

An Introduction to Montessori & Glossary of Terms

A Montessori school utilizes mixed-age classrooms which allows students to progress at their own pace. The Montessori classroom is intensively “process” oriented and therefore students will not bring home a lot “product” from school.

Your child may discover things through experience before the teacher applies a name to the discovery. For example, he might tell you he was “playing with beads all day” (working with the Golden Beads) may not realize that the work he is doing is preparing him for learning addition.

Areas of Learning

In a Montessori curriculum there are six areas of learning: Language Arts, Mathematics, Practical Life, Science, Sensorial, and Social Studies.

Language Arts

Writing

Control of the hand in preparation for writing is developed through many exercises, including specially designed tasks in the use of the pencil. Such exercises begin with young children and extend over several years so that mastery is gradually, but thoroughly, attained.

Reading and Spelling

Children begin to spell using the moveable alphabet to sound out and spell words as they are first learning to read. The sequence of spelling, as with all language skills, begins at an earlier age than in a traditional education setting, during a time when children are spontaneously interested in language. It continues throughout their education.

Grammar

The study of grammar begins almost immediately after the child begins to read. It continues over several years until mastered. The idea is to introduce grammar to the young child as she is first learning to put thoughts onto paper.

Mathematics

Numeration

The first introduction to numeration—numbers zero to ten, numbers shown as length, sandpaper numerals, counting, sight recognition, and the concept of odd and even.

Decimal System

The presentation of the decimal system is through specially prepared materials that represent the decimal hierarchy in concrete three dimensional form. The children learn to first recognize the quantities, then to form numbers with bead or cube materials through 9,999, to read and write numerals up to 9,999, and to exchange equivalent quantities of units for tens, tens for hundreds, etc.

Mathematical Operations

Abstract understanding of addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division is accomplished through the use of the Stamp Game. The Stamp Game is a manipulative system that represents the decimal system as color-keyed “stamps”.

Practical Life

One of the first goals of the school is to develop a strong and realistic sense of independence and self-reliance. This area of the curriculum focuses on development skills that allow the child to effectively control and deal with the social and physical environment in which he or she lives. Practical life begins as soon as the young child enters the school and continues throughout the curriculum to increasingly advanced tasks appropriate to the oldest students.

Science

Early scientific exploration of science begins with the differentiation between living and non-living things and the differentiation between plants and animals. Later the child is introduced to the families of the animal kingdom, including the identification and classification of animals. Ecology is studied to learn about the food chain, camouflage, and predator/prey relationships. Advanced studies include the examination of the internal parts of vertebrates, health and nutrition, physical sciences, and the development of scientific inquiry skills.

Sensorial

These are exercises in perception, observation, fine discrimination, and classification that play a major role in helping children develop their sense of logic and concentration. Skills developed include the discrimination of volume, multiple dimensions, color tones, and the intensity and nature of sounds.

Social Studies

Geography

Geography is presented at a young age through specially made maps in the forms of intricate, color-coded, wooden jigsaw puzzles representing the continents, countries, and the states of the U.S. They are first enjoyed simply as challenging puzzles. Soon, however, the children begin to learn the names of given countries and gain a familiarity with the continents of the globes, the nations of North America, South America, and Europe, along with most of the states of the U.S. Advanced studies include land and water formations, the Earth and its parts, and the hydrosphere.

History

The study of the development of the planet and its life forms over the eons is first studied at about age 6, along with an overview of human history. This is repeated throughout the curriculum in increasing depth of study. Each year the child continues to study and analyze the needs, culture, technology, and social history of various periods in history. The trends of human achievement are charted, such as the development of transportation, architecture, great inventions, and great leaders.

Montessori Glossary of Terms

Guide: the lead teacher in a Montessori classroom.

Normalization: a developmental process marked by a love of work or activity, concentration, self-discipline, and joy in accomplishment.

Pincer Grip: refers to the thumb-and-forefinger motion that's involved for manipulating small items.

Planes of Development: four distinct periods of growth, development, and learning that build on each other as children progress through them (0-6, 6-12, 12-18, and 18-24).

Practical Life: classroom area prepared for activities that are designed to teach care of self and of the environment. These activities form the basis of later abstract learning.

Prepared Environment: refers to a well-thought-out environment, classroom, or home designed with the child in mind. The goal of the prepared environment is to foster independence in the child.

Sensitive Period: a critical time when the child is biologically ready and receptive to acquiring a specific skill or activity.

Three-Period Lesson: a three-step technique for presenting information to the child (introduction or naming, association or recognition, and recall).

Work: a purposeful activity of the child's own choosing.