



Metro East Montessori School

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THE MONTESSORI APPROACH TO EDUCATION

As a Montessori School, we adhere to the educational objective and philosophy developed by Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952), an Italian physician and natural scientist whose discoveries about how children learn revolutionized teaching concepts throughout the world in the first part of this century. Dr. Montessori realized that no human being is ever educated by another person, and felt that the goal of education should not be to fill the child with facts from a pre-selected course of studies; but rather to cultivate his own natural desire to learn.

The Montessori classroom approaches this objective in two ways:

- 1) Each child is allowed to experience the excitement of learning by his own choice rather than by being forced.
- 2) He is assisted in perfecting his natural tools for learning so that his abilities will be at a maximum in all future learning situations.

Children want to master physical, emotional, and cognitive skills. Unless severely impaired, children naturally have the same drive to develop in a cognitive sense as they do in a physical sense. The desire of a four-year-old to read or a ten-year-old to master cube root can be just as strong as the desire of an infant to attain a sitting position, unless the desire has been diminished by some circumstances in the child's life.

The child is a whole being – the physical, emotional, and cognitive parts are interrelated. Each Montessori environment is designed to meet the needs of the child in all these areas. In her writing, Dr. Montessori frequently compared the mind of the young child to a sponge, feeling that "the most important period of life is not the age of university studies, but the first one, the period from birth to six." At this age, children are forming their greatest implement—their intelligence. The child does this through actively exploring—handling, touching, tasting, and smelling the world around him—sorting out his impressions, and ordering his experiences. The activities in a Montessori classroom invite the child to explore, thus reinforcing his impressions by using his hands for learning. Children in the Montessori classroom are peaceful and happy because they are active and learning. All aspects of his personality (physical, emotional, and cognitive) are integrated.

The life of the child is a developmental continuum. Each stage has its base in the preceding one and in turn prepares for the next. This natural continuity is maintained in the Montessori school setting: normal groupings in a Montessori school might include children from eighteen months to three years, three to six years, six to nine years and nine to twelve years. Metro East Montessori School currently has two classrooms for children two and a half to six years of age, one classroom for children six to nine years of age, and one classroom nine to twelve years of age.

Children before the age of six are very different from children after this age. These differences are reflected in the environments prepared for this age group. The Primary (2½ -6) classrooms at Metro East Montessori School are indeed a child's world, geared to the size, pace, and interests of young children. Low shelves, tables, and chairs provide a flexible arrangement for many activities. The Montessori materials in each classroom can be divided into five main groups: the Practical Life exercises, which are the beginning activities for the two, three, and four year old child, assist him in coordinating his body and improving his work habits by increasing his attention span, concentration, independence, and self-confidence; the Sensorial materials help the child refine his perceptions, sharpen his senses of sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing, and hone his ability to compare, contrast, and make judgments; the Math materials aid the young child's understanding of the number system as he playfully shares, combines, counts, and compares concrete representations of quantities; the Language lessons lead a child to reading and writing through games and manipulative materials; and Cultural materials introduce him to the world outside his classroom, involving the young child in subjects such as biology, geography, geology, history, art, and music in a sensorial way. Attractive educational materials beckon to the child in the classroom and invite him to explore the basic information demonstrated by each scientifically designed activity. Over seventy years of experience has proved that children can learn to read, write, and calculate in the same natural way that they learn to walk and talk. They do this at their own periods of interest and readiness.

An important factor in establishing a community feeling in the classrooms is to have a three-year age span. Since each child proceeds at his own pace each is better able to enjoy his own accomplishments rather than comparing himself with others in the class. This attitude frees the children to like each other and to be cooperative. Mixing age groups also means that younger children can learn through observation of older children and through being taught by the older children. The older ones in turn reinforce and clarify their knowledge when they teach younger ones.

The grade school age child (6-12) has different needs and again these are met in the prepared Montessori elementary environment. Here too, age groupings are flexible and young children work along side older children, each at their own level. The ideal Montessori school would have interconnecting classes where younger children could go into the next older class and vice-versa as their needs direct them—the transition between the two stages is generally very gradual and occurs at different times for different children. The appropriate group for a child is determined by the characteristics being exhibited by the child at the time as these are more important indications than age or time of year of which group a child will feel most comfortable and work best in.

Grades (or "marks") as known in traditional education are not part of the Montessori elementary classroom. Children following their own interests and working independently achieve their greatest reward from their own feelings of satisfaction. But the children's work is monitored carefully and Standardized Tests are offered starting in the 3rd year of elementary. Lengthy progress reports are given to parents outlining each child's work in the various areas of language, math, science, social studies, geography, biology, history, art, music, and Spanish.

Montessori is interested in aiding mental growth and helping each child fulfill his potential. By allowing the children to work together, each at his own pace, to choose their activities, and to follow their own unique timetables for development, the Montessori elementary classroom creates an atmosphere of joyful enthusiasm for learning and affection for hard work.

The Montessori school is a miniature society in which children live and learn to work cooperatively. The school is set up in such a way as to facilitate this kind of growth. The basic ground rules for behavior in each class are based on the respect for each individual's rights and the children become responsible for their own behavior and grow in social awareness. The aim of a Montessori school like ours is to create a situation in which children will like others, respect the rights of others, feel a responsibility to others, and respect their own individuality. Hopefully, this will prepare children for full responsible participation in society.