

PRIMARY MONTESSORI

Ages 3 – 6 years

A primary environment is prepared to meet specific developmental needs of the young child. The teacher acts as a guide using her continuous observations of the young child's activity to help them construct themselves. The teacher is the link, which connects the child to their environment. The activities begun in the primary class are repeated on higher and broader levels as the child moves through elementary and secondary school.

PRACTICAL LIFE

The Practical Life Curriculum Area in a Montessori classroom defines the education for the skills required in everyday life. The reason Maria Montessori introduced this curriculum area in the education of young children was that her method aimed at preparing children for life rather than school. Thus she considered it very important to assist development in young children according to their respective stage (physiological and mental) as they come through what she referred to as sensitive periods. According to the Montessori Method the activities in the Practical Life Area should be real activities, which meet the needs of the child in the respective stage of his growth, normalize him, and lead him to independence from the adult. The basic components of this curriculum area are the following: Care of the Self, Care of the Environment, Discipline and Deportment, Grace and Courtesy. As they are meant to normalize the child for a Montessori environment, as well as for life at large, these exercises and activities should be introduced to the child in the beginning, as soon as he comes in a Montessori classroom. In the child's natural effort towards independence and success the Practical Life Curriculum Area has four directed aims:

- ORDER in time and space (meets the need of the child in the sensitive period between 2-4 years of age);
- CONCENTRATION (helps the child to be focused on a purposeful activity);
- COORDINATION (refers to a coordinated large and small muscle movement as well as hand-eye coordination that reflect the respective development of child's mental life);
- INDEPENDENCE ("The essence of independence is to be able to do something for one's self." Maria Montessori - The Absorbent Mind, ch.14, Intelligence and the Hand).

In a Montessori classroom and school (Children's House) the child moves about in an environment made upon his size, yet all things being real and not make-believe. Materials in this area should be attractive, child-size and breakable (glass, porcelain, pottery, etc.) Among practical basic skills like spooning, pouring, cutting, folding, the Practical Life activities develop a sense for social relations, grace and courtesy.

SENSORIAL

Works in this area allow the child to manipulate and classify objects in the environment. All five senses are utilized as the child learns to make finer distinction in quality and gradation. Blindfolding or closing the eyes games help to form mental images on concrete objects, paving the way to abstract thinking. The sensorial materials assists the child in learning to differentiate between sizes, colors, weights, forms, textures, musical sounds, odors and tastes. They help the child organize, classify and give a language to the sensory experiences they have received since birth.

LANGUAGE

The Montessori Method of instruction begins at age two and a half with vocabulary enrichment. A phonetic approach to reading is incorporated with a sight-sound-touch presentation of the alphabet. The Montessori Method enables through specially designed materials for the Language Area, a motor memory along with a visual memory of the letters of the alphabet. Sensations, perceptions and speech are established in this area. Sensations of sight and touch associated with the sounds of the alphabet, the

associations between sound and symbol and pronunciation of the alphabet. Basic reading and writing are emphasized at this level.

In the Montessori areas of Practical Life and Sensorial, the child is introduced to premath concepts such as temporal relations, spatial relations, and one-to-one correspondence. A child's perception is enhanced by asking him to match, order, contrast, and compare. Premath concepts of one-to-one correspondence, class inclusion, seriation, and equivalence are fostered in all of the sensorial apparatus. These areas prepare the child to work in the math area.

MATHEMATICS

The Montessori Materials were designed to allow the child to explore a concept in the concrete form. The sequence of presentation begins with simple to more complex and from concrete to abstract. Children will progress through concepts at their own developmental rate. The materials themselves contain the pattern for presentation as well as understanding. The primary level child is a "fact-seeker". Consequently, this is the time for the foundation of memorization of math facts. Tables are memorized with joy and enthusiasm. The sequence for presentation and learning is:

1. Concrete before Abstract through repeated sensorial impressions of geometry
2. Relationship of Quantity
3. Symbol Recognition
4. Quantity and Symbol Association

The layout for presentation of math materials - left to right and top to bottom (reading presentation) except when working with place value which is right to left as in computations/operations.

CULTURAL (GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, AND SCIENCE)

The child in the Montessori classroom has already been prepared to absorb the enrichment provided in the Cultural Area. Practical Life activities have helped the child develop a respect for objects and their maker and have provided a foundation of experiences for future use in working with cultural materials. The Sensorial Area has helped him develop the awareness of shape, color, texture and other properties of the physical world. Language has given the child the means of expressing his emotions and knowledge. Math has begun a foundation of logic and reasoning. All these will help him to acquire the kind of behavior that enables participation in social groups, understanding of diversity, respect and tolerance for those who are different.

This was called by Maria Montessori, "cosmic education", and it is aimed to bring about in a Montessori classroom a variety of materials in botany, zoology, geography, history, art, music along with the respect for different cultures and peoples. The lessons provide the children with a store of factual information and impressions of various cultures, land formations, eco-systems, and the interrelationship of all parts of the earth. Environmental education forms part of the learning experiences both indoors and out.

The children in the Montessori prepared environment have opportunities to become insightful, perceptive, sensitive and most important thoughtful. These characteristics are cultivated to prepare the child for study of the cosmic world. When the children experience the cultural activities in the prepared environment, they do not find it mysterious or confusing but rather logic, real and part of the real world. The sequence of the materials in this area begins with presenting the real thing (wherever this is possible) before moving to representations (photographs, pictures, drawings) and abstractions. The child will continue with these activities as learning parts and functions, classifying and definitions. It is important to note that the cultural subjects have a two-fold purpose.

- To arouse the child's interest and give him the possibility to explore and experience;
- To help him in his mental classification and systemizing of reality.