people visited the House of Children, including state ministers and their wives, with whom the children behaved graciously and beautifully, without anyone urging them. Even the newspapers in Italy and abroad became excited. So the news spread, until finally also the Queen became interested. She came to

that Quarter, so ill famed that it was considered hell's doors, to see for herself the children about whom she had heard wonders.

What was the wonder due to? No one could state it clearly. But it conquered me forever, because it penetrated my heart as a new light. One day I looked at them with eyes which saw them differently, and I asked myself: 'Who are you? Are you the same children you were before?' And I said within myself: 'Perhaps you are those children of whom it was said that they would come to save humanity. If so, I shall follow you.' Since then, I am she who tries to grasp their message to follow them.

And in order to follow them, I changed my whole life. I was nearly forty. I had in front of me a doctor's career and a professorship at the University. But I left it all, because I felt compelled to follow them and to find others who could follow them, for I saw that in them lay the secret of the soul.

You must realize that what happened was something so great and so stirring that its importance could never be sufficiently recognized. That it will never be sufficiently studied is certain, for it is the secret of life itself. We cannot fully know its causes. It is not possible that it came because of my method, for at the time my method did not yet exist. This is the clearest proof that it was a revelation that emanated from the children themselves.

---

(Below) A meal at the Montessori School in the Convent of the Franciscan Nuns, Rome, c. 1912.



*My educational method has grown from these, as well as from many other revelations, given by the children. You know, from what I have told you, that all the details included in the method have come from the efforts to follow the child. The new path has been shown us. No one knows exactly how it arose; it just came into being and showed us the new way.*

*It has nothing to do with any educational method of the past nor with any educational method of the future. It stands alone as the contribution of the child himself. Perhaps it is the first of its kind, which has been built by him, step by step.*

*It cannot have come from an adult person; the thought, the very principle that the adult should stand aside to make room for the child, could never have come from the adult.*

*Anyone who wants to follow my method must understand that he should not honor me, but follow the child as his leader."*

Maria Montessori discovered that when young children concentrate and investigate a set of purposefully designed activities, they tend to develop self-control; their movements become ordered, and they appear peaceful. Their demeanor towards others becomes kind and gentle.

These characteristics and other discoveries made with the children of San Lorenzo in 1907 were quickly replicated, as new Montessori schools opened throughout Europe and around the world. Children in Elementary and Secondary Montessori schools displayed tremendous enthusiasm as they explored and studied topics in great detail. Their learning achievements were profound. The overall Montessori experience, however, is deeper than an academic course of study. Because the Montessori process fully engages children's natural learning potentials, Montessori students learn about themselves, develop self-confidence, communicate effectively, and work well in groups.

Today's Montessori schools incorporate the discoveries of Maria Montessori as well as recent understandings of how learning and development take place. Montessori schools are now found in private, public, and home-school settings in the United States and abroad. The educational programs located in these schools range from infant care to high school students.

Many of these schools are affiliates of, or are accredited by, one of a dozen national and/or international Montessori organizations. Teachers receive Montessori teacher certification after completing rigorous courses of study. Many teachers describe their own experiences of personal transformation as they, too, witness in children astounding capabilities. From a family's perspective, becoming part of a Montessori school could be thought of as adopting a natural lifestyle we call *The Montessori Way*.

---

(Below) Students at the Montessori School in the Convent of the Franciscan Nuns, Rome, c. 1912.



# A Typical Montessori Day

It is dark at 7:45 A.M. on this mid-winter's morning when Jeanne Saunders pulls up to the drop-off circle at the Montessori school her three children have attended since they were two years old.

Jeanne has made this trip so often over the years that the school feels like her second home. Jeanne works in town and typically cannot leave work until after 5:00 P.M. Her husband, Bill, teaches in the local public school and is off much earlier. He will pick up the children from the after-school program at 4:30 P.M., but if he's late, he knows that they'll be fine until he arrives. The school prides itself on being "family friendly." Working families appreciate its extended-day and summer-camp programs.

Imani, Justin, and Madison definitely think of their Montessori school as their second family. Madison is one of those children who, after eleven years in Montessori, speaks about the school with affection and conviction. Visitors often find her coming up without a moment's hesitation to greet them and offer them a cup of coffee before they start the campus tour. When people ask if she likes it in Montessori, she smiles and says, "Sure! How could anyone not love it here? Your teachers are your best friends, the work is really interesting, and the other kids are my friends, too. You feel really close to everyone."





(Above) Montessori empowers children to take care of their basic needs.

Madison walks her five-year-old sister, Imani, to her morning supervision room. Seven-year-old Justin goes ahead on his own. After dropping off Imani, Madison walks into the middle school wing, where she is a seventh grader. She joins two of her friends in the Commons, and they sit and talk quietly, waiting for class to start at 8:30 A.M.

Imani's morning supervision takes place in her regular classroom. After hanging up her coat, she walks over to Judy, the staff member in charge of her room, and asks if she can help. Judy asks Imani to look over the breakfast table and provide any missing napkins and spoons. Imani does this, and when the table is finally ready, she makes herself a bowl of cereal. Imani adds milk and walks to a breakfast table to eat. Children and their parents drift into the room every so often; gradually the number of children in the early-morning program grows to about fifteen.

After eating her breakfast, Imani brings her bowl and spoon to a dish-washing table. Bowls and spoons are stacked in a bin. Later in the morning, several children will choose the dish-washing activity. All items will be completely cleaned and sterilized afterwards by the dishwasher located in the classroom.

Next, Imani walks to the easel and begins to paint with Teresa, a little girl of just three, who has only joined the

class over the last few weeks. They paint quietly, talking back and forth about nothing in particular.

Eventually, Imani tires of painting and cleans up. For a moment, she is tempted to walk away and leave the easel messy; instead, she carefully cleans up and puts the materials away, as she has learned from more than two years in Montessori.

At 8:30 A.M., Imani's full-day teacher and her assistant arrive, along with several more children. Other children follow over the next few minutes until all twenty-four students and the two adults quietly move about the room. During the next several hours, Imani and her classmates will choose learning activities and will involve themselves individually, as well as in small groups. They will have a variety of lessons from their teachers. Some are demonstrations, during which their teachers show them how to use the learn-

ing materials. Other lessons are in the form of direct instruction on, for example, the phonetic sounds of letters or on names for numerals, geometric shapes, and geographic terms for landforms, continents, and nations.

In another part of the school, Justin and his classmates begin their lower-elementary day (for children between the ages of six and nine) with a writing prompt: "*Wisdom is ...*" As each child completes the writing prompt, the



(Right) Most Montessori schools have art materials in the classroom for use throughout the day. Some schools have art specialists who instruct the children as part of their weekly curriculum or extended-day program.

teachers meet with students to review the progress of their work plans. This morning, Justin will join a small group for an introductory lesson on how to use the science discovery boxes. The focus of the lesson will involve asking investigative questions.

The middle school students start their day with "sharing," one of several components of their morning meeting. By speaking about something that has taken place during the past twenty-four hours, students come to know one another better and build trust.

Afterwards, they will break into math groups. Madison, along with two of her classmates, will present a lesson demonstrating the predictive power of a linear equation. Following math, the students will regroup into smaller teams. Each team is completing research for multimedia presentations based on several topics from their global studies.

Imani, with one of her friends, is also working to construct and solve a mathematical problem:  $2,346 + 1,421$ . This activity reflects their learning accomplishments during the past two years. Each child has used other materials to build an understanding of number and place value. Today, they use a set of numeral cards to make the first addend: 2,346. The cards showing the "units" 1 to 9 are printed in green. The cards showing the "tens" numerals from 10 to 90 are printed in blue. The "hundreds" from 100 to 900 are printed in red, and the cards showing 1,000 to 9,000 are printed in green again, because they represent units of thousands.

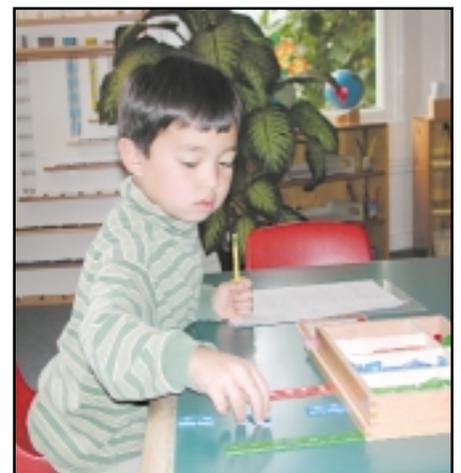
Imani and her friend look through the cards and find a green 6, a blue 40, a red 300, and a green 2,000. They place these numeral cards across the top of a wooden tray and carry it to the "bank," a central collection of golden bead materials. They place their tray on the floor, and they gather 6 "unit" beads.

Next, they count out 4 bars of "ten" beads, which will represent 40. This process is repeated until their tray is

filled with the correct number of "hundred" squares, and "thousand" cubes. They walk back to their work space and unroll a rug on the floor. The two girls then place their numeral cards across the top of the rug. They place the "unit" beads under the green 6 card; 4 bars of "ten" beads each under the blue 40 card; 3 squares of "hundred" beads each under the red 300 card; and 2 cubes of "thousand" beads each under the green 2,000 card. The girls now fill their empty tray with cards to form the numeral 1,421. Walking to the "bank," they again select the correct quantity of bead materials and return to their work rug. They build 1,421 under the 2,346.

The two addends are combined in an addition process: the "unit" beads are combined and placed in the lower-right corner of the rug. The bars of "ten" are combined and placed to the left of the "units." This process continues for the "hundred" squares and "thousand" cubes. Their movements mimic the pencil and paper process. Beginning with the "units," the children count the combined quantities to determine the result of adding the two together. In this example, the result is 7 "unit" beads. They find a green 7 card to represent this partial sum. If their addition resulted in a quantity of ten beads or more, the children would stop at the count of 10 and carry the 10 "unit" beads to the "bank," where they would exchange the 10 "unit" beads for 1 "ten" bar: 10 "units" equals 1 unit of "ten." This process of counting and labeling quantities is repeated for the "tens," "hundreds," and "thousands."

To complete this activity, Imani and her friend collect pieces of math paper, and green, blue, and red pencils. They copy their problem on their papers:  $2,346 + 1,421 = 3,767$ . They put their papers in their cubbies and they return the pencils, numeral cards, bead materials, and tray to their proper places. Finally, they roll up their work rug and



(Above) The Stamp Game

*The Stamp Game is not really a game at all — it is a set of concrete materials that allows young children to solve four-digit math problems; it is a next step on the road to abstraction in the Montessori Math curriculum.*

return it to the rug holder. This is, as the children proudly say, a “big work.”

It is now almost 10:00 A.M. and Imani is hungry. She moves to the snack table and prepares several pieces of celery stuffed with peanut butter. She pours a cup of apple juice, using a little pitcher that is just the right size for her hands. When she is finished, Imani takes the cup to the dish-washing table and wipes the place mat. As with the breakfast dishes, dish washing is a real-life activity; the children will wash their own dishes and learn to take care of their own needs. (Dishes and utensils will go through the dishwasher before the next morning.)

Montessori children are usually energized by “big work.” Cleaning up from her snack has put Imani in the mood to *really* clean something. Younger children will direct their energies into a table-washing activity.

Five-year-old Imani has another plan. She finds her friend Chelsea, and the two girls begin talking about a puppy named Sam. They begin to laugh as their story becomes increasingly elaborate. Their teacher, Ann, acknowledges their creativity and suggests they write a story. This lesson involves a work rug, a box of wooden letters called the *Moveable Alphabet*, pencils, paper, and writing tables. Like the earlier math work, it reflects enormous achievements in language learning. They have already learned the phonetic sounds of letters and how to blend sounds together to write and read words. This activity also reflects enormous achievements in developing focus or concentration and self-discipline. Imani and Chelsea use the alphabet to compose a story about a dog named Sam.

Throughout the morning, Imani’s classmates have completed learning

activities involving sorting and sequencing objects, identifying names for nations, arranging geometric shapes, and exploring scientific properties.

In a very real sense, Imani and her classmates are responsible for the care of this child-sized environment. Older children show younger children how to use the materials. When the children are hungry, they prepare their own snacks by cutting raw fruits and vegetables. They go to the bathroom without assistance. When something spills, they help each other clean up. They also enjoy sweeping, dusting, and washing windows. They set tables, tie their own shoes, polish silver, and steadily grow in their self-confidence and independence. Noticing that the plants need water, Imani carries the watering can from plant to plant, barely spilling a drop.



Children move freely around the class, selecting activities that capture their interests. Imani and her classmates have demonstrated self-sufficiency. They are developing an inner sense of order, a greater sense of independence, and a higher ability to concentrate and follow a complex sequence of steps.

Imani's day continues and she eats her lunch with the class at 11:45 A.M., after which she goes outside with her friends to play. After lunch, the Spanish teacher comes into the room and begins to work with small groups of students.

Throughout their day, Imani and her classmates make responsible choices regarding which learning activities to do next. Each activity engages the children in a number of movement patterns that form a foundation for neurological development. The hands-on learning materials are also concrete models for thinking processes and abstract concepts.

Young children are also comparative thinkers. They learn things are *big* when something else is *small*; things are *loud* when something else is *soft*. Young children are problem solvers. They can group objects together that are congruent; other objects are arranged sequentially by one or more properties of size and color. Repeated use of the materials allow young students to build a clear inner image of, for example, place value: *How big is a thousand as compared with hundreds, tens, and units?*

The design of the learning materials – their sizes, shapes, colors, textures, and weights – holds the interest and attention of Imani and her classmates for long periods of time. Concentration is normal; these young children explore and discover differences and similarities between the objects.

As these children engage in long periods of concentration with the learning materials, they also develop

and display self-discipline. Their movements are orderly. Children act with grace and courtesy; they are considerate and respectful towards one another. At the same time, children are energized by their discoveries and investigations. Self-discipline involves learning to channel their energies by choosing new activities.

During the afternoon Imani becomes occupied with an art activity, listens to selections from a recording of the *Nutcracker* ballet, writes the names of shapes taken from the geometric cabinet, and completes a puzzle map of the United States.

When the day is over, Imani will have completed ten to fifteen different activities, most representing curriculum content quite advanced for someone who, after all, just turned five two months ago. But when her dad picks her up at 4:50 P.M., her response to the usual question of, "What did you do in school today?" is no different from many children: "Stuff. I did a map and, oh, I don't know." Madison and Justin will furnish similar responses, focusing instead on what might happen during the evening at home.



The design of the learning materials — their sizes, shapes, colors, textures, and weights — holds the interest and attention of Montessori students. Above is a set of the **Metal Insets**, one of the materials children use to develop eye-hand coordination.

The Saunders explain a typical school day in this way: "Our children are very happy in Montessori. They are excited about coming, and they can't wait to get here. Their teachers genuinely care for our children; more than that, they *know* our kids. When we describe what our kids are learning, our friends and family are amazed. Our neighbors tell us their children are not learning anything like what our kids do here."

# Montessori's Legacy

*"It was January 6th (1907), when the first school was opened for small, normal children of between three and six years of age. I cannot say on my methods, for these did not yet exist. But in the school that was opened my method was shortly to come into being. On that day there was nothing to be seen but about fifty wretchedly poor children, rough and shy in manner, many of them crying, almost all the children of illiterate parents, who had been entrusted to my care.*

*They were tearful, frightened children, so shy that it was impossible to get them to speak; their faces were expressionless, with bewildered eyes as though they had never seen anything in their lives.*

*It would be interesting to know the original circumstances that enabled these children to undergo such an extraordinary transformation, or rather, that brought about the appearance of new children, whose souls revealed themselves with such radiance as to spread a light through the whole world."*

— Dr. Maria Montessori

Within the next year, news of Dr. Montessori's work stirred interest around the world. Literally hundreds of people began to travel to Rome to see for themselves the school in which young children — children of the deepest poverty and ignorance — taught themselves how to read, write, do mathematics, and run their own schoolhouse with little or no adult supervision.

In her book about educational reform, *The Schoolhome* (Harvard University Press, 1992), Dr. Judith Rowland Martin writes that she was not very impressed when she first encountered Montessori education.

*"I understood that Montessori schools placed children in multi-age classrooms and used manipulative learning materials, which may have been unusual during Dr. Montessori's lifetime*

*but has long since been incorporated into most early childhood and many elementary classrooms thanks to the Open Classroom movement of the 1960s."*

However, Dr. Rowland Martin's understanding of the value of the Montessori approach was profoundly shaken when she came across a statement in one of the very first books written about Dr. Montessori's work in the United States (*A Montessori Mother*, by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1913). "The phrase, *Casa dei Bambini*, is being translated everywhere nowadays by English-speaking people as *The Children's House*; however, its correct meaning, both linguistic and spiritual is *The Children's Home*" (or *Children's Community*, ed.). Canfield Fisher insisted upon this rendering, which she felt offered a much more accurate and complete insight into the character of the Montessori classroom.

Rowland Martin reflected:

*"This misreading of the Italian word casa as house has effectively cut off two generations of American educators from a new and intriguing vision of what school can and should be. If you translate the word casa as house, your attention will be drawn to the*

*child-sized furniture, the Montessori materials, the exercises in Practical Life, the principal of self-education.*

*But if you translate the word casa as home, you will begin to perceive a moral and social dimension that transforms your understanding of Montessori's idea of a school. Once I realized that Dr. Montessori thought of school on the model of a home, the elements of her system took on a different configuration. Where before I had seen small children manipulating concrete learning materials, I now recognized a domestic scene with its own special form of social life and education."*

Rowland Martin realized that what Montessori had established was not simply a classroom in which children would be taught to read and write. The *Casa dei Bambini* represented a social and emotional environment, where



(Right) Students working in the garden of the Montessori School in the Convent of the Franciscan Nuns, Rome, c. 1912.

# SECTION

# 2

# MONTESSORI PROGRAMS



THE PLANES OF DEVELOPMENT  
SENSITIVE PERIODS  
THE METHOD OF OBSERVATION  
THE NORMALIZED CHILD  
A GUIDED TOUR OF EARLY CHILDHOOD &  
ELEMENTARY MONTESSORI CLASSROOMS  
MONTESSORI FOR THE KINDERGARTEN YEAR  
ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS  
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS  
INFANT-TODDLER PROGRAMS  
MONTESSORI IN THE HOME FOR THE YOUNG CHILD  
LEARNERS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES

# Montessori Programs

**D**uring a typical Montessori school day, children's developmental needs and learning characteristics are met while they engage in their learning activities. Montessori noted through her research that children's needs, interests, and abilities group into specific "planes of development."

A plane of development is a specific growth phase. Montessori taught teachers to design school classrooms to meet the needs and interests of children in each growth phase. Montessori also taught teachers to "follow the child" through careful observation. Through observation, teachers attend to each child's learning approaches, strengths and weak-

nesses, and interests and anxieties. The teacher next uses this information to prepare learning environments and learning activities that facilitate the development of each child's potential.

## The Planes of Development

A plane of development is a specific phase of growth. Montessori educators typically talk about the first, second and third planes of development, corresponding to the ages birth to six; six to twelve; and twelve to eighteen. A fourth plane of development, from age eighteen to twenty-four years of age, is not of direct concern to this book but comprises the last stage of the journey from birth to adult maturity.

Because the specific characteristics of each plane is different from the others, Montessori referred to a child's development as a series of "rebirths," and she believed that schools should not be divided by grades (kindergarten, first, second, and so on) but according to each plane. For this reason, Montessori schools consist of mixed-age groupings divided into early childhood, elementary, and secondary programs.

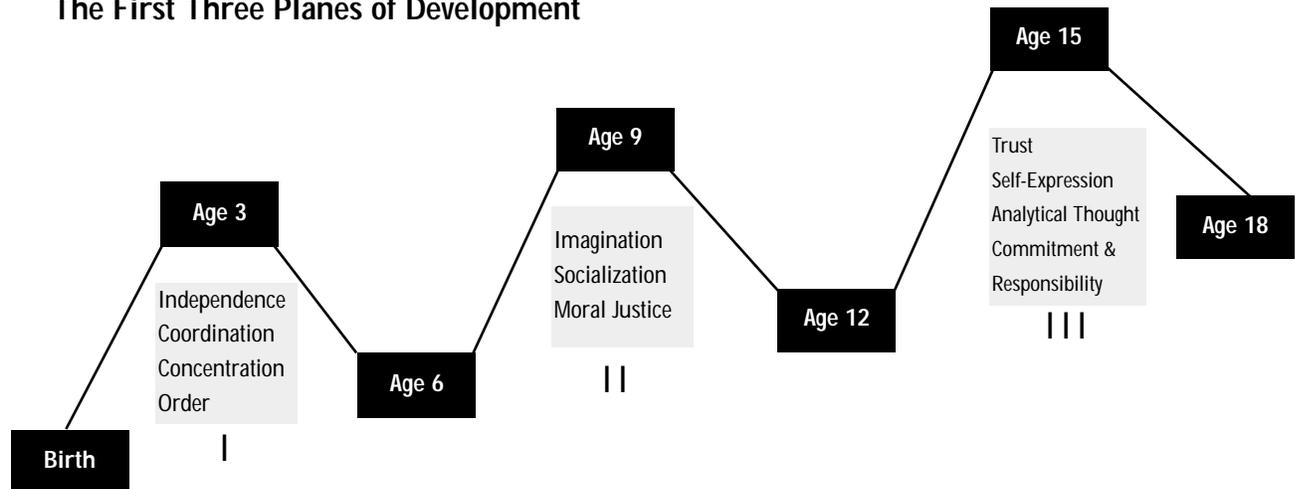
Dr. Montessori's study of children led her to conclude that child development is not linear. Children do not, in other words, develop in a

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(Below) An Early Childhood Montessori classroom.



### The First Three Planes of Development



continual progression; instead, there are predominant years of attainment (as indicated by the rising line on the diagram) followed by predominant years of refinement (indicated by the falling line) within a period of approximately six years. However, the diagram should not be interpreted to mean that children do not attain new understandings and capabilities during periods of refinement. Instead, Montessori proposed that there is an overall tendency for attainment during the first three years followed by a tendency for refinement during the second three years.

Montessori educators teach in partnership with children. It is a partnership based on a guiding trust – a trust that each child will show us when she or he is ready to

learn the next skill or concept. The fact that children are only ready when they are ready is well known by parents. Unless there is a developmental challenge, parents are usually not concerned with the particular day their sons or daughters first learned to walk and talk. If walking happened on a Monday, instead of a Wednesday, during the ninth month, rather than the tenth, parents may be proud.

Learning to read, however, can be a different matter. Parents may have an expectation for their children to begin reading before they turn five. It would be much simpler to educate children if learning to read, write, and compute arithmetic took place according to a specific schedule such as “in kindergarten,” “in first grade,” and so on. Children do, however, follow their own schedule. Despite national, state, and

local performance standards and requirements for teacher accountability, learning to read, write, and compute arithmetic will occur only when the child is ready. Learning to balance and ride a two-wheel bicycle will only occur when the child is ready.

A fundamental Montessori principle is to respect each child as a real person. Respect includes expressing regard and esteem. Respect also involves honoring each child’s readiness for learning. Children do not usually tell us when they are ready; instead, children respond to specially prepared learning environments. Montessori teachers are trained to prepare these environments and to observe for developmental signals that indicate readiness.

*Montessori teachers work with three powerful tools:*

The first is their knowledge of child development and the sensitive periods.

The second is knowing how to prepare the classroom environment so that each sensitive period is satisfied.

The third is knowing how to observe.



### ***Montessori Teachers Use Several Principles to Prepare a Classroom Environment ...***

**The Principle of Freedom:** Children freely choose their own “work” — learning activities — based on their currently active inner sensitive period. But freedom is not a free-for-all. Instead, the principle here is that of freedom within limits. The Montessori teacher understands that for young children, freedom is an accomplishment of the development of inner self-discipline. Self-discipline is understood to be a result of succeeding independently of others. In other words, adults must never do for the child anything that the child can learn to perform for him or herself. Instead, the adult must protect each child’s choice by ensuring that the child will be able to work with the chosen learning materials without interruption or interference from other children.

**Beauty:** Each learning activity is complete; everything needed is present and in good repair. Objects placed in the classroom are attractive and elegant, designed to attract the child’s interest and attention.

**Contact with Nature and Reality:** The classroom objects also represent reality and nature. Children use real sinks and refrigerators instead of play ones. Because in real life everyone does not have the same thing at the same time, there is only one piece of material instead of multiple sets. Dr. Montessori taught that a child’s direct contact with nature results with understanding and appreciating order and harmony. The Montessori classroom environment is a place of life. Children learn to take care of plants, animals, and fish. Magnifying glasses, microscopes, and simple experiments are available for children to observe and learn from nature.



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plined inner city children of her first Children's House began to respond to the new environment.

*"What followed seemed incredible even to Dr. Montessori, for the deprived children blossomed under this freedom, and the possibility of doing work suited to their needs. They revealed to her not only their enormous capacity for intellectual accomplishment but a strange character of sweetness and serenity.*

*They displayed a truly uncorrupted spirit, scorning rewards and punishment, and finding their joy in the prodigious work which involved them. They came from these labors refreshed, as from a creative experience, and as they worked, they grew in inner discipline and peace.*

*The sight of these children, who displayed the truly 'normal' characteristics of childhood, was the force which motivated Montessori for the remainder of her life. This secret of childhood she pursued with all the vitality of the genius who found her raison d'être, and from her tireless observations and efforts, evolved her perception of the child's psychic personality.*

*As she traveled from country to country, lecturing, training teachers, helping to establish school after school, this same phenomenon was observed wherever conditions promoting its growth were perfectly realized.*

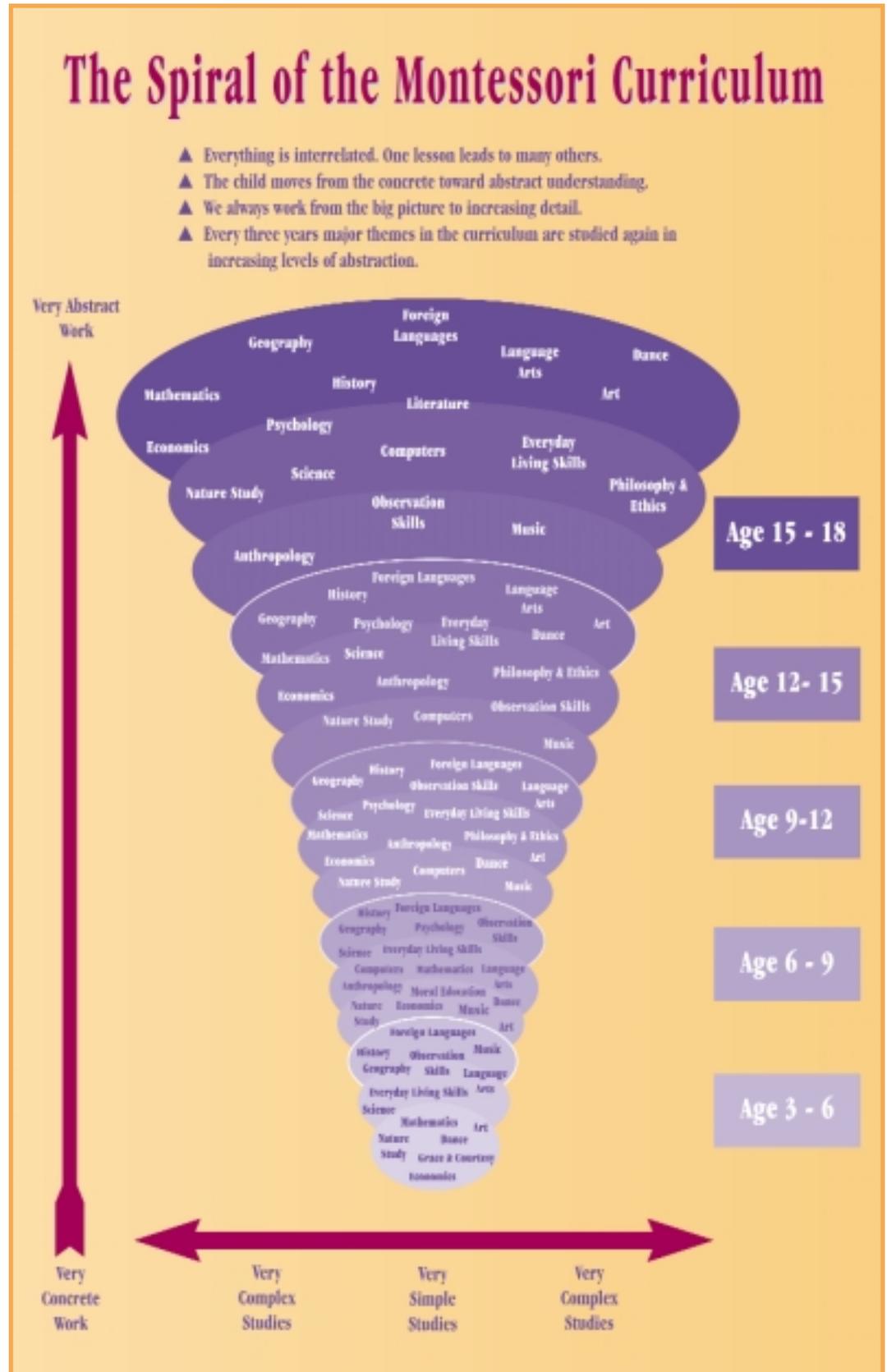
*This normalized child is the image which Montessori teachers keep uppermost in their minds. This is what we are striving for, what we hope to achieve. However, this child will appear only if we conscientiously prepare ourselves and our classrooms and if we can build on the proper preparation in the child's home."*

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# A Guided Tour of Early Childhood & Elementary Montessori Classrooms

Together we are going to go on a tour of several Montessori classes. Along the way, we'll stop and take a look at children doing all sorts of things. We are going to focus most of our visit on classrooms of children age three through six; what Montessori schools commonly call the "Primary" or "Children's House" level (in Canada it is commonly called the "casa" level). However, we will also look in on the elementary classes to get a sense of how the Montessori curriculum extends upward at the higher level.

We wish to extend a very special thank you to the many Montessori schools that have provided us access to their classrooms over the years. Without their help, we would never have been able to compile the many excellent photos in this section.





# Practical Life

**S**uccess in school is directly tied to the degree to which children believe they are capable and independent human beings.

As we allow students to develop a meaningful degree of independence and self-discipline, we also set a pattern for a life-time of good work habits and a sense of responsibility. In Montessori, students are taught to take pride in their work.

Independence does not come automatically as we grow older; it must be learned. In Montessori, even very small children can learn how to tie their own shoes and pour their own milk. At first, shoe laces turn into knots, and milk ends up on the floor. However, with practice, skills are mastered and the young child beams with pride. To experience this kind of success at such an early age is to build up a self-image as a successful person and leads the child to approach the next task with confidence.



(Above and below) Transferring Materials

*The hand movements needed to transfer liquids with a baster helps prepare the child for a wide range of later tasks.*

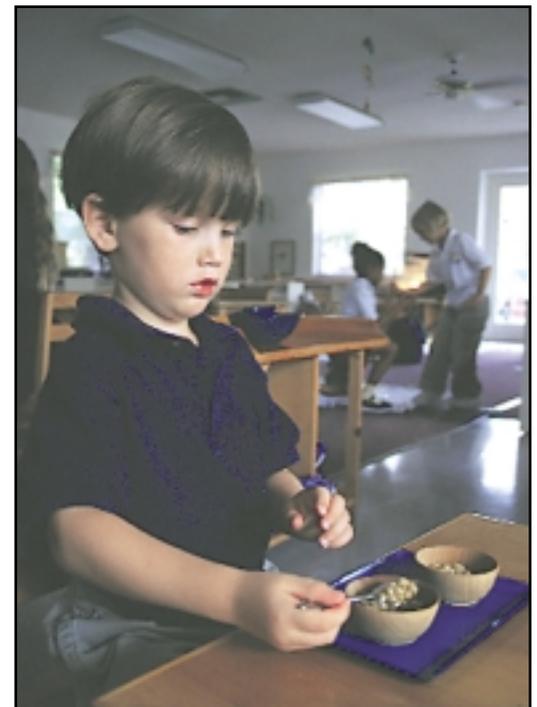


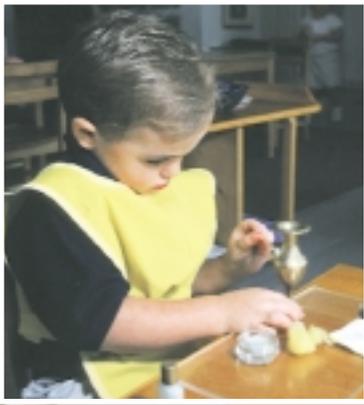
**Pouring**  
*The children learn to pour from one container to another without spilling a single drop.*

## More Transferring Exercises ...

*(Right) This three-year-old is learning to transfer dried peas from one bowl to another with a large spoon.*

*(Far right) Many activities isolate one particular skill, allowing the young child to master it one step at a time. This young student is using a little spoon to transfer beads carefully from one bowl to another.*





*(Above) Children love to polish brass and silver, moving on to learning how to polish their own shoes.*



*(Above) In a very real sense, Montessori children are responsible for the care of this child-sized environment, which is why Dr. Montessori called it a children's "house" or "community."*



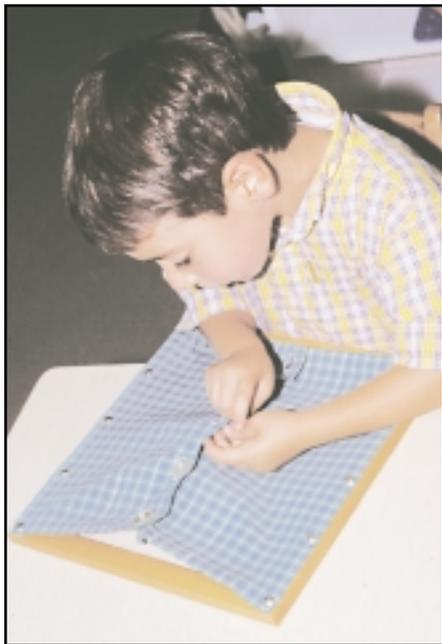
*(Above) They sweep, dust, and wash mirrors and windows.*

***"The essence of independence is to be able to do something for one's self."  
— Montessori***



*(Background) The ability to control one's body and move carefully and gracefully around the room, often carrying things that must not be dropped, is an important aspect of the Practical Life lessons.*

*The children walk along a line on the floor, heel to toe, carefully balancing while carrying small flags, cups, or Montessori materials.*



First steps towards independence ...

*(Above) Young children work with the **Dressing Frames** to master the dressing skills that classically challenge them as they begin to take their first steps toward independence: buttoning their clothes, working on a zipper, tying their shoe laces, and so on.*



Table washing ...

*(Left) To wash this table, these young students methodically gather the bucket, little pitcher, sponges, scrub brushes, towels, and soap and proceed to scrub a small table slowly and methodically. When they are finished, they will return everything to its storage place.*

*These lessons in Practical Life skills do much more than help children learn to wash tables. The process helps them develop an inner sense of order, a greater sense of independence, and a higher ability to concentrate and follow a complex sequence of steps.*



Cleaning up ...



## Eating together ...



(Above) Washing and Ironing

*Children learn to wash small polishing cloths and napkins. Once the cloths are dry, they learn to iron and fold them using a special low-temperature children's iron. Think of the pride that these young children take in doing **real** things, rather than pretending to help around the house.*

(Left) Food Preparation

*When the children are hungry, they prepare their own snacks. They pour themselves a drink from a little pitcher that is just right for their small hands. When finished they clean up and wash their dishes. When something spills, they help each other carefully clean up. In Montessori classrooms, you will find small children cutting raw fruit and vegetables.*

*Older Montessori students learn all sorts of everyday living skills, from cooking to balancing a checkbook. They plan parties, learn how to decorate a room, arrange flowers, garden, and do simple household repairs. Montessori builds many opportunities into the curriculum for students to learn from hands-on experiences. They learn to cook, set tables, eat together in a peaceful atmosphere, and steadily grow in their self-confidence and independence.*



(Above) Sewing

*By learning how to sew, children not only learn a Practical Life skill, they also develop fine-motor skills.*



(Above) Animals in the Montessori environment

*Children learn to care for the small animals being raised in or outside the classroom.*



(Above and right) Gardening in and outside the Montessori classroom

*A sense of beauty is a key element of Montessori. This young student, pictured above, is planting flowers in the class garden, which will later be cut to place in the bud vases on each table in her classroom. The boy to the right is helping to care for the plants in his indoor environment.*



*“Adults work to finish a task, but the child works in order to grow and is working to create the adult, the person that is to be.” — Montessori*

# Lessons in Grace, Courtesy, & Community Service

**L**earning how to work and play together with others in a peaceful and caring community is perhaps the most critical life skill that Montessori teaches.



(Above) The Silence Game

The **Silence Game** helps children develop a much higher level of self-discipline along with a greater awareness of the sounds around us that most people take for granted. In this group activity, the teacher will get the children's attention either by ringing a small bell or by hanging up a sign with the command "Silence." The children stop where they are or gather on the line, close their eyes, and try to remain perfectly still. The children sit still with their eyes shut and wait to hear the teacher whisper their name. When they hear it ever so softly spoken, they silently rise and join the teacher.

Sometimes the teachers will vary the Silence Game by challenging the children to carry bells across the room without allowing them to ring, or they may use the calm atmosphere to introduce the children to guided visualization. At first, the younger children may not be able to hold the silence for more than twenty or thirty seconds, but gradually their ability to relax, listen, and appreciate the perfectly calm environment increases. In many classes, the Silence Game is an important daily ritual. Montessori schools are almost always close-knit communities of people living and learning together in an atmosphere of warmth, safety, kindness, and mutual respect. Teachers become mentors and friends. Students learn to value the different backgrounds and interests of their classmates.

(Right)  
Community  
Service

Community service is an important element in most Elementary and Secondary Montessori programs. These girls, along with their teachers, spend part of their week delivering food to older people, who dearly appreciate not only the meal but the warmth of their company.



(Right) Teaching Peace

**The Peace Table** plays an important role in Montessori classrooms. Two children having a disagreement will normally decide to retreat to the Peace Table to solve their problem. Sometimes, children may not remember, and the suggestion might come from the teacher. When classmates observe an ongoing disagreement, somebody might bring them a peace rose with the reminder to solve their problem at the Peace Table.



Once arrived at the table, the child who feels wronged places her hand on the table, indicating that she wants to have her say without interruption. The other hand she places on her heart, indicating that she speaks the truth, from the heart. She then looks the other in the eye, speaks her name, "Lisa," and proceeds to state how she feels, "Lisa, I feel very angry ..." and continues to state why she feels that way, "... because you didn't let me play with you and Lily!" She states how she wants to resolve the conflict: "And I don't want you to do that ever again if you want to be my friend!" Now that she has stated her case and opened the door for further discussion, she withdraws her hand from the table and from her heart and gives Lisa a chance to respond.

Lisa proceeds that same way. She places her hands on the table and her heart, looks Eleanor in the eye, and responds:

"Eleanor, I feel unhappy that you are angry, I did not mean to hurt your feelings. However, Lily is a good friend of mine also, and the game we played can be played by only two participants. Had I been playing it with you, nobody else could have joined us either. So, you see, it's just one of those things. I want to remain your friend."

With that, Lisa is finished and withdraws her hands. Now it is Eleanor's turn to agree or disagree. In any case, they continue the dialogue until they reach some kind of agreement, even if that means that they disagree. At least they are talking, without yelling, screaming, and blaming. They want to solve the problem. When they have reached an agreement, they ring the bell to let the others know. In case they cannot come to a positive conclusion, they may ask for a mediator. This

may be one of the older children, who has been trained to be impartial and to listen well.

However, if the problem or conflict is too involved, then one of them may ask for a "pow-wow." During a "pow-wow," the entire class, or a large part of the class sits in a circle, listens to first one, then the other person's side of the story. The class members contribute what they can, either as facts of what they have seen or heard, as ethics (right and wrong), or in perspective to class rules upon which all have agreed previously. It is wise for the teacher to observe and monitor the entire process from the sidelines.

The core experience the students gain from these procedures is that it is necessary to solve disturbances honestly and with good will to maintain a harmonious and cooperative atmosphere in the community.





(Left) Teaching Courtesy

*Learning how to greet someone graciously is one of the first acts of courtesy learned in the Montessori classroom.*

*Everyday kindness and courtesy are vital practical life skills. Even the youngest child is treated by her teachers and classmates with dignity and respect.*

*Montessori students come to understand and accept that we all have responsibilities to other people.*

*These children learn how to handle new situations that they will face as they become increasingly independent.*

*They develop a clear sense of values and social conscience and absorb everyday ethics and interpersonal skills from the earliest years.*

Helen Keller, inspired by Montessori, wrote:

*"I believe that every child has hidden away somewhere in his being noble capacities which may be quickened and developed if we go about it in the right way, but we shall never properly develop the higher nature of our little ones while we continue to fill their minds with the so-called 'basics.' Mathematics will never make them loving, nor will accurate knowledge of the size and shape of the world help them to appreciate its beauties. Let us lead them during the first years to find their greatest pleasure in nature. Let them run in the fields, learn about animals, and observe real things. Children will educate themselves under the right conditions. They require guidance and sympathy far more than instruction."*

Montessori proposed that we could accomplish world peace by healing the wounds of the human heart and by producing a child who is independent, at peace with herself, and secure. Montessori envisioned her educational reforms as essentially leading to a reconstruction of society. Montessori schools are different but not because of the materials that are used in the classrooms. Look beyond the maps, science charts, and geometry materials. Each classroom is a place where children really want to be because it feels a lot like home. Montessori schools give children the sense of belonging to a family and help children learn how to live with other human beings.



(Above) Learning to Care for Others

*When we say that Montessori is not only a fine preparation for college but for life, we aren't exaggerating. Many Montessori schools teach elementary children how to care for infants, and some even train those who are interested to assist in the school's infant and toddler environments. The lessons of the heart that these children learn lasts a lifetime.*

## The Sensorial Exercises



*What's inside?  
Children use the  
**Mystery Box** to  
help develop their  
sense of touch.*

**A** child interacts with the physical world through her senses. From birth, she will look, listen, touch, taste, pick up, manipulate, and smell almost anything that comes into her grasp. At first, everything goes into the mouth. Gradually she begins to explore each object's weight, texture, and temperature. She may watch something that catches her attention, such as a butterfly, with infinite patience. The sensorial curriculum is designed to help the child focus her attention more carefully on the physical world, exploring with each of her senses the subtle variations in the properties of objects.

At first, the child may simply be asked to sort among a prepared series of objects that vary by only one aspect, such as height, length,

or width. Other exercises challenge her to find identical pairs or focus on very different physical properties, such as aroma, taste, weight, shades of color, temperature, or sound. These exercises are essentially puzzles, and they tend to fascinate the children because they are just difficult enough to represent a meaningful challenge. Each has a built-in control of error that allows the child who is observant to check her own work.

The Sensorial exercises include lessons in vocabulary, as the children master the names of everything from sophisticated plane and solid geometric figures to the parts of familiar plants and animals. As the Inuits demonstrate to us with their many different words for *snow*, we observe that as the children learn the correct names for

things, the objects themselves take on meaning and reality as the child learns to recognize and name them.

Why is it so important to educate the young child's senses? We certainly don't believe that we can improve a child's hearing or sight through training. However, we can help children to pay attention, to focus their awareness, and to learn how to observe and consider what comes into their experience. In a way, the Sensorial curriculum accomplishes something like a course in wine tasting or music appreciation; one learns to taste, smell, or hear what is experienced with a much deeper awareness and appreciation. These exercises can help children understand and appreciate their world more fully.



Working with the Geometric Solids



(Above and right) The Pink Tower

The **Pink Tower** is one of the Sensorial materials that children enjoy working with early in their Montessori experience. The Pink Tower, or “Tower of Cubes,” is composed of a graduated series of ten wooden cubes. The largest cube has a square section of 10 centimeters per side and is 10 centimeters high. Thus, it measures 10 x 10 x 10 centimeters. The square section and height of each of the succeeding cubes decreases by 1 centimeter down to the smallest cube which measures 1 x 1 x 1 centimeter.

Children carefully carry the Tower, cube by cube, to the little rug that defines their work area. They carry each cube comfortably at waist height as they take the cubes and place them in random order upon the carpet.

As they manipulate the cubes and carry them across the room, the children get a very strong impression of size and weight. When all the cubes have been carried to the rug, the child looks for the largest one and begins to build the Tower, one cube at a time. At each step, he looks through the cubes that have not yet been added to the Tower to find the largest. As each is placed on the Tower, the child controls his movements to place the cube gently down right in the center of the larger cube on which it is rested. Once the Tower has been constructed, the child carefully takes it down and either begins again or returns the cubes, one by one, to their proper place on the shelf.



*Some people have heard that in Montessori, children are taught that there is only one way to work with each material. In truth, the children explore and discover all sorts of creative ways to work with them. For example, students will construct the Tower horizontally, or line up two edges to create a vertical stairway. The children will also build the **Pink Tower** in various combinations with the **Brown Stair** (described on page 68), along with some of the other Sensorial materials.*

# History, Geography, & International Culture

**W**e are all members of the human family. Our roots lie in the distant past, and history is the story of our common heritage. Without a strong sense of history, we cannot begin to know who we are as individuals today. Our goal is to develop a global perspective, and the study of history and world cultures forms the cornerstone of the Montessori curriculum.

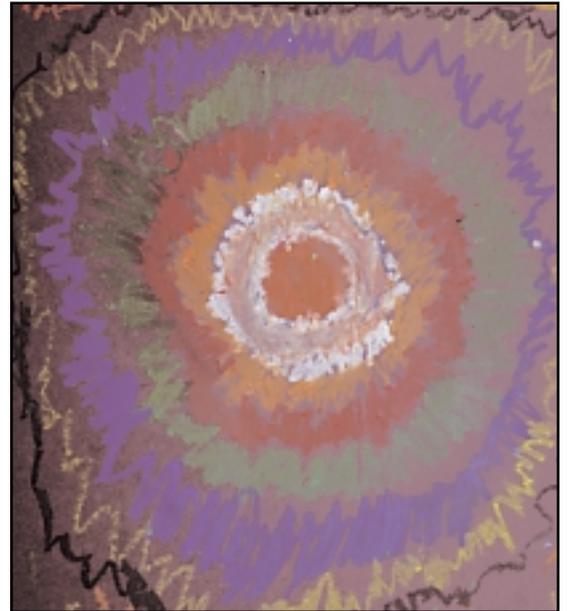
With this goal in mind, Montessori teaches history and world cultures starting as early as age three. The youngest students work with specially designed maps and begin to learn the names of the world's continents and countries.

Physical geography begins in the first grade with a study of the formation of the Earth, the emergence of the oceans and atmosphere, and the evolution of life. Students learn about the world's rivers, lakes, deserts, mountain ranges, and natural resources.

Elementary students begin to study world cultures in greater depth: the cus-

(Right) *The Big Bang*

*Here is one student's artistic interpretation of the Big Bang.*



*Montessori's integrated thematic curriculum allows a broad scope of study in the areas of history, geography, and international culture.*

toms, housing, diet, government, industry, the arts, history, and dress. They learn to treasure the richness of their own cultural heritage and those of their friends.

The children also study the emergence of human beings during the old and new stone ages, the development of the first civilizations, and the universal needs common to all humanity. For older elementary students, the focus is respectively on early man, ancient civilizations, and early-American history.

Montessori tries to present a sense of living history at every level through direct hands-on experience. Students build models of ancient tools and structures, prepare their own manuscripts, make ceremonial masks, and re-create all sorts of artifacts of the everyday life of historical eras. Experiences such as these make it much easier for Montessori children to appreciate history as it is taught through books.

While Montessori schools are communities apart from the outside world, in which children can first begin to develop their unique talents, they are also consciously connected to the local, national, and global communities. The goal is to lead each student to explore, understand, and grow into full and active membership in the adult world.

Field trips provide opportunities to explore the world outside the classroom.



(Above) Research Card Materials

*Younger elementary children often use simplified research card material and charts in their studies.*



(Left) The Imaginary Island Puzzle

*The **Imaginary Island Puzzle** introduces students in elementary classes to thirty-eight land and water forms. They study vocabulary and definitions of such words as isthmus, butte, tributary, archipelago, bight, lagoon, and more.*

*Children also learn to plot longitude and latitude and analyze the flora and fauna of a region. With the use of eighty-four puzzle pieces, students are able to create an infinite variety of islands of their own design, modifying them at will, and reinforcing vocabulary words during the process.*

(Right) International studies continue at every age level in Montessori education. The curriculum integrates art, music, dance, cooking, geography, literature, and science. Children learn to prepare and enjoy dishes from all over the world. They learn traditional folk songs and dances in music and explore folk crafts in art. In Language Arts, they read the traditional folk tales and research and prepare reports about the countries they are studying that year. Units of study often culminate in marvelous international holidays and festivals that serve as the high points of the school year.



## Foreign Languages

As part of the International Studies program, most Montessori schools introduce a second language to even their youngest children. The primary goal in a Foreign Language program is to develop conversational skills along with a deepening appreciation for the culture of the second language.



*The student pictured here is researching colonial America.*



(Above) The Land and Water Forms

This student is working with the **Land and Water Forms**, a set of three-dimensional models that represent, in very simple terms, the nature of basic geographic features. This is also a pouring exercise, as the child adds water to the tray to create a higher level of sensory impression. Here she explores the idea that an island is a body of land surrounded by water, while a lake is a body of water surrounded on all sides by land.

The children learn to name each form, match the model with a photo of a real lake or island, place the correct printed label underneath each form, then prepare their own labels. They also learn the definitions of each form, continue to learn about the largest lakes or islands in the world, and research facts about specific places.

The first set includes such geographic forms as an isthmus, peninsula, cape, bay, and strait. Advanced exercises introduce more complex geographic features, such as mountains, mountain ranges, volcanoes, archipelagos, foothills, cliffs, mesas, prairies, river valleys, and river deltas.



(Above) The Teaching Clock

Before a child can begin to understand history, she needs to begin to grasp the concepts of time. This child is learning to tell time, along with the other concepts of the passage of time, such as: How long is a minute, an hour, a day, a year? How old are the people that I know?

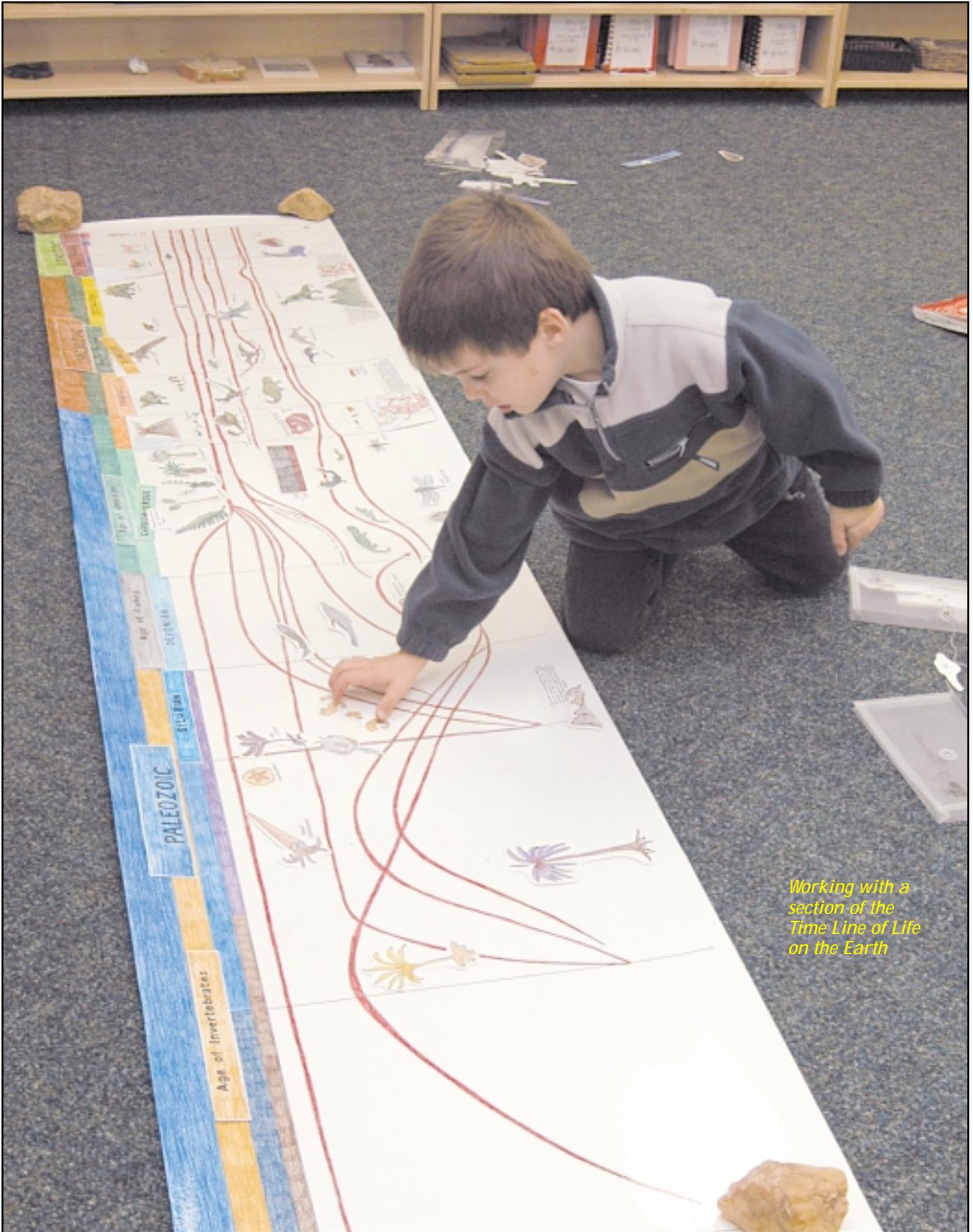


(Above) "Cuneiform" Tablets

A set of clay "cuneiform" tablets made by a class of elementary students who are studying ancient history.

(Left) Time Lines

A lower-elementary student at work with the **Time Line of Life on the Earth**.



*Working with a section of the Time Line of Life on the Earth*





*Primary children love to work with Puzzle Maps. At the beginning, they don't understand them to be maps of the Earth's surface; they are simply lovely puzzles. Gradually the children are taught the names of each continent and can identify a great many countries, states, and provinces. As they learn to read, they begin to label each piece.*

(Above and below) Puzzle Maps



*The student above is using a Puzzle Map to draw a map of North America.*



(Below) Puzzle Map of the Continents & Continent Globe

*These children are beginning to grasp that flat maps, such as the Puzzle Map of the Continents, represent geographical features on a world that is a sphere. They note that the same color coding is used to show the continents on the Continent Globe and the Puzzle Map.*



## Montessori Maps & Globes

(Left) Pin Maps

*The Pin Maps challenge the upper elementary children to master the names of the countries, capital cities, and flags of the countries of several continents. Each label is printed on a card attached to a pin, which is placed in the appropriate hole on the map. A set of control charts allows these elementary children to check their own work.*

# Hands-On Science the Montessori Way

Science is an integral element of the Montessori curriculum. Among other things, it represents a way of life: a clear thinking approach to gathering information and problem solving. The scope of the Montessori Science curriculum includes a sound introduction to botany, zoology, chemistry, physics, geology, and astronomy.

Montessori does not separate science from the big picture of the formation of our world. Students consider the formation of the universe, development of the planet Earth, the delicate relations between living things and their physical environment, and the balance within the web of life. These great lessons integrate astronomy, the earth sciences, and biology with history and geography.

The Montessori approach to science cultivates children's fascination with the universe and helps them develop a life-long interest in observing nature and discovering more about the world in which they live. Children are encouraged to observe, analyze, measure, classify, experiment, and predict and to do so with a sense of eager curiosity and wonder.

In Montessori, science lessons incorporate a balanced, hands-on approach. With encouragement and a solid foundation, even very young children are ready and anxious to investigate their world, to wonder at the interdependence of living things, to explore the ways in which the physical universe works, and to project how it all may have come to be.

For example, in many Montessori schools, children in the early elementary grades explore basic atomic theory and the process by which the heavier elements are fused out of hydrogen in the stars. Other students study advanced concepts in biology, including the systems by which scientists classify plants and animals. Some elementary classes build scale models of the solar system that stretch out over two miles!



(Above) The Clock of Eras

*The elementary students shown above are working with the **Clock of Eras**. This more advanced exercise presents the great geological eras of the Earth's history as a pie graph or clock face. The children label each geological era, from the formation of the Earth to the present day. In earlier exercises, they've begun to study what was happening on the Earth's surface during each era.*

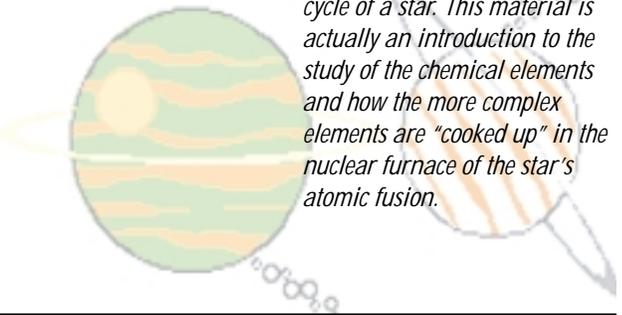
*“The secret of good teaching is to regard the child’s intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown to grow under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim is not only to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his innermost core. We do not want complacent pupils but eager ones. We seek to sow life in the child rather than theories, to help him in his growth, mental and emotional as well as physical, and for that we must offer grand and lofty ideas to the human mind. If the idea of the universe is presented to the child in the right way, it will do more for him than just arouse his interest; it will create in him admiration and wonder, a feeling loftier than any interest and more satisfying.”*

— Maria Montessori



(Above) The Life Cycle of a Star

*This eight-year-old is working with a model that depicts the life cycle of a star. This material is actually an introduction to the study of the chemical elements and how the more complex elements are “cooked up” in the nuclear furnace of the star’s atomic fusion.*



(Right) Model of the Solar System

*Using this simple moving model, elementary students study the orbital relationships of the planets as they revolve around the sun.*



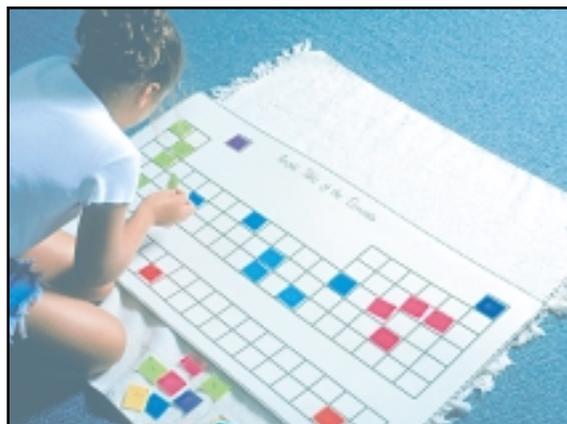
(Right) Exploring the Elements

*This elementary student is exploring the elements. He is constructing models of the atomic structure of one element, placing protons and neutrons in the nucleus and electrons in the outer shells.*



(Above) Constructing Molecules

*These two elementary students are constructing models of common molecules, using wooden spheres to represent different elements.*



(Above) Mendeleev's Periodic Table of the Elements

*Working with this unique teaching version of **Mendeleev's Periodic Table of the Elements**, elementary children begin to learn about the more complex elements, their symbols, and how various elements are grouped together according to their properties. At the same time, children are looking for examples of common elements in their daily environment and beginning to research information about the characteristics and uses of the elements.*

# Joyful Scholars: Montessori for the Elementary Years

**D**uring the early childhood years in Montessori classrooms, parents watch as their young children learn to read, write, and explore the world around them. The learning process seems painless and incredibly effective. It is both. What it is *not* is simple. The Montessori Method has been perfected over many decades, and it takes many years of dedication to become a Montessori teacher.

Montessori parents who are thrilled with their young children's progress often urge Montessori schools to expand their program to include the elementary years.

The Elementary Montessori program has also been proven to be painless and effective. Establishing a new elementary program, however, is not simple. It is not merely an extension of what came before. It is exciting, complex, and different!

Elementary Montessori teachers become certified after a rigorous course of study lasting a full year or longer. Qualified Montessori teachers at this level are in great demand and are often hard to find. Older students are also physically larger, requiring more classroom space. In addition to the Montessori materials that students at this level will continue to use, new research and teaching materials, such as encyclopedias, computers, and microscopes become exciting, necessary, and expensive educational tools.

Then there's the issue of accountability. This is the level when parents become increasingly focused on how their children compare to other students of the same age who have experienced a non-Montessori education. Issues of grading, test scores, and homework are raised much more often.

While these challenges should be carefully considered before expanding an existing program to include the elementary years, it is important to remember that Montessori at the elementary level works! It is the important next step in the lives of the "renaissance" adults we hope our children will someday become, and it is well worth the effort that it takes to produce a quality program.



**A**s children near the end of their kindergarten year in Montessori, many parents struggle with the question of whether or not to keep their children in Montessori for the elementary program. On the one hand, the typical Montessori five-year-old's self-confidence and love of learning makes many families ask: "Why tamper with something that is clearly working?" On the other hand, since the children will be moving on to another class one way or the other, many parents feel that the first grade seems to be the logical time to make the transition from Montessori.

For many families, a major consideration will be the ability to save thousands of dollars a year by taking advantage of the local public schools. Others wonder if a more highly structured and competitive independent school would give their child a better preparation for college.

Although each family will analyze the issues in their own way, the family's final decision will involve an investment in their children's future. All of us want the best for our children, and the often unspoken concern of many parents is: "Will Montessori prepare my child for the *real* world?"

The answer, by the way, is *yes!* Montessori works! It has worked for years in thousands of Montessori schools around the world. Montessori has enjoyed the support of some of the leading personalities of our time, including President Woodrow Wilson, Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Mahatma Gandhi, Helen Keller, Sigmund Freud, Buckminster Fuller, Bertram Russell, Jean Piaget, Alfred Adler, Erik Erikson, Anne Frank (who was a Montessori student), and David Elkind, just to name a few. One elementary teacher responded to her parents' fears by describing "the Montessori Way" as follows:

*"Many parents express the concern that Montessori at the elementary level may not prepare them for the 'real world.' I'm not exactly sure what that means. Is it that their Primary Montessori experience was too secure, too child-centered, too accepting? Surely, those qualities cannot be seen as negatives. Is it that there is a sneaking suspicion that all this Montessori stuff is fine up to kindergarten, but now it's time to face math tests and text*

**Authors' Note:** For this chapter, we have drawn together some of Dr. Maria Montessori's thoughts about the foundation of education at the elementary years from three of her books, *To Educate the Human Potential*, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, and *Spontaneous Activity in Education*. In a few places, we have taken some liberty with the original translation for the purpose of clarity.

*"The passage to the second level of education is the passage from the sensorial, material level to the abstract. The need for abstraction and intellectual activity makes itself felt around the seventh year.*

*Before age seven, the child focuses himself on a sensorial exploration and classification of the relationships among concrete objects — not exploration on the intellectual plane. The three- to seven-year-old generally is content to know **what** something is, along with a simplistic explanation of its function. The older child is oriented toward intellectual discovery and investigation.*

*In the second period, the child needs wider boundaries for his social experiences. He needs to establish social relationships in a larger society and the traditional schools, as they have been conceived for so long, can no longer be sufficient for him. He feels the closed environment as a constraint, which is why children of this age may no longer go to school enthusiastically. He prefers to catch frogs or play with his friends without adult supervision. An education that suppresses the true nature of the child is an education that leads to the development of unhappy and socially immature adults.*

*It is at age seven that one can note the beginning of an orientation toward the judgement of acts as right or wrong, fair or unfair ... This preoccupation belongs to a very special interior sensitivity — the conscience. The seven-to-twelve-year-old period, then, constitutes one of particular importance for moral education ... The adult must be aware of the evolution that is occurring in the mind of the child at this time and adapt his methods to conform with it.*

*These three characteristics — the child's felt need to escape the closed environment, the passage of the mind to the abstract, and the birth in him of a moral sense — serve as the basis for a scheme at the elementary level."*

— Dr. Maria Montessori

*books, standardized curricula and a real school? I suppose it is a question of examining one's own values regarding education. The observable fact is that the majority of children in Elementary Montessori programs achieve high-level academic standards because they are highly motivated and have been exposed to an extremely broad and integrated curriculum.*

*They may not have a weekly math test on which their grade is based, but they can prove to you that 'the answer in division is what one unit gets.' No, they won't have a multiple-choice quiz on Chapter 2 of their science or geography textbook. Rather, they can independently research topics using an encyclopedia, atlas, reference books, maps, microscopes, or magnifying glasses. Real school should engender a love of learning and an acceptance of personal responsibility for intellectual growth as well as social interaction. Real school attempts to shape long-term attitudes and concrete skills necessary not just to move up to the next grade, but to 'move up to' a successful and happy life."*

Elementary children face new developmental challenges. A specially prepared learning environment is just as important now as it was before during the early childhood years if children are to fulfill their complete learning potential. More than school achievement test scores are at stake. Learning to identify, pursue, and communicate deep interests in the world leads children to self-mastery and to habits of lifelong learning.

Elementary Montessori students themselves are often the most compelling argument for the value of an Elementary Montessori education!

### *What makes Elementary Montessori different?*

When you observe an Elementary Montessori class at work, you may find it difficult to get a sense of the big picture. Over here some students are working on math, some are reading, while others are working on science. In the corner, a teacher is giving a lesson to a small group of children, while occasionally glancing up to keep an eye on the rest of the class. The elementary classroom may appear to be unstructured, but these seemingly random, yet obviously purposeful activities, are basic to the independent learning and self-directed activity of the Montessori approach.

While there is a vast range in the level of curriculum on which the children are engaged, each child is considered as an individual. Montessori teachers strive to challenge each according to his or her developmental needs and abilities.

Please keep in mind that, while Dr. Montessori developed a very specific model, individual Montessori schools and classrooms differ. These components, however, are typically found in most programs.



*“Montessori Elementary gives children the opportunity to continue to progress at their own pace in an environment that nurtures a love of learning. Children take responsibility for their own learning and have daily opportunities to make decisions and choices in a child-centered classroom. They are exposed to many complex concepts at an early age through the use of wonderful concrete learning materials.*

*It is not unusual to see seven-year-olds in a Montessori classroom constructing atomic and molecular models. Nine-year-olds analyze the squares of trinomials, while ten-year-olds solve algebraic equations and twelve-year-olds compute the square root of large numbers.*

*“What parent who has watched her children thrive both intellectually and socially in the Children’s House would not want this to continue in the elementary years?”*

— Judi Charlap  
Elementary Montessori Teacher  
The New Gate School, Sarasota, Florida

## Basic Components of the Elementary Montessori Program

### Multi-Age Class Groups

Elementary Montessori classes continue to bring children of different age levels together. Normally, classes will span three age/grade levels, with the common divisions being ages six to nine (grades one to three in the United States) and ages nine to twelve (grades four to six). Some schools may follow a somewhat different scheme of grouping their children. There are many reasons why Montessori classes group children of several grade levels together:

- Since Montessori allows children to progress through the curriculum at their own pace, there is no academic reason to group children according to one grade level.

- In a mixed-age class, children can always find peers who are working at their current level.
- To accommodate the needs of individual learners, Montessori classrooms have to include curriculum to cover the entire span of interests and abilities up through the oldest and most accelerated students in the class. This creates a highly enriched learning environment.
- In multi-level classrooms, younger children are constantly stimulated by the interesting work in which the older students are engaged.
- At the same time, in multi-level classrooms older students serve as tutors and role models for the younger ones, which helps them in their own mastery (we learn best when we teach someone else) and leaves them with a tremendous sense of pride.
- By working with children for three years, teachers get to know them extremely well.
- And, finally, there is a strong sense of continuity in the Elementary Montessori class, because two-thirds of the children return each year for either their second or third year with the same teacher(s). Most of the children know one another and understand the culture of the class. This makes it much easier to orient new children into the group.

### Friendships and Community

One of the things that you will normally see when you enter an elementary classroom is joy, excitement, and enthusiasm. These are not children



(Above) Students participate in a lesson on the geological folding of the Earth's crust.

who are given worksheets over and over again. These are children who are engaged.

Montessori schools are normally small close-knit communities of children, teachers, and parents. They are like an extended family. Everyone knows everyone else. Children become close and remain friends with their teachers and both younger and older classmates. They grow up and study together for many years. While there may not be as many other children in the school as they would find in a larger school, their friendships will tend to be closer.

Elementary Montessori students can move around. They don't have to sit at a desk all day long. Students work together most of the time, either helping one another master skills and information or on group projects.

Parents are normally very involved at the elementary level as partners in supporting their children's education. They may come in to teach lessons, take small groups out into the

community for field trips, and help with celebrations and performances.

### **Elementary Montessori Teachers Serve as Mentors, Friends, and Guides**

The Elementary Montessori educator is not so much a "teacher" in the traditional sense as a "guide." In more and more schools, this title is actually used to describe their role.

The Elementary Montessori curriculum is very broad and requires the teacher to have a broad and thorough education of his or her own. With lessons that range from the history of mathematics to the physics of flight, mineralogy, chemistry, algebra, geometry, and literature, to name just a few, the average teacher would be lost.

The best Elementary Montessori teachers are "renaissance" men and women; individuals who are equally interested in mathematics, the sciences, the arts, architecture, literature, poetry, psychology, economics, tech-

nology, and philosophy. Beyond this, the Elementary Montessori educator needs patience, understanding, respect, enthusiasm, and a profound ability to inspire a sense of wonder and imagination. Such teachers are very rare, but they are absolutely magical!

Becoming an Elementary Montessori teacher requires a year of graduate study and student teaching and countless hours of hard work to gather or create the curriculum materials that constitute a prepared Elementary Montessori environment.

### **Academics**

The Elementary Montessori classroom offers an environment in which children tend to blossom! This may sound like propaganda, but it's true!

Dr. Montessori was convinced that children are born curious, creative,

(Right) Elementary students often prefer to work on the floor with their friends.

Homework should never become a battleground between adult and child. One of our goals as parents and teachers is to help children learn how to get organized, budget time, and follow through until the work is completed. Ideally, home challenges will give parents and children a pleasant opportunity to work together on projects that give both parent and child a sense of accomplishment. They are intended to enrich and extend the curriculum.

Montessori challenges children to think, explore, and pursue tangible projects that give them a sense of satisfaction. Homework is intended to afford students the opportunity to practice and reinforce skills introduced in the classroom.

Moreover, there is a certain degree of self-discipline that can be developed

within the growing child through the process of completing assignments independently.

For example, many elementary classes will send home a packet of "At-Home Challenges" for each age group in the class. The children have an entire week, through the next weekend, to complete them. The following Mondays, teachers sit down with the children to review what worked, what they enjoyed, and what they found difficult or unappealing.

Depending on the child's level, assignments normally involve some reading, research, writing, and something tangible to accomplish. They may be organized into three groups:

1. **Things to be experienced**, such as reading a book, visiting a museum, or going to see a play;

2. **Things to learn**, stated in terms of skills and knowledge, such as *See if you can learn how to solve these problems well enough so that you can teach the skill to a younger student*; and

3. **Products to be submitted**, such as a play, essay, story, experiment, or model.

When possible, teachers will normally build in opportunities for children to choose among several alternative assignments. Sometimes teachers will prepare individually negotiated weekly assignments with each student.

Whenever students voluntarily decide to learn something, they tend to engage in their work with a passion and attention that few students will

## Homework ... Montessori Style

**H**ere are just a few examples of assignments that students and families have found to be both interesting and challenging:

- ✿ Perform an act of charity or extraordinary kindness.
- ✿ Plan and prepare dinner for your family with little or no help from your folks.
- ✿ Plan and prepare a dinner for your family typical of what the ancient Greeks might have eaten.
- ✿ Read together books that touch the soul and fire the imagination. Discuss the books that the children are reading in class on Fridays.
- ✿ Visit a church or synagogue of a different faith than yours. Meet the rabbi, priest, or minister and learn as much as you can about this other faith.
- ✿ Go to a boatyard and learn what you can about different kinds of boats, their purpose, cost, advantages and disadvantages.
- ✿ Buy some stock and follow its course over time. Pretend that you have a thousand dollars to invest ... ten thousand, a million.
- ✿ Calculate how many square feet of carpet it would take to cover your entire house. Convert this number into square yards. Call two carpet dealers. What kinds of carpet do they offer and what would it cost to carpet your house?
- ✿ Build a model of the floor plan of your house out of cardboard, one floor at a time. Be as careful and exact as you can.
- ✿ Develop a pen pal in another Montessori school.
- ✿ Prepare a list of all the things that you would like to do with your life: career, cities to visit, mountains to climb, things you want to learn, etc.
- ✿ Teach your dog a new trick.
- ✿ Build a model of the Parthenon, an aqueduct, or some other historical structure.
- ✿ Plant a garden, tree, or some bulbs around your house.
- ✿ Write a play and perform it with some friends for your class.
- ✿ Make puppets with your folks, build a puppet theater, and put on a performance.

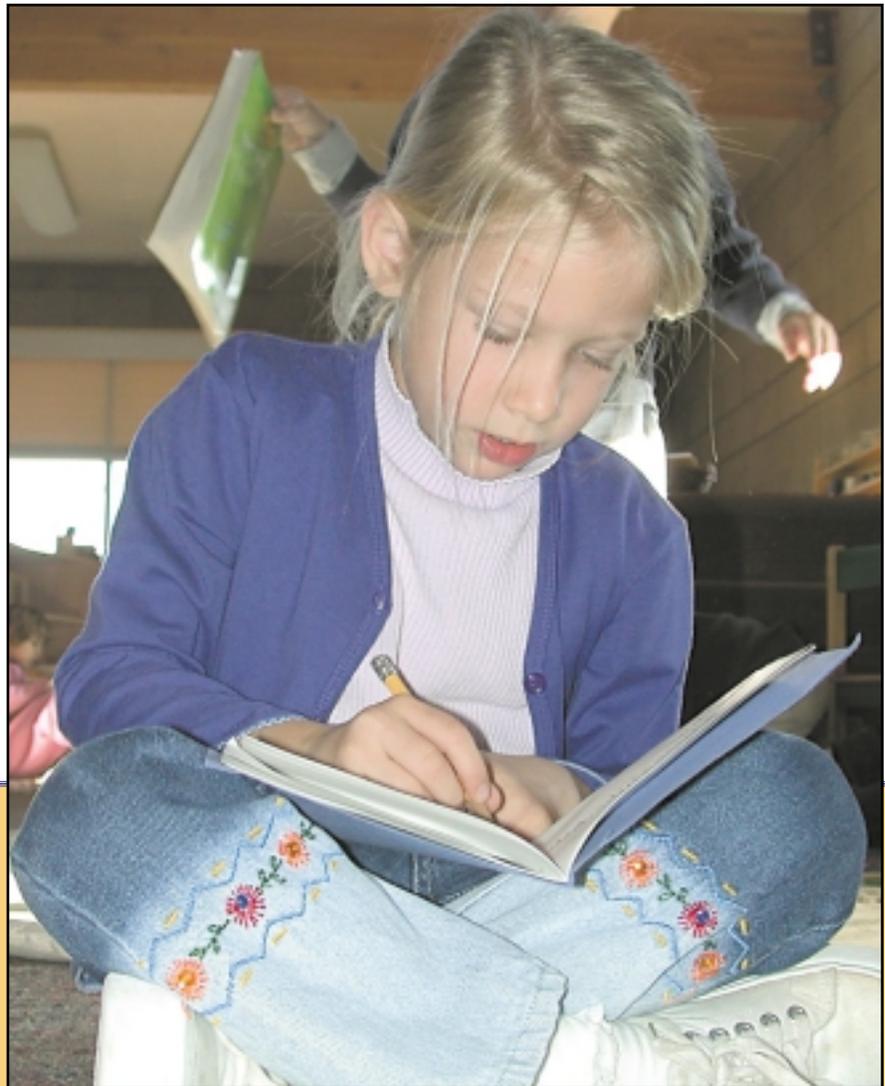
ever invest in tasks that have been assigned.

**Providing Structure: Setting High, Individually Tailored Expectations**

Individually tailored expectations doesn't mean that students can do whatever they want academically. They cannot elect whether or not to learn to read. Montessori students have to live within a cultural context, which for us involves the mastery of skills and knowledge that we consider basic.

Montessori gives students the opportunity to choose a large degree of what they investigate and learn, as well as the ability to set their own schedule during class time

Montessori children normally work with a written study plan for the day or week. It lists the basic tasks that they



(Above) An Elementary Montessori student taking her weekly spelling test.

- ✿ Learn about magic and master a new trick.
- ✿ Build a bridge out of popsicle sticks held together with carpenter's glue that will span a three-foot chasm and support several bricks.
- ✿ Interview your grandparents about their childhood. Write a biography or share what you learn with your class.
- ✿ Using one of the better books on children's science projects, select an experiment or project, carry it out, and prepare a report that documents what you did.
- ✿ Build a model sailboat using different types of sail plans. Race them on a pond with your class.
- ✿ Select a city somewhere in the world where you have never traveled. Find out everything that you can.

- ✿ Learn something new and teach it to someone in your class.
- ✿ Meet a real artist and visit her studio.
- ✿ Learn first aid.
- ✿ Prepare a time line of the presidents of the United States, along with picture cards, name tags, and fact cards. Study until you can complete the timeline on your own.
- ✿ Make your own set of constructive triangles, golden beads, or some other familiar Montessori material.
- ✿ Using 1 cm. as a unit, build out of clay, wood, or cardboard pieces to make up units, tens, hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, hundred thousands, millions up to one billion.
- ✿ Prepare a scale model of the solar system in which the distance from the sun to Pluto will be two miles. Prepare carefully measured models of the planets and sun and calculate the distance that each will need to be placed on the scale away from the sun.



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need to complete, while allowing them to decide how long to spend on each and what order they would like to follow. Beyond these basic individually tailored assignments, children explore topics that capture their interest and imagination and share them with their classmates.

### Tests

Montessori children usually don't think of our assessment techniques as "tests" so much as "challenges."

Early Childhood Montessori teachers observe their children at work or ask them to teach a lesson to another child to confirm their knowledge and skill.

Most Elementary Montessori teachers will give their students informal individual oral exams or have the children demonstrate what they have learned by either teaching a lesson to another child or by giving a formal presentation. The children also take and prepare their own written tests to administer to their friends.

Rather than being graded using a standard letter-grade scheme, students are normally working toward mastery.

### Standardized Tests

Very few Montessori schools test children younger than the first or second grades; however, most Montessori schools regularly give elementary students quizzes on the concepts and skills that they have been studying. Many schools ask their older students to take annual standardized tests.

While Montessori students tend to score very well, Montessori educators frequently argue that standardized testing is inaccurate, misleading, and stressful for children. There are many issues, including how well a given test captures a sense of someone's true skills and knowledge.

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Any given testing session can be profoundly affected by the student's emotional state, attitude, and health, and to a large degree, what they really demonstrate is how well a student knows how to take this kind of test. Montessori educators further argue that formal tests are unnecessary, since any good teacher who works with the same children for three years and carefully observes their work, knows far more about students' progress than any paper-and-pencil test can reveal.

The ultimate problem with standardized tests in our country is that they have often been misunderstood and misinterpreted in other schools. Tests can be fairly useful when seen as a simple feedback loop, giving both parents and school a general sense of how students are progressing.

Although standardized tests may not offer a terribly accurate measure of a child's basic skills and knowledge, in our culture, test-taking skills are just another Practical Life lesson that children need to master.

### Reporting Student Progress

Because Montessori believes in individually paced academic progress and encourages children to explore their interests rather than simply complete work assigned by their teachers, we don't assign grades or rank students within each class according to their achievement. Parents, students, and guides give and receive feedback in several different ways:

**Student Self-Evaluations:** At the elementary level, students will often prepare a monthly self-evaluation of their previous month's work. When completed, they meet with the teachers, who will review it and add their comments and observations. Students also prepare self-evaluations of the past three month's work: what they accomplished, what they enjoyed the most, what they found most difficult, and what they would like to learn in the three months ahead.

### Portfolios of Student Work:

In many Montessori schools, two or three times a year, teachers (and at the elementary level, students) and sometimes parents go through the students' completed work and make selections for their portfolios.

### Student/Parent/Teacher Conferences:

Once the students' three-month self evaluations are complete, parents, students, and teachers will hold a family conference two or three times a year to review their children's portfolios and self-evaluations and go through the teachers' assessment of their children's progress.

### Narrative Progress Reports:

Typically once or twice a year Montessori teachers will prepare a written narrative evaluation of the student's work, social development, and mastery of fundamental skills.

## *Some final thoughts in closing ...*

**W**e invite you to take a close look at the kind of person your child has become today at four or five and ask yourself how would you like her to be when she's eighteen? By what set of values do you hope she will live? Do you hope that she will still love school and be excited about learning? If so, then you have laid the right foundation by sending her to Montessori thus far. Like our families and so many millions of others like us, you've taken the first step. And now the question is what's next? We invite you to follow those of us who have gone before down the Montessori path. We have discovered it to be the best decision that we could have made for our children. What your son or daughter has experienced thus far is just the first step in the journey, and the best is yet to come.





## Montessori At The Secondary Levels

**Y**our children have been in Montessori all their lives. They love school and learn enthusiastically. Montessori has been the perfect match, but your children are approaching the age where they will have to leave Montessori if their school doesn't do something soon! And so you ask, "Why aren't there any Secondary Montessori programs in our town? What would it take to start a middle school class at our school?"

Most Americans have the impression that Montessori is just for early

childhood. Even though Montessori schools have spread all over the world during the last century, most schools in the United States stop after kindergarten. Some schools run through sixth grade, but Secondary Montessori schools are very rare. This is beginning to change as more and more Montessori schools open elementary classes, and many have either opened or are exploring the possibility of developing middle school programs.

This is important to the entire Montessori community because, unfortunately, in the eyes of many people around the world, "real education" begins with high school. Just consider the relative respect given to high school teachers compared to the level of respect given to those who teach preschoolers. Consider the dollars contributed annually to high schools compared to the relative pittance given to early childhood programs.

*"The need that is so keenly felt for a reform of secondary schools is not only an educational but also a human and social problem. This can be summed up in one sentence: Schools as they are today are adapted neither to the needs of adolescence nor to the time in which we live."*

— Maria Montessori

Today, we know that this prejudice is illogical, as research supports the premise that the most important years of a child's education are not the years of high school and college but those of the first six years of life. This is the foundation of everything that will follow.

Illogical as this prejudice may be, it is a fact of life that Montessorians have not been able to escape. Parents invariably look for evidence that Montessori works, and the evidence that parents would find ultimately compelling is a track record of Montessori preparing students to gain admission to the finest colleges and universities.



For this reason, as Montessori education slowly develops at the high school level, it will finally be able to take credit for those terrific young men and women that we have been sending off for generations to the finest public and private high schools. Think back. Do most people give credit to the preschools and elementary schools that they attended, or do they look back fondly on their high school years? For this reason alone, the expansion of Montessori at the high school level is an important and essential trend in the future development of Montessori around the world. Only the establishment of successful Montessori

High Schools can validate the effectiveness of Montessori as a "whole" in the eyes of the average person.

### The Emergence of Secondary Montessori Programs

The first secondary schools organized along Montessori principles were founded in Europe in the 1930s. Anne Frank, the young girl made famous by her poignant diaries, was a student in the first Montessori high school in Amsterdam when it was closed by the Nazis. At last count, there were eight large, highly regarded Montessori High Schools in the Netherlands.

The first American secondary programs influenced by Dr. Montessori's ideas, but not openly identified as "Montessori" began to appear in the 1940s and 1950s. Co-author, Tim Seldin, attended one of the first of these programs at the Barrie School in Silver Spring, Maryland, which established its upper school in the 1950s.

In the late 1970s, a small group of Montessori leaders, interested in the development of an American Montessori secondary model, founded the *Erdkinder* Consortium. This group's discussions led to a consensus that while Dr. Montessori's vision of a residential, farm-based learning com-

munity would be a model to work toward, schools interested in developing a modified middle school program in the interim should be encouraged to do so. These schools became known as “urban-compromise” programs.

In the 1970s, a number of early adolescent programs openly identified as being “Montessori influenced,” were established in the United States, including Near North Montessori in Chicago, the Ruffing Montessori School in Cleveland, Ohio, and two that are no longer in operation: the Montessori Farm School in Half Moon Bay, California and the Erdkinder School near Atlanta, Georgia.

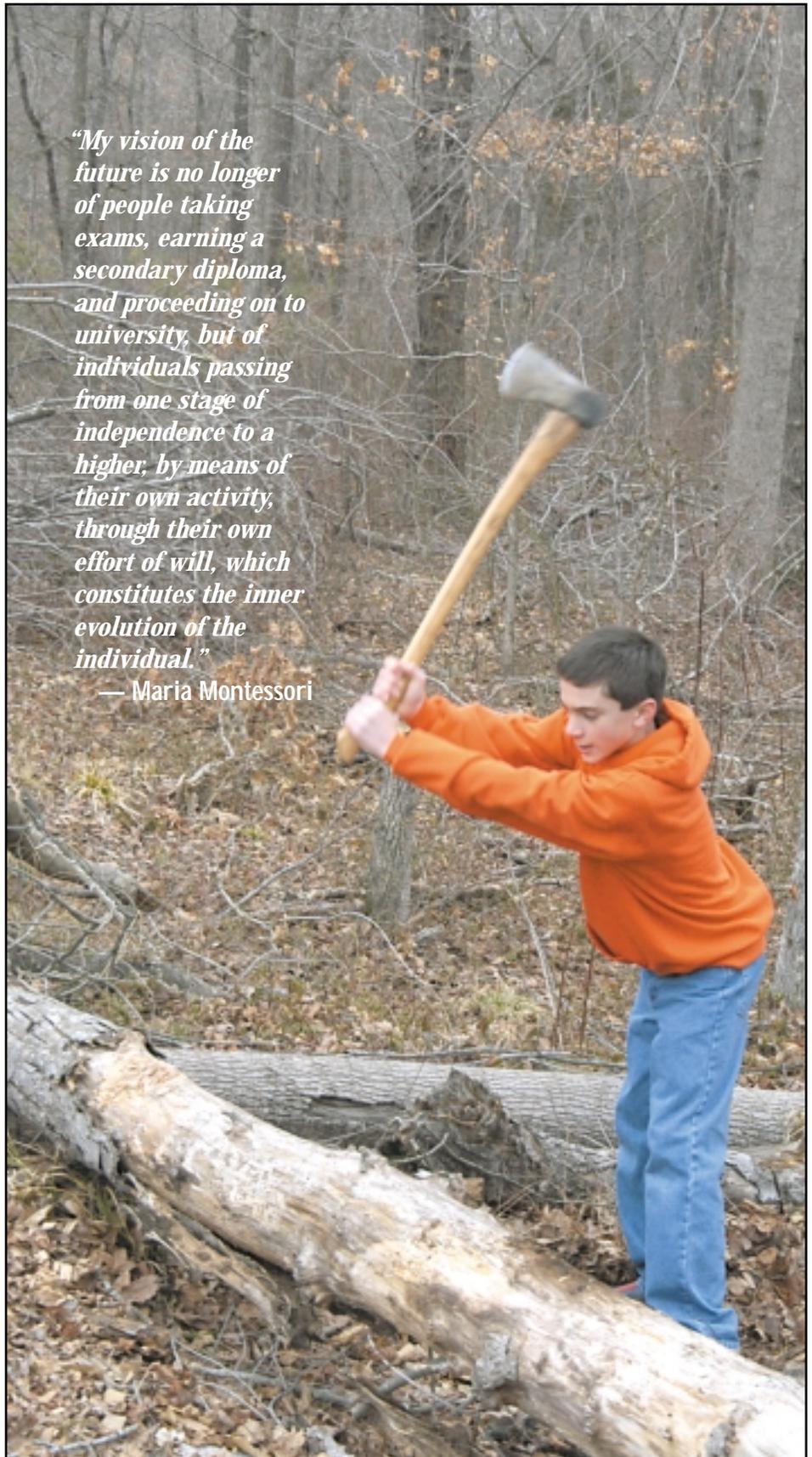
In 1982, the Barrie School became the first Montessori Junior and Senior High School program officially recognized by the American Montessori Society. That year, the Institute for Advanced Montessori Studies in Silver Spring, Maryland, and the Dallas Montessori Teacher Education Program in Dallas, Texas, opened the first Montessori Secondary teacher education programs.

During the 1980s, a number of other programs for young adolescents opened in the United States and Canada, including the Franciscan Earth School in Portland, Oregon; the School of the Woods in Houston, Texas; St. Joseph’s Montessori in Columbus, Ohio; the Toronto Montessori School in Ontario, Canada; and the Athens Montessori School in Athens, Georgia.

Today, perhaps half the Montessori schools in America stop after kindergarten, while most of the rest extend to the third or sixth grade. Montessori Middle and High School programs, however, are still very rare. We estimate that there

*“My vision of the future is no longer of people taking exams, earning a secondary diploma, and proceeding on to university, but of individuals passing from one stage of independence to a higher, by means of their own activity, through their own effort of will, which constitutes the inner evolution of the individual.”*

— Maria Montessori



are now more than two hundred Montessori Middle School programs in North America with numerous others in various stages of development. There are approximately twenty high schools openly identifying themselves as Montessori, and a growing number under development.

### Montessori's Vision of the *Erdkinder*

Maria Montessori first proposed her ideas for the reform of secondary education in a series of lectures given at the University of Amsterdam in January 1920. They were later published during the 1930s as part of her work *From Childhood to Adolescence*.

Dr. Montessori's model of secondary education is based on her understanding of the developmental needs and learning tendencies of early adolescents. In addition to conceiving many of the reforms incorporated into today's most innovative programs for early adolescents, Montessori added a unique idea: she recommended a residential school located in a country setting.

Montessori believed that by living independently of their families for a few years in a small rural community, young people could be trained in both the history of technology and civilization, while learning the practical habits, values, and skills needed to assume the role of an adult in today's society.

Envisioning a school where children would grow their own food and live close to nature, she called her program the *Erdkinder*, which translates from the Dutch as "the children of the Earth" or "children of the land."

Dr. Maria Montessori proposed living and working on a residential farm school as the best possible education-

al setting for young adolescents (twelve- to fifteen-year-olds) as they transitioned physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, and morally to adulthood.

Montessori believed the demands of puberty warranted a holiday from traditional lecture-based instruction. Instead of confining students to classrooms, she proposed a program that would help them accomplish two key developmental tasks: becoming psychologically and economically independent. Only then, she argued, would young adolescents escape from the pettiness of traditional schooling and engage seriously in the realities of life in society.

Montessori envisioned the *Erdkinder* as a small community of teenagers and adults located in a rural setting. Here teachers and students would live and work together throughout the year, growing much of their own food and manufacturing many of the things they would need for life in the country, thereby developing a deep sense of their connection to the land and the nature and value of work.

She envisioned students, under adult supervision, managing a hostel or hotel for visiting parents. The students would sell farm goods and other products in their own store. These farm management and store economics would form the basis of meaningful academic studies.

The *Erdkinder* curriculum would encourage self-expression through music, art, public speaking, and theater. Students would also study languages, mathematics, science, history of civilizations, cultures, and technological innovations. The *Erdkinder* would possess a "museum of machinery," where students could assemble, use, and repair their own farm equipment.

For many years the idea of a residential farm school was explored, but considered impractical. Montessori Secondary schools are now found in urban and suburban settings in the United States, with enrollments ranging from fewer than ten students to public school programs with more than 250 students.

The cost of organizing a residential *Erdkinder* program has been considered far too high for any one school to attempt; instead, Montessori Middle School programs attempt to incorporate as many *Erdkinder* components as possible.

The Montessori community looked on with considerable interest in 2001 when David Kahn, Director of the North American Montessori Teacher's Association (NAMTA), opened the Montessori Farm School in Huntsburg, Ohio in conjunction with the Hershey Montessori School. Serving students from ages twelve to fifteen, the Montessori Farm School is a lovely facility and an exciting project that has attracted widespread attention, including a substantial article in the *London Times*.

Many leaders in Secondary Montessori education believe that the future will lie primarily with non-residential programs. The opening of the Farm School, and others like it that may follow, provides an opportunity to test one of Dr. Montessori's hypotheses. She proposed that the residential community, with its artificially created social laboratory, will prove to be of most value in the completion of the development of mature, well-adjusted young adults.

A piece prepared by David Kahn describing the Montessori Farm School in greater depth follows.



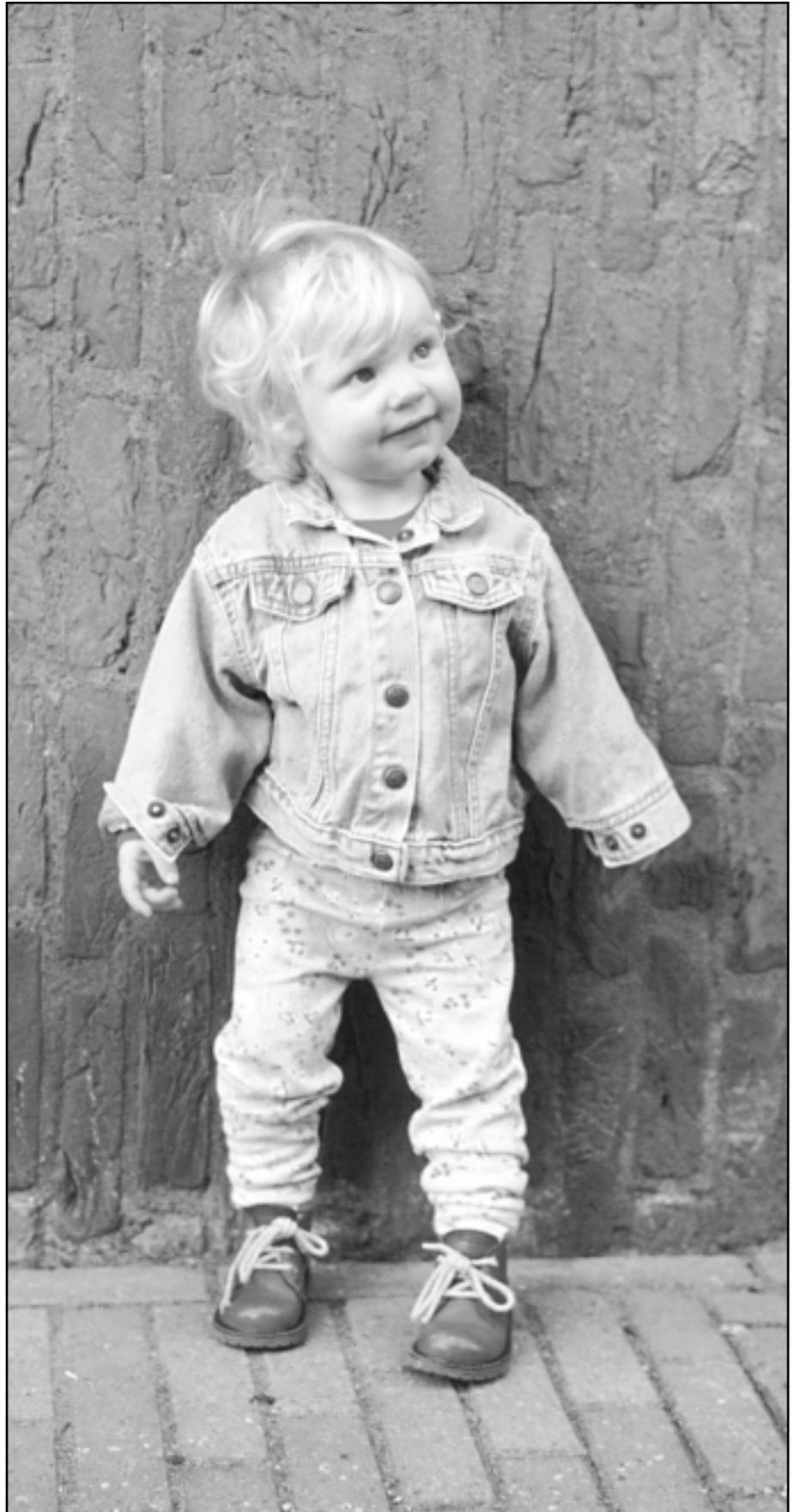
# Montessori Infant-Toddler Programs:

## The Best Beginning

**T**here is an ironic prejudice about education found in almost every country: the older the students are that one teaches, the higher the pay and respect for the teacher. We take it for granted that a professor in a graduate school is a more prestigious position than that of a high school teacher, which is, in turn, considered a more sophisticated position than teaching elementary and, of course, both are far more respectable than that of a nursery-school teacher. And no one in his or her right mind would want to teach infants and toddlers, right? Yet research clearly shows that the most important period in a human being's educational and emotional development are not the years of high school and college but rather the first six years of life.

Human beings are a magical combination of at least three factors: our genetic inheritance, our biological development, and our experiences.

Authors' Note: We wish to thank Susan Tracy, M.Ed., Director of the Learning Together Parent Education Center in Palatine, Illinois, for her invaluable assistance in co-authoring and preparing this chapter. We also thank the many schools that welcomed us into their infant-toddler classrooms. In the case of K.T. Korngold of The Montessori Children's Center at Burke (White Plains, NY), we wish to extend a special thanks for allowing us to enter "Sarah's world," a beautiful at-home Montessori infant environment that is pictured throughout this and the following "Montessori in the Home" section.





Genetics play an enormous role. In addition to the more obvious issues such as our sex, eventual height, and the color of our eyes, genetics determine our special gifts and handicaps, predispositions, and many aspects of our interests, talents, and personalities that scientists are only now beginning to understand.

However, whatever potential or predispositions we inherit from our parents, they will only be developed if our bodies are allowed to develop normally. A child who is malnourished in the critical first six years of life, or who suffers a devastating disease or physical injury, will normally develop much less of his or her potential as a human being than one who enjoys good health.

Equally important, and most relevant to this book, is the question of the

child's early education. Of course the brain is not a muscle, but like a muscle, the brain only develops through active use. This is especially true in the years of infancy and early childhood.

In the past, many people pictured a child's mind as a blank slate on which adults, through instruction, could "write down" the content of a good education. Likewise, another common metaphor was that of an empty bowl, waiting to be filled with the contents of the school's curricula. Montessori demonstrated that both concepts are inaccurate.

The young child's mind is more like that of an acute observer or scientist, eager to learn, explore, try new things, and master new skills. But most importantly, she recognized that with stimulation, the child's ability to concentrate, absorb, and master new ideas

and skills increases, and that the earlier we begin a program of intellectual, physical, sensory, and artistic education, the more dramatic the result.

This is a time of great sensitivity to language, spatial relationships, music, art, social graces, and so much more. If, during this period, the mind is stimulated by the child's exposure to a rich environment, the brain will literally develop a much stronger and lasting ability to learn and accomplish. In short, while our culture may believe that preschool teachers are the least significant educators our children will encounter, in reality the contribution that they offer is of incredible importance in a child's education.

This is especially true of those who teach infants and toddlers. So please forgive us when we cannot hide our frustration when parents say things

like, "Oh, for goodness sake, my child is just in preschool! Education during these years is not all that important! All she needs are teachers who are warm and kind."

~~The Terrible~~ *Terrific Twos:*  
**Montessori for the Infant and Toddler Years**

The concept of a specific program for these very young children was developed by Adele Costa Gnocchi and Dr. Silvana Quattrocchi Montanaro at the Centro Educazione Montessori in Rome. This world-famous teacher education program awards the Association Montessori Internazionale's Assistants to Infancy Certification, preparing Montessori educators to work with children from birth through age three. Over the last twenty years, other Montessori programs have developed infant-toddler teacher education programs of their own.

Infant-toddler Montessori educators are passionate about their work. Inspiring teacher educators Celma and Desmond Perry, Virginia Varga, and Carole Korngold have tirelessly advocated the importance of these programs and are slowly beginning to convince Montessori schools around the world to develop them.

Montessori programs for children under age three are not quite as rare as hen's teeth; however, they are anything but common. Toddler classes are still fairly few and far between, and infant programs are still so uncommon that parents would be fortunate to find one in their community. Where infant and toddler programs do exist, they tend to be extraordinarily popular, and it may be quite difficult to find an opening unless parents begin their search a year or more in advance.





(Above) Young children enjoy constructing new shapes with a wide variety of blocks and connecting materials.

## The Four Common Types of Infant-Toddler Programs

### Parent-Infant Programs

These are primarily programs designed to educate the parent of very young children in child development and the Montessori strategies for helping parents to respond to the needs they observe in their infants. These programs give parents an opportunity to observe their children and, through discussion, learn how they can best respond to their babies' needs. Normally, parent-infant programs will accept children under eighteen months of age. Parents come with their children to a short class normally lasting about ninety minutes, held once a week. Often, there will be a parent-teacher discussion held at another time during the week. Topics always include parent questions and concerns and a weekly topic, such as: sleep, nutrition, home environment, and infant and toddler development. The staffing is commonly one certified Montessori Infant-Toddler teacher with the parents working in the

Why don't more schools offer infant-toddler programs? Basically there are four major reasons.

The first is that there are very few certified Infant-Toddler Montessori teachers.

Secondly, because only a handful of children are supporting the trained teaching staff and classroom, these programs are more expensive to run than the classes for three to six-year-olds, and few schools feel that they can ask parents to pay the true cost of operation. As a result, many schools lose money on this type of program. The compensation is that the children who come through these programs will be

among their very best students in the years to come because of their early start. In some cases, state regulations may prohibit schools from accepting children under age three. Similarly, in some states, operating a program at this age level may cause the school to be classified as a child-care center, rather than as an educational institution.

And finally, many Montessori administrators wrestle with the concern that if they accept children under age three, prospective parents will view the school as a day-care center, rather than as a school, which some administrators fear might cause their entire program to lose credibility.

**A Note on Staffing:** A key issue with infant programs is the adult-to-child ratio. State regulations vary, and the required ratios and maximum group sizes will vary from one state to another. The standard that we recommend for this age is lower than most states require – striving for a one-to-three adult-to-infant ratio, or a small group of normally nine infants to one teacher and two adult assistants. This tends to make such programs more expensive, but due to the low adult-to-infant ratio and the special training needed, the quality is well worth the cost. It is especially important that staff turnover in these programs be very low, as even the youngest infant tends to bond deeply with the adult caregivers. Their consistency over time is very important to the program's success.



## SECTION

3

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

*DOES MONTESSORI PREPARE  
CHILDREN FOR THE REAL WORLD?*

REFLECTIONS ON A MONTESSORI EDUCATION

*THE MONTESSORI WAY*



**“Montessori is too structured!”**

**“Children have to grow up and face the real world sooner or later!”**

**“Your children are STILL in Montessori! You do want them to go to college ... don’t you?”**

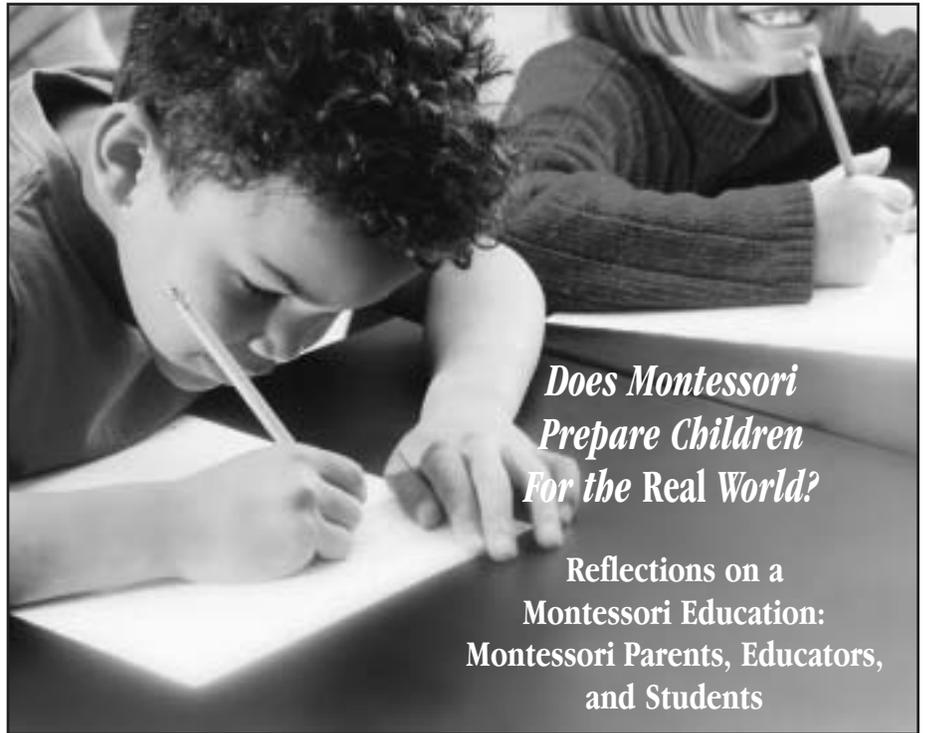
**“Montessori has no structure!”**

*Does any of this sound familiar?*

**M**ontessori parents often hear statements like these. They hear them from well-meaning relatives, co-workers, neighbors, and just about anybody who knows that they have a child in a Montessori school. When it comes to Montessori, it seems that everyone has an opinion!

Many parents of children enrolled in Montessori schools have heard the statement, *“It takes courage to be a Montessori parent.”* The first time I heard that statement, I remember wondering why anyone would think that it takes courage to send children to a Montessori school? I still wonder.

Maybe it’s because Montessori tends to encourage children to think for themselves and articulate their own opinions. There are moments when it would be a whole lot easier for parents to live with a six-year-old, who blindly and obediently accepts explanations for why you don’t create a recycling center right in the middle of your kitchen, rather than a righteous Montessori four-year-old who announces that she *knows* where ham-



*Does Montessori Prepare Children For the Real World?*

Reflections on a Montessori Education:  
Montessori Parents, Educators,  
and Students

burger *really* comes from and she’s *never – ever –* going to eat it, or any other animal, ever again. *Period!*

As children get older, many Montessori parents come to understand the “courage” statement in a whole different light. About the time that children hit the kindergarten year, parents may find themselves defending their choice to keep their children in Montessori. The opinions of relatives are often the most difficult to discount, because they come from people who are legitimately concerned about the future of their grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.

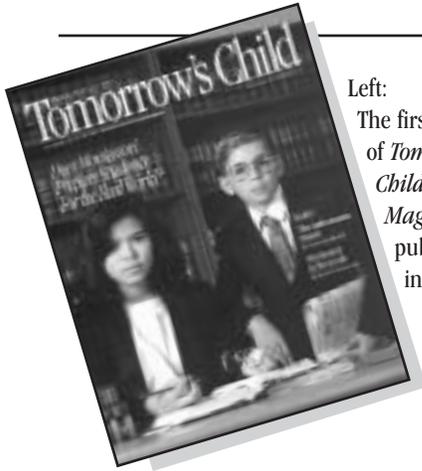
The pressure can become intense. Most parents who continue with Montessori report that there were times when they were very tempted to walk away and put their children into the capable hands of a more traditional school. “After all,” they rationalize, “we didn’t go to Montessori, and we turned out all right.” Or did we?

One characteristic that many Montessori parents share is their concern over the manner in which society has

come to define “success.” Is a child who grows up to become a doctor or a lawyer any more successful than a carpenter or a musician or a teacher or a homemaker? And on what basis can we legitimately fear that these bright and enthusiastic Montessori children of ours would be any less likely to earn professional degrees because of their Montessori education than if we sent them to some other school?

As the parent of two children, each of whom spent ten years in Montessori, and as someone who has had an opportunity to observe the long-term development of my own children and that of their Montessori peers, I know that Montessori students do well in college and careers. I also know, however, that many parents worry that because Montessori *looks* different, it may handicap their children in some way.

Most of us who choose Montessori are comfortable with our children; we are confident in their intelligence, curiosity, and ability to make their way in the world. I would like to believe



Left:  
The first issue  
of *Tomorrow's  
Child*  
Magazine  
published  
in 1993.

that Montessori parents are less likely to push their children (either consciously or unconsciously) into pursuing high-status careers, just because the social status of certain professions is the standard by which the world has come to measure success.

I hope that parents who choose Montessori are most concerned that their children will grow up to be

responsible, contributing members of society, adults who will find satisfaction and fulfillment in their work, regardless of their career path. I am hopeful that my own adult children will approach each day of their adult life with the same enthusiasm and eagerness to grow that they experienced as young children in their Montessori classrooms.

At the same time, our children must be capable of accepting the challenges that life will provide and have the ability to adapt to new ideas and technology. If these are outcomes that other parents share for their children, then I believe that parents can feel confident in their decision to keep their children in Montessori programs.

As Editor of *Tomorrow's Child* magazine, I helped select the cover for our first issue back in 1993 (shown at left). This somewhat controversial cover

had significance to me for three reasons. First, the boy in the picture is my son, Robin, at age ten. I can assure you that he did not look like that in real life. Second, it was the first and only time I ever succeeded in getting him into a tie and jacket at that age. Third, and most importantly, he and my daughter's friend, Leslie Tam, are posed as lawyers in the photo, and, as a young adult, I chose a career in law for all the wrong reasons.

I believed that becoming a lawyer would give me prestige and wealth. What it gave me was an ulcer and the nagging feeling that I should be doing something different with my life. While I don't dislike lawyers (well, at least not any more than anyone else), it just wasn't the right career for me. As I now tell my own grown-up children: *Just because you can do something well, it doesn't mean you have to do it.* There

**T**he dichotomy inherent in your question is false. Montessori *is* the real world. The Montessori classroom is very much true to life. The child is pursuing an interest in the context of many choices. Isn't that what society is all about?

Montessori children see their own growth, constantly respond to their own needs in relation to the multi-aged community around them. They learn to make individual choices that connect with their capabilities. And that may be different than making it on Wall Street or becoming a doctor, lawyer, or preacher.

The Montessori classroom allows for a diversity of individual expressions, personalities, and cultural origins. We must broaden the images of success: carpenter, welder, automotive mechanic, beautician, poet —

the possibilities correspond to the uniqueness of each child.

Some say that Montessori classrooms are devoid of competition and, therefore, not part of the "real world," but competition, like cooperation, is natural to life and, therefore, emerges naturally in the Montessori classroom. There, children freely compare and contrast each other's work.

Montessorians are careful not to exploit the natural competition but rather to note how children build or lose self-esteem in relation to the way they perceive themselves or the way others perceive them. And while the multi-age grouping softens comparison because of the variety of stages present in each classroom over a three-year age span, I would hardly consider the Montessori classroom a shelter from the real world.

In the micro-society of the Montessori classroom, these children will learn a great deal about human nature and individual personality. They will learn tolerance and respect as modeled by the Montessori-trained teacher; they will learn about fairness, about different approaches for different needs, and about individuality in relation to group cooperation.

Success is in the eyes of the beholder; it is largely formed privately, individually, and compassionately by the child and the family. Even the Montessori classroom cannot substitute for the parent's faith in the child or the child's faith in following his or her own star.

— David Kahn,  
Executive Director of  
The North American Montessori  
Teachers' Association (NAMTA)

is nothing wrong with law, medicine, teaching, carpentry, or any other career, as long as it is what is right for the individual.

If the answer to the question of whether or not Montessori prepares children for the *real* world is to be judged by whether or not great percentages of Montessori students pursue professional careers, then the answer is *maybe*. If the answer to the question is to be judged by whether or not Montessori prepares children for life, then the answer is unequivocally *yes*.

As a parent I set very high expectations for my children. I expected them to be well prepared academically so that they would be able to follow their dreams wherever that may take them, but I also hoped that they would be able to make responsible choices. I also hoped that they would be able to retain the love of learning and creativity that Montessori nurtured in them. Although I cared about academics, I felt certain that my children would achieve similar results from any good school, Montessori or otherwise. For me, the true value of a Montessori education went beyond academics.

I have often wished that I had attended a Montessori school as a child. Things might have turned out differently. For one thing, I might have saved a lot of money on law school. I really do believe, however, that all learning experiences have value and that my years in law school were not wasted. And maybe a bit of Montessori did rub off on me after all. At the age of thirty-five, I quit the practice of law to pursue other interests that I find much more fulfilling — career paths I probably should have explored in the first place, if I had not been trying so hard to jam my “round-pegged” personality into a square professional hole.

When I announced that I wasn’t going to practice law any more, the initial overwhelming response was, “What do you mean you’re not going to practice law? How do you think you’re going to survive without a profession?” Sound familiar?

I hope that as parents we will have the courage to recognize and continue to support the human values and life lessons that children learn in Montessori classrooms every day. My own two children went to good colleges, are now in graduate school, and seem destined to find satisfaction in their careers and adult lives. Our world could probably use a lot more Montessori lawyers, politicians, and doctors who understand that there’s more to life than being “book smart.” Above all, though, I think that as parents and educators, we must never accept the premise that our primary objective must be to teach children to *survive* life. Better we should help them learn to celebrate it!

— Joyce St. Germaine, Executive Director of  
The Montessori Foundation and  
Editor of *Tomorrow’s Child* Magazine

**M**y experience with students who leave the Montessori classroom is that they keep the Montessori philosophy with them forever and use what they learned in life. I have received feedback from students, parents, and high schools that our students do well in high school, colleges, universities, and in their chosen job fields.

Academically, they are well prepared, know how to learn, and enjoy learning. Since Montessori offers many different learning styles, students have acquired the ability to use all modalities, which allows many options and choices for them. Our students are pursuing the math and science fields by winning high school awards and majoring in these areas in college and universities. They can take a long-term project and break it down into “do-able” parts, and they see assessments as feedback and want to correct their test vs. just get a grade. Personally, they are self-confident and know themselves well — their strengths and weakness, which allows them to make knowledgeable decisions. They are not afraid to take calculated risks in pursuing new interests.

Socially, they care about others, know how to work well in groups, consider the opposite sex as friends, are student leaders, start new service organizations, participate in global projects, and are activists. They are the ones who organize petitions and are willing take a stand on moral issues — not only for their own particular causes but also for larger causes, such as discrimination and religious preference, which may not affect them personally. By doing what is best for students at each plane of development, Montessori prepares them for the future, because they have developed the ability to be adaptable and flexible to what is next in their life.

— Elisabeth Coe, Ph.D., Past-President of  
The American Montessori Society;  
Faculty Member and Principal of School of  
The Woods, Houston, TX, and Executive Director of  
The Houston Montessori Center

Does Montessori  
prepare children  
for the  
“real” world? ...

I started learning about and teaching using the Montessori Method in 1960. It is now over forty years later. Then I taught about it, ran a Montessori school, served on the AMS Board, and always had to answer: “*But will the children adjust to other schools and do well in life?*”

To this question, I had flip answers, hope-filled replies, and much conviction; but now I have experience. Also, I have comparisons, having run two non-Montessori schools. In addition, I’ve had a post-Montessori career in corporate life (CBS-TV) and have run a foundation, which raised funds for over six hundred independent colleges. The simple answer to the question as to whether Montessori prepares students to survive in other schools is **yes!** To compete, **yes!** Prosper, **yes!** And these replies are not boasts — they are my pleasant reality.

First, children generally survive well beyond the expectations of parents and educators. God, or nature made, they are built to endure and overcome. “Overcoming” Montessori is really easy, because it is like basic training for life; it engages the senses, acknowledges physical mobility, and respects the need to manage time. It follows the individual intellect, while providing an adequate dose of reality and Practical Life skills.

Most important is: *How does the student think (s)he has done, “given their givens?* Montessorians do not make genes or create home environments — we run schools and help parents grow along with their children using a scientifically enlightened model and a practical psychology and pedagogy. Maria Montessori gathered the insights, time refined them, and time refines them still. This is what I call the *verb* — Montessori as



action, not just a proper noun. I respect the noun; I love the verb.

For fourteen years, I sent kids off to other schools while working within and heading the Whitby School (The American Montessori Center [est.1958]). I watched and collected data. After years of working in business and running two other schools, I’ve collected much information. Watching my own children, grandchildren, neighbors, nieces/nephews, et. al, I can simply say that Montessori allows and helps children to be physicians, lawyers, business executives, educators, authors, film makers, mothers/fathers, computer experts, writers, musicians, politicians; survivors of college folly, parental divorce; and seekers of the mysteries of life through faith, religion, nature or philosophy. In brief, nothing in Montessori guarantees success or the absolute avoidance of all of life’s follies and failures. It *does* provide many tools and, in most cases, tools not commonly exploited in many other educational systems. Dr. Montessori was an excellent physician and an even greater educator. She was not, and is not, God; neither are those who use and advance her Method.

But if you simply want children to enjoy their education, use their senses, find uses for imagination and inventiveness, and respect natural timing, while also respond-

ing to fire drills and traffic signs; Montessori is a good bet. If you want me or others to say it is the *only* way to educate or the best, we respond by saying, “... *among great foods, we choose this Montessori diet.*” If you want guarantees, we caution you to watch out for snake-oil salesmen. Montessori was not a huckster and neither are we a hundred years later. Our students reveal their talents; we direct their learning. God or nature, along with their mothers and fathers and their socio-economic realities, play roles as well. Montessori prepares children to use their talents, advancing their natural abilities and taking that development into an ever-changing world.

Montessori students are the best evidence of their preparation. Seek them out. Speak with them. Observe them. It is likely you have already noticed them, perhaps even hired them, and maybe you already like them. What you did not know was that they were educated, in part, within a Montessori environment.

— John P. Blessington,  
Headmaster *Emeritus* of  
The Whitby School; Currently Executive  
Producer for Interfaith Religious  
Programs for CBS Television

**D**oes Montessori prepare children for the real world? I think it does. In fact, I think Montessori can help you be more successful in your career, perhaps even help you find a better career. Education isn't a process that only takes place in a school classroom. Forget fluffy notions of well-roundedness; in order to succeed in the workplace you have to keep abreast of current events, trends, and skills. Unfortunately, I've met many adults who have completely lost interest in learning, who would sooner watch reality television than read a non-fiction book about the real world. These people are handicapped in the marketplace.

What you learn in school isn't nearly as important as knowing how to learn on

your own, outside of an academic environment. My impression is that most people never learn to enjoy learning. School is a painful experience for many people, a place of degradation and captivity rather than one where knowledge is passionately pursued. Montessori gave me a thirst for learning and the confidence that I can teach myself anything I need to know.

An example: I was nine-years-old in 1979. When I expressed an interest in getting a computer in the classroom, I wasn't ridiculed. No adult patiently explained in somber tones that computer science wasn't in the lesson plan or the budget. Instead, my classroom teachers and I brainstormed ways to raise the money, deciding on a raffle. My father donated a television to the school to use as a prize, and a month later

*lo and behold!* the classroom had the school's first computer. I was enthralled by the huge silver contraption with the passion that only a nine-year-old can have, and my teachers encouraged me in this passion so that by the time I was ten-years-old I was programming in BASIC. Now a scientist for a Verizon subsidiary, I do C++ programming every day, and I still love it.

If I had gone to a traditional school, I might have ended up a programmer. I might even hold the same position I do now. But it's hard to imagine that a traditional education would have allowed me to develop the drive and enthusiasm to stay on top of my field.

— Marc Seldin

**Former Montessori Student**

**D**oes Montessori prepare children for the real world? Unequivocally *yes!*

The purpose of education is to enable the child to lead a productive and fulfilling life as an adult. Since Montessori takes into account the nature of the child and how the child learns, by providing an environment within which children create themselves, Montessori children are enabled with qualities of high self-esteem, self-directedness, leadership, self-discipline, self-confidence, a sense of responsibility, the ability to learn how to learn, an enjoyment of learning, a joy of life, the ability to think, benevolence toward others, the capacity to get along with others, and so on. Montessorians know these qualities are already within the child, and the Montessori Method allows them to blossom. These are the very qualities needed to lead a productive and fulfilling life no matter what type of "real" world is encountered.

— John H. Davis, Ph.D.  
**Father of Three Grown  
Montessori Children**



I know that Montessori education prepares children for the real world, probably the way that most parents know, and that's when they look at their grown children and observe the way in which those youngsters have become adults and faced the world. Montessori gives children an ability to face both themselves and the world in a particular way.

Both of my children who had Montessori education as very young children have a quality of daring and competence in their own ability that has enabled them to approach new problems and challenges with appropriate confidence, great enthusiasm, and focus.

I believe that this is one of the dispositional outcomes of Montessori, which has never really been measured, but which is palpable in most parents' experience.

I think that most parents who have had Montessori experiences with their children at an early age would agree that there is a quality to these youngsters who are now adults that is particular to their Montessori experience, though it would be difficult to describe or define.

— Nancy McCormick-Rambusch, Ph.D.  
Noted American Educator,  
Founder & First President of  
The American  
Montessori Society

I recently met a father of three grown children while waiting for my car to be repaired. When he learned I was affiliated with a Montessori school he said, "Oh, Montessori is great!" I inquired as to his experience, and it turns out his older son attended Montessori. He said to me, "He is now twenty-five, and we can still see the difference that his years in Montessori made." It is this kind of intangible sense that your child is more solid, centered, independent, or has a unique way of thinking about things that is so hard to quantify, yet makes all the difference in the world.

— Susan French-Lawyer,  
Admissions Director  
Montessori School of Syracuse

Does Montessori prepare children for the real world? This is a question I hear all the time. And my reaction to this question is to ask another question: *Whose world are you talking about?* Are you concerned that we are not preparing children for corporate America or for a world that does not offer freedom of choice, a world that is not interested in receiving a new productive, contributing member, one who cares about their fellow human beings, possesses a joy of learning, and is a clear thinking, creative, problem-solving, self-confident, compassionate human being.

What world is out there that would not want or desire an individual prepared for being fully present in the way that was just described? I have often wondered what real world would want anyone prepared in a lesser form.

— Melody Mosby, Program Director  
Athens Montessori School,  
Athens, Georgia







# The Montessori Way

**D**r. Maria Montessori carried a large vision for the purpose of education — the establishment of universal and lasting peace. Although she witnessed two world wars and the unleashing of nuclear power, Montessori evolved a living philosophy of education, child-study methods, age-appropriate curricula and instruction, and programs for adult teacher education. In 1940, she wrote:

*“Man masters almost everything but himself. He knows almost everything but himself. He avails himself of the most hidden treasures but does not use the immense riches and powers that lie within himself.”*

*This points to the great and urgent task of education! No mobilization is as complete as that which can be realized by the school. In the past, military service was limited to men of a certain age group. Now more and more people are drawn into the service of war — even women and children.*

*But if the school takes upon itself the task of mobilizing the young for the achievement of that perfect development that brings forward man as he can and is destined to be: conscious of the society he will become part of; master, not slave, of the infinite means that civilization puts at his disposal; equally developed in his moral and social powers as in his physical and intellectual ones; aware of his task, which requires the collaboration and unanimous effort of the whole of mankind—nobody will be overlooked.*

*Nobody will be rejected; nobody exempted! The whole of mankind will be enrolled in this service, which is a service for peace. Thus, education will become a true and invincible armament for peace! All human beings will grow to be ‘knights of peace’ during that period in their life when what is formed can never again be*

*shed or destroyed, because this is the period of formation when the cornerstones of the human personality are definitely fixed.”\**

Here, in closing, we would like to compare the *Montessori Way* to an American political system determined to substitute practices of adult accountability for experiences of childhood. We believe that the national focus on children’s test scores as a measure of teacher performance has too narrowly defined the purpose of education and the scope of learning experiences.

We argue, along with many others, that the current political determination to install educational accountability will not work. Despite considerable financial investment, training of teachers, matching instruction to national, state, and local curricular standards, and teaching children how to test, children nationally have show little test score improvement. Sadly, accountability has brought fear into the learning environment by imposing sanctions on schools that do not meet targeted test scores. Sanctions include removing principals and teachers from schools that do not perform.

In making this comparison, the *Montessori Way* finds new relevancy and importance to children and their families. The *Montessori Way* continues almost one hundred years after Montessori’s initial insights in her first school in Rome. Montessori schools today seek to help children become independent and self-disciplined by assisting them with a full development of their unique individual potentials. Montessori teachers do this through child study and by fashioning classroom and outdoor environments in which children find engaging activities that help them develop habits of lifelong learning — for example, concentration, investigation, collaboration, problem solving, and communication.

The *Montessori Way*, with its focus on children’s unique capabilities, stands in marked contrast to the directions of national education efforts. More than two decades ago (in 1981), the United States Department of Education established the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Its purpose was to study the quality of education in the United States and make recommendations for improvements.

The Commission’s findings were published in 1983. Their report, titled “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reforms,” alarmed the nation and set a course of action that continues to dictate educational policy twenty years later. Although the opening paragraphs of “A Nation at Risk” have been repeatedly reprinted, it is worth reading them again. The emotional language stands in marked contrast to the convictions we call the *Montessori Way*:

*“Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur — others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.*

*If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the*

\*Retrieved August 5, 2003, from the Association Montessori Internationale’s website <http://www.montessori-ami.org/ami.htm>



*mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems, which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.”\**

“A Nation at Risk” was a call for mobilization. Educational improvements since 1983 have included investments in new curriculum, increases in salaries, incorporating technology into daily instruction, and the implementation of national, state, and local curriculum and assessment standards. Despite studies of the human brain and new understandings of optimal learning conditions, the focus of school reform has, in our opinion, been largely misdirected. Instead of accomplishing the comprehensive educational reforms that Montessori called for in 1940 — creating schools based on partnership, community, and a joyful, natural approach to learning — during the past two decades, teachers and school administrators are now held accountable for their students’ learning, which is increasingly measured by their performance on high-stakes tests. Twenty years later, test scores have minimally improved, despite new understandings for how children learn and, based on these understandings, new methods of instruction.

The nation’s landscape drastically changed during this same historic period. Today’s schools must educate children from numerous linguistic and cultural traditions, include children with a large range of learning challenges and styles in regular classrooms and keep terrorism away from the classroom door. Education reforms during the past twenty years have also included efforts to teach children how to reason and understand, identify and solve problems, work in teams, and communicate effectively.

These skills, rather than simple memorization, are said to help prepare children for their adulthoods in an information-age twenty-first century. Our children will face known problems with as yet unknown solutions: dwindling, non-renewable energy supplies; environmental degradation, including the destruction of rain forests, the loss of topsoil, species extinction, and pollution. Other challenges facing our children include human migration; hunger; terrorism; and America’s national debt.

Given the urgent and demanding complexities of everyday living, we find that the *Montessori Way* is more relevant today than ever before. Throughout this book we have used the term “Montessori” to refer to a person, a philosophy, an understanding of how children learn, an educational method, a set of learning materials, and a way of life. This way of life is a philosophy for how human beings ought to live their lives and treat one another. It is an attitude of respect and encouragement for each human being, no matter how young or how old. It is a sense of partnership, rather than power and authority.

We argue that these are indeed the qualities of a fulfilled and happy life; these are the qualities of a person who is able to engage in today’s pressing issues and challenges.

\*Retrieved August 20, 2003, U.S. Department of Education web site: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>

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The *Montessori Way* recognizes that each child (and each adult) has her or his own unique capabilities. Each child has, in other words, *genius*. A primary purpose for education is to help each child obtain her full potential. The adult's task is to overcome her or his biases and prejudices and learn to see clearly the possibilities within each child. We assist children by preparing learning environments with carefully designed activities that allow them to exercise and develop their capabilities.

The practice of testing children to evaluate adult performance is wrong. The premise of supposing that test scores measure learning is limiting.

Children learn in relationships that nurture and support. Learning is a community experience, and trust between people is essential. Threats of loss of funds and public embarrassment elevate fear and lowers trust. The learning community becomes fragile. The classroom, rather than the nation, is now at risk. Teachers and principals are frightened by the loss of their jobs. Teachers pass on their fears and worries. Learners cannot engage in creative and critical-thinking skills when fear is present. As children become stressed, they cannot test well.

As American students' scores on both international math and science examinations and on local and state accountability measures showed minimal gains during the past twenty years, schools throughout the country responded by better preparing children to take tests. Teachers teach "to the test." Students are drilled; memorization, not learning how to identify and solve problems, occupies lessons.

Time for this is found by eliminating instructional time for art, music, recess, and physical education. In some schools, time for history and science has been reduced, if not eliminated. Time for test practice allows no time for students' interests or authentic problems; no time to tune children into the challenging issues of their adulthoods.

Teaching "to the test" is based on a factory-model approach to learning, a model that misunderstands and misuses children's learning capabilities and promise. In a factory, controls are implemented to assure a uniform and quality product. While this process is important for material objects, it is inappropriate and wrong for children. Becoming the same is not the purpose of life.

A recent email adds an interesting perspective. It described a company's struggle to develop, market, and sell a unique product. As it happens, the concept design was very exciting, and there was (and still is) a national need for this unique product. The marketing plans were creative, innovative, and ready for release. According to the company's strategic business plan, there should have been no problem with generating huge profits. They had a winner. Everyone was excited and enthusiastic. This was a great place to work. Problems soon arose, however, and the problems involved the manufacturing process. The company was unable to make products that consistently meas-

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ured up to manufacturing standards. After careful study, the company's leaders determined the source of the problem was its work force. To correct this situation, the company reformed its policies to hold all employees accountable for measurable goals. Failure to produce would result in termination. For a while, more products were acceptably produced. But fear was rising. As leadership focused on faulty products and dismissed workers, the quality of the company's workplace culture continued to erode.

A new study was commissioned, and the company realized its problems came from the raw materials it had to work with. Because this was a unique product, no one vendor could supply all of the needed raw materials. And, because many vendors had to be involved, the raw materials were not standard. Consequently, the materials would not have the same inherent properties and would not respond to one manufacturing process.

Leadership was in a quandary. They knew multiple manufacturing procedures would be required. But this would require considerable training of the work force and an expensive retooling process. Leadership decided to cover up the results of its new study. They would focus, as before, on developing stronger accountability standards. The email concluded with identifying the company and its unique product — American schools and the process of educating our children. While we are not aware of cover-ups, we are terribly aware of the costs of not paying attention to the unique capabilities and learning approaches of each child.

A test score, at best, indicates a specific performance or the child's response to specific test questions on a given day, which is easily affected by his or her health and emotional state. When it is finally reported weeks or months later, a test score is an artifact.

Caution should guide decisions and conclusions, if for no other reason than that children have continued to learn and grow since the test date. Discussion about who they *were* and what they *did* masks who they are now and what they are capable of today.

The *Montessori Way* is an alternative to an approach to education that now teaches and tests children for what to know, and for how to know it, but without regard for when they understand. Children are, in other words, ready only when they are ready.

The Montessori commitment to respect each individual child honors the learning process each child must follow as he or she makes meaningful sense of knowledge and skills. Learning is taking place every day and every waking moment. It happens uniquely for each child. More than being responsible for external and arbitrary content standards, Montessori teachers are also accountable for facilitating the growth of such qualities as character, grace and courtesy, kindness, respect, and the development of self-discipline.

Standards now exist in all states for achievement and accountability. But do the standards permit differences in learning styles and approaches? Cultural and ethnic diversities? Gender differences?

Test score measures are too narrow; childhood and the experience of learning are far more complex. Maria Montessori wrote:

*"My vision of the future is no longer people taking exams and proceeding on to certification . . . but of individuals passing from one stage of independence to a higher [one], by means of their own activity through their own effort of will, which constitutes the inner evolution of the individual."*

— Maria Montessori  
*From Childhood to Adolescence*

In keeping with the principles of *The Montessori Way*, we imagine children graduate from Montessori schools demonstrating:

- ▲ A passion for learning;
- ▲ The ability to choose and engage for long periods of time in work that is personally fulfilling;
- ▲ The ability to identify a social problem and contribute to its solution;
- ▲ The knowledge of how to respect and restore the natural environment;
- ▲ An understanding of cultural and racial differences as a call for celebration rather than a cause for fear; and
- ▲ The accomplishment of self-discipline and responsible choice.

This is hardly a completed list. Other characteristics would include "initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgment, commitment, nuance, good will, ethical reflection, or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes."\*

These qualities are consistent with the *Montessori Way* because learning, finally, is more than a test performance. Children require age-appropriately designed classrooms and other environments and relationships between healthy and whole persons.

A child can only attend to reading, writing, and arithmetic when matters of health (nutrition, rest, and emotional well-being) are consistently assured. When unique capabilities and independence are respected as a life-long method of learning, education cannot be standardized and delivered as a one method teaches all, one test measures all.

\*Bill Ayers, quoted in England, C.M. (2003). "None of Our Business. Why Business Models Don't Work in Schools." pg. 8. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

The *Montessori Way* understands that learning, not education, is the issue. Children are not taught, they learn. Teachers do not teach. They show, model, encourage, and create situations and conditions for children to investigate, inquire into, and discover. In sum, children, not teachers, build knowledge. And, children do not develop or learn uniformly at the same standard pace.

Truthfully, children can only learn when they do. A child will talk, walk, and balance a bicycle only when she is ready. A child will understand numbers, operations with fractions, equivalencies between geometric figures, causes of historical events — only when she is ready. A child will blend visual symbols for language (“c” – “a” – “t”) and read only when she is ready.

In keeping with the *Montessori Way*, we honor and respect individual children for their particular approaches and styles of learning. We help children develop habits and skills of life-long learning with natural systems — curiosity, inquiry and exploration — without resorting to external rewards, threats, and competitions. Why do human children suddenly require learning goals in the form of measurable content standards to demonstrate that they learn? The argument, of course, is more political and, therefore, more controlling. It’s not a question of learning; it’s a question of who wants children to learn what.

Parents and teachers should access their state and local content and achievement standards; these are available on the websites of state departments of education. These impressive lists of objectives hide the fact that *real* learning does not follow a neat and orderly progression. The focus must be larger than what is learned and include understanding of how and when a child learns. In sum, we must learn to ask, “At this moment, who is learning what — and how?”



Montessori recognized this kind of question and developed an approach to instruction called the “scientific pedagogy.” Montessori teachers act as research scientists and endeavor to understand the complete child in order to help facilitate the process Montessori called “educating the human potential.” Children are naturally becoming; they naturally engage in a whole developmental process. Not knowing today (as measured by a low test score) is not the same as not knowing forever. Similarly, knowing today (a high test score) does not guarantee knowing always. Humans do forget.

Montessori discovered the requirement of repetition in a child’s learning process. In her day, the schooling process involved recitation. Teachers spoke, and children recited back what they heard. In Montessori classrooms, children learn from repeated explo-

rations of materials. Children observe and study natural life and learning materials.

With repetition, children increase their understanding of particular concepts and improve their capabilities with particular skills. This is as true for young children learning to arrange and sequence a set of cylinders of varying lengths and diameters as it is for secondary students learning to research and present a persuasive argument in a written essay or a proposal for how to improve local recycling efforts.

Education reform is as necessary today as it was at the start of the twentieth century. The directions of current efforts are too narrow and, based on political agenda rather than children’s development, too dangerous. Instead, each child deserves a complete education in which all of her or his unique capabilities are engaged; an education we call the *Montessori Way*.





# SECTION

4

# APPENDICES

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PARENTS OFTEN ASK

FINDING THE RIGHT SCHOOL

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# Brief Answers to Questions Parents Often Ask

## *Why do Montessori classes group different age levels together?*

Sometimes parents worry that by having younger children in the same class as older ones, one group or the other will be shortchanged. They fear that the younger children will absorb the teachers' time and attention, or that the importance of covering the kindergarten curriculum for the five-year-olds will prevent them from giving the three- and four-year-olds the emotional support and stimulation that they need. Both concerns are misguided.

At each level, Montessori programs are designed to address the developmental characteristics normal to children in that stage.

- ▲ Montessori classes are organized to encompass a two- or three-year age span, which allows younger students the stimulation of older children, who in turn benefit from serving as role models. Each child learns at her own pace and will be ready for any given lesson in her own time, not on the teacher's schedule of lessons. In a mixed-age class, children can always find peers who are working at their current level.
- ▲ Children normally stay in the same class for three years. With two-thirds of the class normally returning each year, the classroom culture tends to remain quite stable.
- ▲ Working in one class for two or three years allows students to develop a strong sense of community with their classmates and teachers. The age range also allows especially gifted children the stimulation of intellectual peers, without requiring that they skip a grade or feel emotionally out of place.

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### ***Why Do Montessori Classes Tend To Be Larger than Those Found in Many Other Schools?***

Many schools take pride in having very small classes, and parents often wonder why Montessori classes are so much larger. Montessori classes commonly group together twenty-five to thirty children covering a three-year age span.

Schools that place children together into small groups assume that the teacher is the source of instruction, a very limited resource. They reason that as the number of children decreases, the time that teachers have to spend with each child increases. Ideally, we would have a one-on-one tutorial situation.

But the best teacher of a three-year-old is often another somewhat older child. This process is good for both the tutor and the younger child. In this situation, the teacher is not the primary focus. The larger group size puts the focus less on the adult and encourages children to learn from each other.

By consciously bringing children together in larger multi-age class groups, in which two-thirds of the children normally return each year, the school environment promotes continuity and the development of a fairly stable community.

### ***Why Do Most Montessori Schools Ask Young Children to Attend Five Days a Week?***

Two- and three-day programs are often attractive to parents who do not need full-time care; however, five-day programs create the consistency that is so important to young children and which is essential in developing strong Montessori programs. Since the primary goal of Montessori involves creating a culture of consistency, order, and empowerment, most Montessori

schools will expect children to attend five days a week.

### ***Why Is Montessori So Expensive Compared to Conventional Schools?***

Montessori programs are normally more expensive to organize and run than conventional classrooms due to the extensive teacher education needed to become certified and the very high cost of purchasing the educational materials and beautiful furniture needed to equip each Montessori classroom.

Montessori is not always more expensive. Tuition costs depend on many factors, including the cost of the various elements that go into running a particular school, such as the cost of the buildings and grounds, teacher salaries, the size of the school,\* the programs it offers, and whether the school receives a subsidy payment from a sponsoring church, charity, or government agency.

### ***Why Do Most Montessori Schools Want Children to Enter at Age Three?***

Dr. Montessori identified four “planes of development,” with each stage having its own developmental characteristics and developmental challenges. The Early Childhood Montessori environment for children age three to six is designed to work with the “absorbent mind,” “sensitive periods,” and the tendencies of children at this stage of their development.

Learning that takes place during these years comes spontaneously without effort, leading children to enter the elementary classes with a clear, concrete sense of many abstract concepts. Montessori helps children to become self-motivated, self-disciplined, and to retain the sense of

curiosity that so many children lose along the way in traditional classrooms. They tend to act with care and respect toward their environment and each other. They are able to work at their own pace and ability. The three-year Montessori experience tends to nurture a joy of learning that prepares them for further challenges.

This process seems to work best when children enter a Montessori program at age two or three and stay at least through the kindergarten year. Children entering at age four or five do not consistently come to the end of the three-year cycle having developed the same skills, work habits, or values.

Older children entering Montessori may do quite well in this very different setting, but this will depend to a large degree on their personality, previous educational experiences, and the way they have been raised at home.

Montessori programs can usually accept a few older children into an established class, so long as the family understands and accepts that some critical opportunities may have been missed, and these children may not reach the same levels of achievement seen in the other children of that age. On the other hand, because of the individualized pace of learning in Montessori classrooms, this will not normally be a concern.

### ***How Can Montessori Teachers Meet the Needs of So Many Different Children?***

Great teachers help learners get to the point where their minds and hearts are open, leaving them ready to learn. In effective schools, students are not so much motivated by getting good grades as they are by a basic love of learning. As parents know their own children’s learning styles and temperaments, teachers, too, develop this sense of each child’s uniqueness by

\* In general, larger schools tend to be more cost-effective to run than small ones.

spending a number of years with the students and their parents.

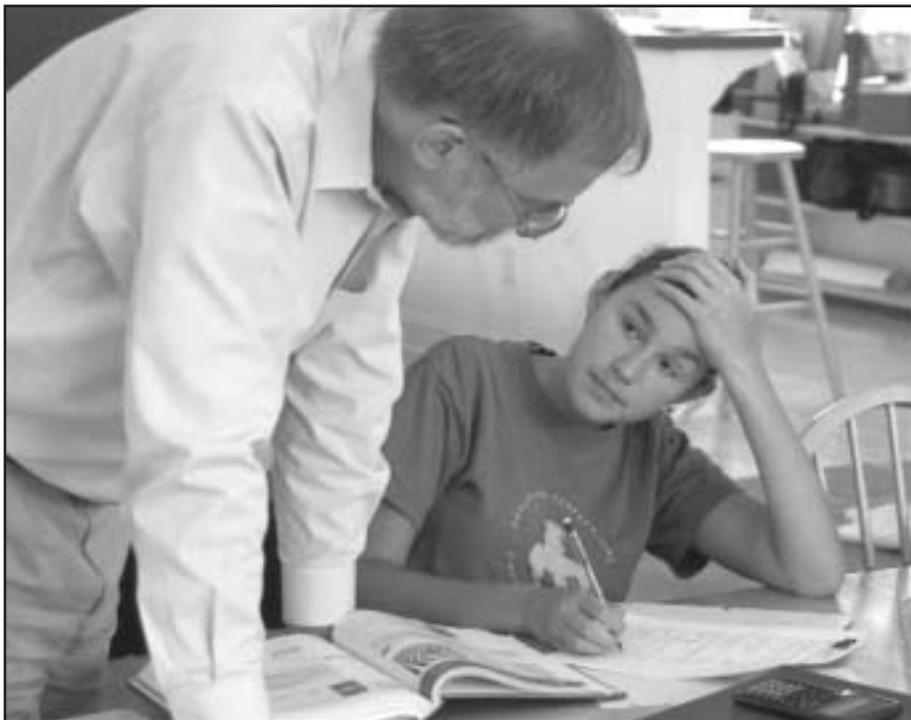
Dr. Montessori believed that teachers should focus on the child as a person, not on the daily lesson plan. Montessori teachers lead children to ask questions, think for themselves, explore, investigate, and discover. Their ultimate objective is to help their students to learn independently and retain the curiosity, creativity, and intelligence with which they were born. As we said in an earlier chapter, Montessori teachers don't simply present lessons; they are facilitators, mentors, coaches, and guides.

Traditionally, teachers have told us that they "teach students the basic facts and skills that they will need to succeed in the world." Studies show that in many classrooms, a substantial portion of the day is spent on discipline and classroom management.

Normally, Montessori teachers will not spend much time teaching lessons to the whole class. Their primary role is to prepare and maintain the physical, intellectual, and social/emotional environment within which the children will work. A key aspect of this is the selection of intriguing and developmentally appropriate learning activities to meet the needs and interests of each child in the class.

Montessori teachers usually present lessons to small groups of children at one time and limit lessons to brief and very clear presentations. The goal is to give the children just enough to capture their attention and spark their interest, intriguing them enough that they will come back on their own to work with the learning materials.

Montessori teachers closely monitor their students' progress. Because they normally work with each child for two or three years, they get to know their students' strengths and weaknesses, interests, and personalities extremely well. Montessori teachers often use the children's interests to enrich the



curriculum and provide alternate avenues for accomplishment and success.

#### ***Why Is a Montessori Classroom Called a "Children's House?"***

Dr. Montessori's focus on the "whole child" led her to develop a very different sort of school from the traditional teacher-centered classroom. To emphasize this difference, she named her first school the "Casa dei Bambini" or the "Children's House."

The Montessori classroom is not the domain of the adults in charge; it is, instead, a carefully prepared environment designed to facilitate the development of the children's independence and sense of personal empowerment.

This is a children's community. They move freely within it, selecting work that captures their interest. In a very real sense, even very small children are responsible for the care of their own child-sized environment. When they are hungry, they prepare their own

snacks and drinks. They go to the bathroom without assistance. When something spills, they help each other carefully clean up.

Four generations of parents have been amazed to see small children in Montessori classrooms cut raw fruits and vegetables, sweep and dust, carry pitchers of water, and pour liquids with barely a drop spilled. The children normally go about their work so calmly and purposely that it is clear to even the casual observer that they are the masters in this place: The "Children's House."

#### ***What Do Montessori Schools Mean by the Term "Normalization?"***

"Normalization" is a Montessori term that describes the process that takes place in Montessori classrooms around the world, in which young children, who typically have a short attention span, learn to focus their intelligence, concentrate their energies for long periods of time, and take tremendous satisfaction from their work.

In his book, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*, E.M. Standing described the following characteristics of normalization in the child between the age of three and six:

- A love of order;
- A love of work;
- Profound spontaneous concentration;
- Attachment to reality;
- Love of silence and of working alone;
- Sublimation of the possessive instinct;
- Obedience;
- Independence and initiative;
- Spontaneous self-discipline;
- Joy; and
- The power to act from real choice and not just from idle curiosity.

#### *Is Montessori for All Children?*

The Montessori system has been used successfully with children from all socioeconomic levels, representing those in regular classes as well as the gifted, children with developmental delays, and children with emotional and physical disabilities.

There is no one school that is right for all children, and certainly there are children who may do better in a smaller classroom setting with a more teacher-directed program that offers fewer choices and more consistent external structure.

Children who are easily overstimulated, or those who tend to be overly aggressive, may be examples of children who might not adapt as easily to a Montessori program. Each situation is different, and it is best to work with the schools in your area to see if it appears that a particular child and school would be a good match.

#### *Is Montessori Opposed to Homework?*

Most Montessori schools do not assign homework to children below the elemen-

tary level. When it is assigned to older children, it rarely involves page after page of “busy” work; instead, the children are given meaningful, interesting assignments that expand on the topics that they are pursuing in class. Many assignments invite parents and children to work together. When possible, teachers will normally build in opportunities for children to choose among several alternative assignments. Sometimes, teachers will prepare individually negotiated weekly assignments with each student.

#### *Is Montessori Unstructured?*

At first, Montessori may look unstructured to some people, but it is actually quite structured at every level. Just because the Montessori program is highly individualized does not mean that students can do whatever they want.

Like all children, Montessori students live within a cultural context that involves the mastery of skills and knowledge that are considered essential.

Montessori teaches all of the “basics,” along with giving students the opportunity to investigate and learn subjects that are of particular interest. It also allows them the ability to set their own schedule to a large degree during class time.

At the early childhood level, external structure is limited to clear-cut ground rules and correct procedures that provide guidelines and structure for three- and four-year-olds. By age five, most schools introduce some sort of formal system to help students keep track of what they have accomplished and what they still need to complete.

Elementary Montessori children normally work with a written study plan for the day or week. It lists the

tasks that they need to complete, while allowing them to decide how long to spend on each and what order they would like to follow. Beyond these basic, individually tailored assignments, children explore topics that capture their interest and imagination and share them with their classmates.

#### *Are There Any Tests in Montessori Programs?*

Montessori teachers carefully observe their students at work. They give their students informal, individual oral exams or have the children demonstrate what they have learned by either teaching a lesson to another child or by giving a formal presentation. The children also take and prepare their own written tests to administer to their friends. Montessori children usually don't think of assessment techniques as *tests* so much as *challenges*. Students are normally working toward mastery rather than a standard letter grade scheme.

**Standardized Tests:** Very few Montessori schools test children under the first or second grades; however, most Montessori schools regularly give elementary students quizzes on the concepts and skills that they have been studying. Many schools have their older students take annual standardized tests.

While Montessori students tend to score very well, Montessori educators are deeply concerned that many standardized tests are inaccurate, misleading, and stressful for children. Good teachers, who work with the same children for three years and carefully observe their work, know far more about their progress than any paper-and-pencil test can reveal.

The ultimate problem with standardized tests is that they have often been misunderstood, misinterpreted,

and poorly used to pressure teachers and students to perform at higher standards. Although standardized tests may not offer a terribly accurate measure of a child's basic skills and knowledge, in most countries test-taking skills are just another Practical Life lesson that children need to master.

### ***How Do Montessori Schools Report Student Progress?***

Because Montessori believes in individually paced academic progress, most schools do not assign letter grades or rank students within each class according to their achievement. Student progress, however, is measured in different ways, which may include:

**Student Self-Evaluations:** At the elementary level, students will often prepare a monthly self-evaluation of the past three month's work: what they accomplished, what they enjoyed the most, what they found most difficult, and what they would like to learn in the three months ahead. When completed, they will meet with the teachers, who will review it and add their comments and observations.

**Portfolios of Student Work:** In many Montessori schools, two or three times a year, teachers (and at the elementary level, students) and parents go through the students' completed work and make selections for their portfolios.

**Student/Parent/Teacher Conferences:** Once the students' three-month self-evaluations are complete, parents, students, and teachers will hold a family conference two or three times a year to review their children's portfolios and self-evaluations and go through the teachers' assessment of their children's progress.

**Narrative Progress Reports:** In many Montessori schools, once or twice a year, teachers prepare a written narrative report discussing each student's work, social development, and mastery of fundamental skills.

### ***Will My Child Be Able to Adjust to Traditional Public or Private Schools After Montessori?***

By the end of age five, Montessori children are normally curious, self-confident learners who look forward to going to school. They are normally engaged, enthusiastic learners who honestly want to learn and who ask excellent questions.

Montessori children by age six have spent three or four years in a school where they were treated with honesty and respect. While there were clear expectations and ground rules, within that framework, their opinions and questions were taken quite seriously. Unfortunately, there are still some teachers and schools where children who ask questions are seen as challenging authority.

It is not hard to imagine an independent Montessori child asking his new teacher, "But why do I have to ask each time I need to use the bathroom?" or, "Why do I have to stop my work right now?" We also have to remember that children are different. One child may be very sensitive or have special needs that might not be met well in a teacher-centered traditional classroom. Other children can succeed in any type of school.

There is nothing inherent in Montessori that causes children to have a hard time if they are transferred to traditional schools. Some will be bored. Others may not understand why everyone in the class has to do the same thing at the same time. But most adapt to their new setting fairly quickly, making new friends, and succeeding within the definition of success understood in their new school.

There will naturally be trade-offs if a Montessori child transfers to a traditional school. The curriculum in Montessori schools is often more enriched than that taught in other schools in the United States. The values and attitudes of the children and teachers may also be quite different. Learning will often be focused more on adult-assigned tasks done more by rote than with enthusiasm and understanding.

There is an old saying that if something is working, don't fix it. This leads many families to continue their children in Montessori at least through the sixth grade. As more Montessori High Schools are opened in the United States and abroad, it is likely that this trend will continue.

### ***Is Montessori Opposed to Competition?***

Montessori is not opposed to competition; Dr. Montessori simply observed that competition is an ineffective tool to motivate children to learn and to work hard in school.

Traditionally, schools challenge students to compete with one another for grades, class rankings, and special awards. For example, in many schools tests are graded on a curve and are measured against the performance of their classmates rather than considered for their individual progress.

In Montessori schools, students learn to collaborate with each other rather than mindlessly compete. Students discover their own innate abilities and develop a strong sense of independence, self-confidence, and self-discipline. In an atmosphere in which children learn at their own pace and compete only against themselves, they learn not to be afraid of making mistakes. They quickly find that few things in life come easily, and they can try again without fear of

embarrassment. Dr. Montessori argued that for an education to touch children's hearts and minds profoundly, students must be learning because they are curious and interested, not simply to earn the highest grade in the class.

Montessori children compete with each other every day, both in class and on the playground. Dr. Montessori, herself an extraordinary student and a very high achiever, was never opposed to competition on principle. Her objection was to using competition to create an artificial motivation to get students to achieve.

Montessori schools allow competition to evolve naturally among children, without adult interference unless the children begin to show poor sportsmanship. The key is the child's voluntary decision to compete rather than having it imposed on him by the school.

### *Is It True that Montessori Children Never Play?*

All children play! They explore new things playfully. They watch something of interest with a fresh open mind. They enjoy the company of treasured adults and other children. They make up stories. They dream. They imagine. This impression stems from parents who don't know what to make of the incredible concentration, order, and self-discipline that we commonly see among Montessori children.

Montessori students also tend to take the things they do in school quite seriously. It is common for them to respond, "This is my work," when adults ask what they are doing. They work hard and expect their parents to treat them and their work with respect. But it is joyful, playful, and anything but drudgery.

### *Is Montessori Opposed to Fantasy and Creativity?*

Fantasy and creativity are important aspects of a Montessori child's experience. Montessori classrooms incorporate art, music, dance, and creative drama throughout the curriculum. Imagination plays a central role, as children explore how the natural world works, visualize other cultures and ancient civilizations, and search for creative solutions to real-life problems. In Montessori schools, the Arts are normally integrated into the rest of the curriculum.

### *What's the Big Deal about Freedom And Independence in Montessori?*

Children touch and manipulate everything in their environment. In a sense, the human mind is handmade, because through movement and touch, the child explores, manipulates, and builds a storehouse of impressions about the physical world around her. Children learn best by doing, and this requires movement and spontaneous investigation.

Montessori children are free to move about, working alone or with others at will. They may select any activity and work with it as long as they wish, so long as they do not disturb anyone or damage anything, and as long as they put it back where it belongs when they are finished.

Many exercises, especially at the early childhood level, are designed to draw children's attention to the sensory properties of objects within their environment: size, shape, color, texture, weight, smell, sound, etc. Gradually, they learn to pay attention, seeing more clearly small details in the things around them. They have begun to observe and appreciate their environment. This is a key in helping children discover how to learn.



Freedom is a second critical issue as children begin to explore. Our goal is less to teach them facts and concepts, but rather to help them to fall in love with the process of focusing their complete attention on something and mastering its challenge with enthusiasm. Work assigned by adults rarely results in such enthusiasm and interest as does work that children freely choose for themselves.

The prepared environment of the Montessori class is a learning laboratory in which children are allowed to explore, discover, and select their own work. The independence that the children gain is not only empowering on a social and emotional basis, but it is also intrinsically involved with helping them become comfortable and confident in their ability to master the environment, ask questions, puzzle out the answer, and learn without needing to be “spoon-fed” by an adult.

### ***What if a Child Doesn't Feel Like Working?***

While Montessori students are allowed considerable latitude to pursue topics that interest them, this freedom is not absolute. Within every society there are cultural norms; expectations for what a student should know and be able to do by a certain age.

Experienced Montessori teachers are conscious of these standards and provide as much structure and support as is necessary to ensure that students live up to them. If for some reason it appears that a child needs time and support until he or she is developmentally ready, Montessori teachers provide it non-judgmentally.

### ***What about Children with Special Needs?***

Every child has areas of special gifts, a unique learning style, and some areas that can be considered special challenges. Each child is unique. Montessori is designed to allow for differences. It allows students to learn at their own pace and is quite flexible in adapting for different learning styles.

In many cases, children with mild physical handicaps or learning disabilities may do very well in a Montessori classroom setting. On the other hand, some children do much better in a smaller, more structured classroom.

Each situation has to be evaluated individually to ensure that the program can successfully meet a given child's needs and learning style.

### ***Wasn't Montessori's Method First Developed for Children with Severe Developmental Delays?***

The Montessori approach evolved over many years as the result of Dr. Montessori's work with different populations and age groups. One of the earliest groups with which she worked was a population of children who had been placed in a residential-care setting because of severe developmental delays.

The Method is used today with a wide range of children, but it is most commonly found in settings designed for normal populations.

### ***Is Montessori Effective With the Very Highly Gifted Child?***

Yes, in general, children who are highly gifted will find Montessori to be both intellectually challenging and flexible enough to respond to them as a unique individuals.

### ***Is Montessori Elitist?***

No. Montessori is an educational philosophy and approach that can be found in all sorts of settings, from the most humble to large, well-equipped campuses. In general, Montessori schools consciously strive to create and maintain a diverse student body, welcoming families of every ethnic background and religion, and using scholarships and financial aid to keep their school accessible to deserving families. Montessori is also found in the public sector as magnet public school programs, Head Start centers, and as charter schools.

### ***Does Montessori Teach Religion?***

Except for those schools that are associated with a particular religious community, Montessori does not teach religion. Many Montessori schools celebrate holidays, such as Christmas, Hannukah, and Chinese New Year, which are religious in origin, but which can be experienced on a cultural level as special days of family feasting, merriment, and wonder.

The young child rarely catches more than a glimmer of the religious meaning behind the celebration. Our goal is to focus on how children would normally experience each festival within their culture: the special foods, songs, dances, games, stories, presents — a potpourri of experiences aimed at all the senses of a young child.

On the other hand, one of our fundamental aims is the inspiration of the child's heart. While Montessori does not teach religion, we do present the great moral and spiritual themes, such as love, kindness, joy, and confidence in the fundamental goodness of life in simple ways that encourage the child to begin the journey toward being fully alive and fully human. Everything is intended to nurture within the child a sense of joy and appreciation of life.



# Finding the Right School

*"Why is there so much variation from one Montessori school to another? How can I know if I've found a 'real' Montessori school?"*

Although most schools try to remain faithful to their understanding of Dr. Montessori's insights and research, they have all been influenced by the evolution of our culture and technology. Remember, despite the impression many parents hold, the name *Montessori* refers to a method and philosophy, and it is neither a name protected by copyright nor a central licensing or franchising program.

In many parts of the world, anyone could, in theory, open a school and call it *Montessori* with no knowledge of how an authentic program is organized or run. When this happens, it is both disturbing and embarrassing for those of us who know the difference. Many of these schools fail but often not before they harm the public's perception of the integrity and effectiveness of Montessori as a whole.

Often, one sign of a school's commitment to professional excellence is their membership in one of the professional Montessori societies, such as the Association Montessori Internationale or the American Montessori Society. They, along with several other Montessori organizations, such as the International Montessori Council, also offer schools the opportunity to become accredited as well.

There are many other smaller Montessori organizations as well, but the key is to remember that there is no requirement that a Montessori school be affiliated or accredited by any outside organization. Quite a few Montessori schools choose to remain independent.

## *What should we look for when we visit Montessori schools?*

### The Montessori Learning Environment

- ▲ Montessori classrooms should be bright, warm, and inviting, filled with plants, animals, art, music, and books. Interest centers will be filled with intriguing learning materials, mathematical models, maps, charts, international and historical artifacts, a class library, an art area, a small natural-science museum, and animals that the children are raising. In an elementary class, you will also normally find computers and scientific apparatus.
- ▲ You should not find rows of desks in a Montessori classroom. There will not be a teacher's desk and chalk board in the front of the room. The environment will be set up to facilitate student discussion and stimulate collaborative learning.

- ▲ Montessori classrooms will be organized into several curriculum areas, usually including: language arts (reading, literature, grammar, creative writing, spelling, and handwriting); mathematics and geometry; everyday living skills; sensory-awareness exercises and puzzles; geography, history, science, art, music, and movement. Most rooms will include a classroom library. Each area will be made up of one or more shelf units, cabinets, and display tables with a wide variety of materials on open display, ready for use as the children select them.
- ▲ Students will typically be found scattered around the classroom, working alone or with one or two others.
- ▲ Teachers will normally be found working with one or two children at a time, advising, presenting a new lesson, or quietly observing the class at work.



# Resources

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## Montessori Organizations In North America

### The United States

#### Association Montessori Internationale – USA (AMI-USA)

410 Alexander St.  
Rochester, NY, 14607  
Phone: 585-461-5920  
Fax: 585-461-0075  
Website: <http://www.montessori-ami.org>  
Email: [info@montessori-ami.org](mailto:info@montessori-ami.org)

#### American Montessori Society (AMS)

281 Park Ave.. S. 6th Floor  
New York, NY 10010-6102  
Phone: 212-358-1250  
Fax: 212-358-1256  
Website: <http://www.amshq.org>

#### International Montessori Council (IMC) & International Montessori Council School Accreditation Committee

1001 Bern Creek Loop  
Sarasota, FL 34240  
Phone: 941-379-6626/800-655-5843  
Fax: 941-379-6671  
Website: <http://www.Montessori.org>  
Email: [timseldin@montessori.org](mailto:timseldin@montessori.org)

#### International Association of Progressive Montessorians (IAPM)

500 Vista del Robles  
Arroyo Grande, CA 93420  
Phone: 805-473-2641

#### International Montessori Society (IMS) & Accreditation Council (IMAC)

912 Thayer Ave.. #207  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Phone: 301-589-1127  
Web: <http://trust.wdncom/ims/index.htm>  
Email: [havis@erols.com](mailto:havis@erols.com)

#### Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE)

c/o Gretchen Warner, Ph. D.  
University of Wisconsin-Parkside  
Tallent Hall, Room 236  
900 Wood Road, Box 2000  
Kenosha, WI 53141-2000,  
Phone: 888-446-2283/262-595-3335  
Fax: 262-595-3332  
Website: <http://www.macte.org>  
Email: [warner@MACTE.org](mailto:warner@MACTE.org)

Montessori Institute of America (MIA)  
3410 S. 272nd, Kent, WA 98032  
Phone: 1-888-564-9556  
Web:<http://www.montessoriconnections.com/MIA>

Montessori Education Programs International (MEPI)  
PO Box 2199, Gray, GA 31032  
Phone: 478-986-2768  
Website: <http://www.mepiforum.org>  
Email: [mepi@alltel.net](mailto:mepi@alltel.net)

Montessori School Accreditation Commission (MSAC)  
4043 Pepperwood Court, Suite 1010  
Sonoma, CA 95476  
Phone: 707-935-8499  
Fax: 707-996-7901  
Website: <http://www.montessori-msac.org>  
Email: [montessorimsac@aol.com](mailto:montessorimsac@aol.com)

Montessori World Educational Institute (MWEI)  
1700 Bernick Dr., Cambria, CA 93428  
Phone: 805-927-3240  
Fax: 805-927-2242  
Email: [mwei@tcsn.net](mailto:mwei@tcsn.net)

North American Montessori Teachers Association (NAMTA)  
13693 Butternut Road  
Burton, OH 44021  
Phone: 440-834-4011  
Fax: 440-834-4016  
Website: <http://www.montessori-namta.org>  
Email: [staff@montessori-namta.org](mailto:staff@montessori-namta.org)

National Center for Montessori Education (NCME)  
4043 Pepperwood Ct., Suite 1012  
Sonoma, CA 95476  
Phone: 707-938-3818  
Fax: 707-996-7901.  
Website: <http://www.montessori-ncme.org>  
Email: [montessorineme@aol.com](mailto:montessorineme@aol.com)

Pan American Montessori Society  
105 Plantation Circle  
Kathleen, GA 31047  
Phone: 912-987-8866  
Email: [montessori@worldnet.att.net](mailto:montessori@worldnet.att.net)

### Canada

Canadian Association of Montessori Teachers  
P.O. Box 27567, Yorkdale Postal Outlet  
R. P. O. Toronto, Ontario M6A 3B8  
Canada  
Website: <http://www.camt.org>  
Email: [amt@interlog.com](mailto:amt@interlog.com)

The Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators (CCMA)  
Box 54534  
Toronto, Ontario M5M 4N5  
Canada  
Phone: 416-789-1334/800-954-6300  
Fax: 416-789-7963  
Website: <http://www.ccma.ca/ccma>  
Email: [tgorrie@ccma.ca](mailto:tgorrie@ccma.ca)

Montessori Teachers Association of North America  
723 Hyland Street, Whitby  
Ontario L1N 6S1  
Canada  
Phone: 905-623-6722  
Email: [netti723@idirect.com](mailto:netti723@idirect.com)

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## Montessori Organizations Outside of North America

### Australia

Montessori Association of Australia  
Website: <http://www.montessori.edu.au>

**Note:** We have listed several Montessori organizations outside North America.. This is by no means a complete list. There are many Montessori societies throughout the world – too numerous to mention in our limited space. For an up-to-date list please check The Montessori Foundation's website:

[www.montessori.org](http://www.montessori.org)

## New Zealand

Montessori Association of  
New Zealand (MANZ)  
PO Box 2305, Stokes  
Nelson, New Zealand  
Phone: 03 544 3273  
Website: <http://www.montessori.org.nz>  
Email: [eo@montessori.org.nz](mailto:eo@montessori.org.nz)

## United Kingdom

AMI-UK  
c/o Maria Montessori Institute  
26 Lyndhurst Gardens  
London NW3 5NW, England  
Phone: 020 7435 3646  
Fax: 020 7431 8096  
Website: <http://www.mariamontessori.org>  
Email: [montessori@amiuk.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:montessori@amiuk.fsnet.co.uk)

Montessori Centre International (MCI)  
18 Balderton Street  
London W1K 6TG, England  
Phone: 44-20-7493 0165  
Fax: 44-20-7629 7808  
Website: <http://www.montessori.ac.uk>  
Email: [information@montessori.ac.uk](mailto:information@montessori.ac.uk)

Montessori Education UK  
Phone: 020 89464433  
Fax: 020 89446920  
London W1K 6TG, England  
Web: <http://www.montessorieducationuk.org>  
Email: [meuk@montessorieducationuk.org](mailto:meuk@montessorieducationuk.org)

Montessori St. Nicholas Charity  
24 Prince's Gate  
London SW7 1PT, England  
Phone: 44 (0) 20 7584 9987  
Fax: 44 (0) 20 7589 3764  
Website: <http://www.montessori.uk>  
Email: [centre@montessori.org.uk](mailto:centre@montessori.org.uk)

## Resource Centers (U.S.)

American Montessori Consulting  
(resources for teachers and home schoolers)  
P.O. Box 5062  
Rossmore, CA 90720  
Phone: 562-598-2321  
Website: <http://www.members.aol.com/moteaco>  
Email: [amonco@aol.com](mailto:amonco@aol.com)  
[AMCNEWS@aol.com](mailto:AMCNEWS@aol.com)

Centro de Informacion  
Montessori de las Americas  
(CIMLA ) Comité Hispano  
Montessori  
2127 35th Ave.  
Omaha, NE 68105-3131  
Phone: 402-345-8810  
Website: <http://www.leonfelipe.com/cimla/>

Christian Montessori  
Educators (CME)  
5837 Riggs  
Mission, KS 66202,  
Phone: 913 362-5262

Christian Montessori Fellowship  
22630 East Range  
San Antonio, TX 78255  
Phone: 210-698-1911

Montessori Development  
Partnerships  
11424 Bellflower Rd. NE  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
Phone: 216-421-1905

Montessori Public School Consortium  
(affiliated with NAMTA)  
11424 Bellflower Rd. NE  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
Phone: 216-421-1905  
Website: <http://www.montessori-namta.org>

The Montessori Foundation  
1001 Bern Creek Loop  
Sarasota, FL 34240  
Phone: 941-379-6626/800-655-5843  
Fax: 941-379-6671  
Website: <http://www.Montessori.org>  
Email: [timseldin@montessori.org](mailto:timseldin@montessori.org)

Montessori Resource Center  
320 Pioneer Way  
Mountain View, CA, 94041  
Phone: 415-335-1563  
Website: <http://www.nienhuis.com/MRC1.html>  
Email: [value@nienhuis-usa.com](mailto:value@nienhuis-usa.com)

Public School  
Montessorian Newspaper  
2933 N. 2nd St.  
Minneapolis, MN 55411  
Phone: 612-529-5001  
Fax: 612-521-2286  
Website: <http://www.jolapub.com/psmcurrent.htm>  
Email: [montessori@jolapub.com](mailto:montessori@jolapub.com)

## Manufactures and Suppliers of Montessori Classroom Materials

**Authors' Note:** There are scores of companies around the world that manufacture and sell Montessori materials, classroom furniture, art supplies, musical instruments, and many other products and services to Montessori schools, as well as homeschoolers. This is a list of some of the leading suppliers in the United States and Canada. Our apologies to any companies that have been inadvertently omitted. Contact information obviously changes over time. You can find a current directory of Montessori suppliers in the United States and Canada at <http://www.montessori.org>

Bruins Montessori International USA  
655 W. Illinois Ave., Ste. 606  
Dallas, TX 75224  
Phone: 214-941-4601/800-900-9012  
website: <http://bruinsmontessori.com>  
Email: [info@bruinsmontessori.com](mailto:info@bruinsmontessori.com)

Cabdev Montessori Materials  
3 Whitehorse Rd., Unit 6  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M3J 3G8  
Phone: 416-631-8339  
Website: <http://cabdevmontessori.com>  
Email: [info@cabdevmontessori.com](mailto:info@cabdevmontessori.com)

Hello Wood Products  
PO Box 307, Rickman, TN 38580  
Phone: 931-498-2432/800-598-2432  
Website: <http://hellowood.com>  
Email: [hellowood@twlakes.net](mailto:hellowood@twlakes.net)

Juliana Group  
7 Drayton St. #208, Savannah, GA 31401  
Phone: 912-236-3779/800-959-6159  
Fax: 912-236-8885  
Website: <http://www.julianagroup.com>  
Email: [juliana@julianagroup.com](mailto:juliana@julianagroup.com)

Kaybee Montessori  
7895 Cessna Av. #K  
Gaithersburg, MD 20879-4162  
Phone: 301-963-2101/800-732-9304  
Website: <http://www.montessori-namta.org/generalinfo/sources.html>

LORD Company  
103 Methodist St., Cecelia, KY 42724  
Phone: 207-862-4537  
Website: <http://www.lordequip.com>  
Email: [information@lordequip.com](mailto:information@lordequip.com)

**Materials Company of Boston**

PO Box 596  
Goffstown, NH 03045  
Phone/Fax: 603-641-1339  
Web: <http://www.TheMaterialsCompany.com>  
Email: [MaterialCo@aol.com](mailto:MaterialCo@aol.com)

**Nienhuis Montessori USA**

320 Pioneer Way  
Mountain View, CA 94041  
Phone: 650-964-2735/800-942-8697  
Website: <http://www.nienhuis-usa.com>  
Email: [value@nienhuis-usa.com](mailto:value@nienhuis-usa.com)

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**Suppliers of Supplementary  
Montessori Teaching Materials**

**Authors' Note:** These are some of the primary suppliers of supplemental teaching materials to Montessori schools. These include early phonetic readers, supplementary teaching materials for many areas of the curriculum, art and music materials, and all the things needed for Practical Life and cultural studies. Again, we offer our apologies to any companies that have been inadvertently omitted.

**Albanesi Educational Center**

1914 Walnut Plaza., Carrollton, TX 75006  
Phone: 972-478-7798  
Fax: 972-478-9998  
Web: <http://www.montessoriresources.com>  
Email: [montessoriresources.com](mailto:montessoriresources.com)

**Bivins Publishers/Montessori Associates**

PO Box 2319, Gray, GA 31032-2319  
Phone: 912-986-3992

**Catechesis of the Good**

**Shepherd Association**  
P.O. Box 1084, Oak Park, IL 60304  
Phone: 708-524-1210  
Fax: 708-386-8032  
Email: [cgsusa@jps.net](mailto:cgsusa@jps.net)

**College of Modern Montessori**

(Distance Learning)  
PO Box 119, Linbro Park, 2065  
South Africa  
Phone: 27 (0) 11 608-1584  
Fax: 27 (0) 11 608-1586  
Web: <http://www.montessoriint.com>  
Email: [modmont@global.co.za](mailto:modmont@global.co.za)

**Concepts To Go/KIR Associates**

PO Box 10043, Berkeley, CA 94709  
Phone: 510-848-3233/800-660-8646

**Conceptual Learning Materials**

2437 Bay Area Blvd. #57  
Houston, TX 77058  
Phone: 281-488-3252  
Fax: 281-480-1054  
Web: <http://www.conceptuallearning.com>  
Email: [dianneknesek@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dianneknesek@sbcglobal.net)

**Franklin Montessori Materials**

506 Franklin St., Fredricksburg, TX 78624  
Phone: 830-990-9550  
Email: [info@506franklin.com](mailto:info@506franklin.com)

**Great Extensions**

3745 S. Hudson, Tulsa, OK 74135-5604  
Phone: 918-622-2890  
Fax: 918-622-3203  
Email: [greatext@undercroft.org](mailto:greatext@undercroft.org)

**Houston Montessori Center Materials**

1331 Sherwood Forest Dr.  
Houston, TX 77043  
Phone: 713-464-5791  
Website: <http://www.houstonmontessoricenter.org>

**In-Print For Children**

12 E. Glenside Ave., Glenside, PA 19038  
Phone: 800-481-1981  
Email: [inprintcj@earthlink.net](mailto:inprintcj@earthlink.net)

**Insta-Learn**

(Spelling, Math, & Language Arts)  
Phone: 800-225-7837

**Lakeshore Learning Materials**

2695 E. Dominguez St.  
Carson, CA 90810  
Phone: 310-537-8600/800-421-5354  
Website: <http://www.lakeshorelearning.com>

**Learning Tree Toys**

7646 North Western, Oklahoma City, OK 73116  
Phone: 405-848-1415  
Fax: 405-848-0240  
Website: <http://www.learningtreetoys.com>

**Little Partners (Furniture)**

Phone: 800-704-9058  
Website: <http://www.littlepartners.com>  
Email: [mwdinfo@cox.net](mailto:mwdinfo@cox.net)

**Making Montessori Easy**

PO Box 201, Clawson, MI 48017  
Phone: 248-542-4159  
Website: <http://makingmontessorieasy.com>  
Email: [makemontessoriez@aol.com](mailto:makemontessoriez@aol.com)

**Mandala Classroom Resources**

1001 Green Bay Rd. #190  
Winnetka, IL 60093-1721  
Phone: 847-446-2812

**Memphis Montessori Inst. & Essentials**

3323 Windemere Ln., Memphis, TN 38125  
Phone: 901-748-2966

**Michael Olaf**

65 Ericson Ct. #1, Arcata, CA 95521  
Phone: 800-429-8877  
Fax: 707-826-2243  
Website: [www.michaelolaf.net](http://www.michaelolaf.net)  
Email: [michaelola@aol.com](mailto:michaelola@aol.com)

**Montessori Educational Computer  
Systems (Educational software)**

13008 Rover Av. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87112  
Phone: 505-294-7097/800-995-5133  
Website: <http://mecssoftware.com>

**Montessori Handmade**

PO Box 1182  
Manchester Center, VT 05255  
Phone: 800-426-3022/800-426-3022  
Fax: 802-362-5833

**Montessori Made Manageable**

PO Box 172205  
Hialeah, FL 33017  
Phone: 954-389-6167  
Website: <http://mmm-inc.com>

**Montessori Matters /E-Z Learning Materials**

701 E. Columbia Ave.  
Cincinnati, OH 45215  
Phone: 513-821-7448

**Montessori Printing**

2 Springhouse Square, Scarborough,  
Ontario, M1W 2X1, Canada  
Phone: 416-499-4568

**Montessori Research & Development**

16492 Foothill Blvd.  
San Leandro, CA 94578-2105  
Phone: 510-278-1115  
Website: <http://www.montessorird.com>

**Montessori Services**

11 West Bourham Ave.  
Santa Rosa, CA 95407  
Phone: 707-579-3003  
Website: <http://montessoriservices.com>  
Email: [infor@montessoriservices.com](mailto:infor@montessoriservices.com)

**My World Discoveries**

PO Box 12255, El Cajon, CA 92022  
 Phone: 619-588-7015/800-631-0761  
 Fax: 619-466-0093  
 Website: <http://myworlddiscoveries.com>  
 Email: [mwdinfo@cox.net](mailto:mwdinfo@cox.net)

**North American Montessori Center**

(Distance Learning and Manuals)  
 13469 27th Ave.  
 Surrey, BC V4P 1Z1, Canada  
 Phone: (Toll Free) 877-531-6665  
 Fax: 619-466-0093  
 Website: <http://www.montessoritraining.net>

**Paper Cuts Montessori Materials**

8371 Garden Gate Place  
 Boca Raton, FL 33433  
 Phone: 561-883-2959

**Parent-Child Press**

PO Box 675, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648  
 Phone: 814-696-7510  
 Website: <http://www.parentchildpress.com>  
 Email: [infor@parentchildpress.com](mailto:infor@parentchildpress.com)

**Peg Hoenack's Musicworks**

2815 W. Burbank Blvd., Burbank, CA 91505  
 Phone: 818-842-6300  
 Fax: 818-846-3757

**Priority Montessori Materials**

3920 P Rd., Paonia, CO 81428  
 Phone: 888-267-9289  
 Fax: 970-527-7590  
 Website: <http://www.prioritymontessori.com>

**Shiller Math**

Phone: 888-556-6284  
 Fax: 619-466-0093  
 Website: <http://shillermath.com>

**Spring Valley Montessori  
Teacher Education Materials**

36605 Pacific Hwy. S.  
 Federal Way, WA 98003  
 Phone: 253-927-2557

**United Montessori  
Association Independent  
(Distance Learning)**

15050 Washington Ave..  
 Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-1112  
 Phone: 866-UMA-1988 /  
 Fax: (425) 952-9415  
 Website: <http://www.unitedmontessori.com>  
 Email: [contact@unitedmontessori.com](mailto:contact@unitedmontessori.com)

**A Handful of the Best  
Montessori Websites:**

**The Montessori Foundation;  
The International Montessori Council;  
and Montessori Online**  
<http://www.montessori.org>

This website offers an extensive library of resources on Montessori education aimed at everyone from parents, educators, and the educational leaders of large and small Montessori schools. It includes: a directory of Montessori schools around the world; information on teacher education programs; The Montessori Foundation's Publication Center's information on subscribing to *Tomorrow's Child*; The International Montessori Council and its school accreditation program; courses offered through The Montessori Leadership Institute; and conferences sponsored by The Montessori Foundation.

**Montessori Connections:**  
<http://www.montessoriconnections.com>

This is a large and comprehensive commercially sponsored website offering a wide array of information and resources, including: an online shopping mall; an international directory of Montessori schools; teacher education centers; and Montessori organizations.

**American Montessori Consulting:**  
<http://home.earthlink.net/~amontessoric/index.html>

This organization offers a wide range of resources for homeschoolers. It also provides an on-line magazine and hosts on-line discussion groups.

**The International Montessori Index:**  
<http://www.montessori.edu>

This is a site set up by Susan Stephenson, one of the founders of Michael Olaf Company and a well-known Montessori educator. Primarily oriented to the AMI perspective, it provides some excellent articles and resources.

**Michael Olaf Montessori**  
<http://www.michaelolaf.net>

This is a sister website to Susan Stephenson's International Montessori Index. It includes the text from both of Michael Olaf Montessori's excellent publications: *The Joyful Child* and *Child of*

*the World*. The articles are of great interest to parents. The Michael Olaf Company offers a wonderful array of educational toys, games, books and learning materials.

**The Mammolina Project:**  
<http://www.mammolina.org>

This project gathers a wide range of articles and resources from the international Montessori community.

**Montessori for the Earth:**  
<http://www.montessorifortheearth.com>

This website offers online resources for parents and homeschoolers, college students, and teachers who want to learn about Montessori education in order to incorporate it into their home, classroom, or college studies.

**Montessori Great Lessons Page**  
<http://www.missbarbara.net/montesso.html>

This site was developed by a public Montessori elementary school teacher to help other elementary Montessori teachers support their students in using the Internet to follow up on the Great Lessons.\*

**Montessori Teachers Collective**  
<http://www.moteaco.com/>

This site was developed by an elementary Montessori teacher to provide a wide range of valuable resources and programs that are useful for teachers and others interested in Montessori curriculum.

**North American Montessori  
Teachers' Association**  
<http://www.montessori-namta.org>

This site is aimed primarily at AMI-certified teachers. It provides information about NAMTA conferences and describes their programs and publications.

**Shu-Chen Jenny Yen's On-Line Montessori**  
[http://www.ux1.eiu.edu/~cfsjy/mts/\\_link.htm](http://www.ux1.eiu.edu/~cfsjy/mts/_link.htm)

This site provides Montessori teacher albums for teachers of three-to-six year-old children.

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# Notes:

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**Tim Seldin** is the President of The Montessori Foundation and Chair of The International Montessori Council. His more than thirty years of experience in Montessori education includes twenty-two years as Headmaster of the Barrie School in Silver Spring, Maryland, his own alma mater (age two through high school graduation). He has also served as the Director of the Institute for Advanced Montessori Studies and as Head of the New Gate School in Sarasota, Florida. Tim Seldin is the author of several books on Montessori education, including: *Finding the Perfect Match – Recruit and Retain Your Ideal Enrollment*; *Master Teachers/ Model Programs*; *Starting a New Montessori School*; *Building a World-Class Montessori School* (co-authored by Jonathan Wolff); *Celebrations of Life* (co-authored by Musya Meyer); and *The World in the Palm of Her Hand* (co-authored by Donna Seldin Danner).

Tim is the parent of three children (Marc, Michelle, and Caitlin), stepfather to Chelsea and Robin, and the grandfather of Hollis. He lives on a small ranch in Sarasota, Florida with his wife, Joyce St. Giermaine, their seven horses, dogs (too many to count), and two Norwegian Forest cats.



*Tim Seldin*

## The Authors

**Paul Epstein, Ph.D.** has been active in the field of Montessori education since 1974 as an administrator, teacher, teacher educator, researcher and author. A graduate of Dartmouth College, Paul earned his doctorate in cultural anthropology from SUNY Buffalo. He is currently the Head of School at Chiaravalle Montessori School in Evanston, Illinois

Paul is a Montessori teacher educator and was a director of Montessori teacher education for early childhood and secondary level one programs. As a classroom teacher, he taught in Montessori early childhood, middle and high school programs. In addition, Paul was an associate professor at Transylvania University and is currently an adjunct professor at Northwestern University. He holds Montessori teacher certification in early childhood and secondary levels one and two from the American Montessori Society.

Paul presents a research based observation program titled, “Observing Children Well, Practicing the Arts of Reflective Teaching.” This program draws upon his background and doctorate in Cultural Anthropology. He is also a frequent presenter at Montessori conferences and author of articles appearing in Montessori journals.

Paul’s immediate family includes his wife Ann, author of this book’s chapter addressing children with exceptionalities. Ann, currently a visiting assistant professor at Roosevelt University, earned her doctorate in early childhood special education. She is also a Montessori teacher educator. They have two children.



*Paul Epstein, Ph.D*

*The Montessori Way* provides a clear and comprehensive introduction to the philosophy and educational approach that is practiced in Montessori schools, large and small, around the world.

*The Montessori Way* gives the reader an in-depth look at the Montessori approach, from infant-toddler education through high school. It will be of special interest to parents considering Montessori for the first time, as well as those whose children have attended Montessori schools, college educators, and anyone who is looking for a good, solid, easy-to-understand explanation of Montessori education.



*"The Montessori Way* gives the reader an in-depth look at the Montessori education from infancy through high school, from principles to practice. It will be useful to current and prospective Montessori parents and teachers. It is written in a very accessible style, intentionally demystifies jargon, and openly acknowledges the contributions of individuals and schools representing AMI, AMS, and other Montessori organizations. It seeks the common ground we all share. Congratulations for writing a book of such scope and aspiration."

— John Long, Headmaster  
Post Oak School, Bellaire, Texas

*"The Montessori Way* is unique in its comprehensive wealth of information on a Montessori education, from the early years through high school. This is a must-read for educators, parents, and all those interested in positive educational outcomes for our children."

—Eileen Roper Ast, Executive Director  
American Montessori Society, New York, New York

"This book is an outstanding portrait of the breadth and depth of Montessori curriculum and philosophy from infancy to the secondary school years. By enabling parents to deepen their understanding of Montessori, it will assist families in bringing the gift of Montessori into their homes and in strengthening their commitment to authentic Montessori practice in their schools."

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—Jonathan Wolff, Director  
Learning for Life  
Montessori Teacher Educator,  
Author, and Consultant

*"The Montessori Way* does a brilliant job of translating Dr. Montessori's deep insights into 21st century terms for parents, teachers and educators of all kinds. It is comprehensive in its scope, written in very clear, accessible language, with beautiful illustrations and photos. Anyone unfamiliar with Montessori should be able to come away from reading this book with a clear picture of what the Montessori Way is about and how it works."

— Marsha Familaro Enright, Head  
Council Oak Montessori School,  
Chicago, Illinois

