

## The Montessori Developmental Curriculum

**“My vision for the future is no longer people taking exams and proceeding to then on that 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”)**

Montessori education is a flow experience; it builds on the continuing self-construction of the child – daily, weekly, yearly – for the duration of the program. It is an uninterrupted series of learning passages, a continuum based on Maria Montessori’s theory of the Four Planes of Development. In Montessori’s metaphorical language, “the successive levels of education must conform to the successive personalities of the child.”

**The Infant Community** (sometimes called “Toddler Community” or “Young Children’s Community”) serves children who are comfortably walking (approximate age 14 months) to age three, in a small and intimate group of twelve to fourteen children and two to three trained staff persons. It has two program options, either half day or full day. The environment conforms to the physical needs of the children, both in the size of the furnishings and in the opportunities for motor development. There is an observation area for adults, minimal furniture, tiled floors, maximum natural light, selected art placed low on the walls, and defined spaces to challenge the coordination of movement.

**The Montessori Preschool Program (ages 3-6)** The Montessori preschool classroom, or Children’s House, is a “living room” for children. Children choose their work from among self-correcting materials displayed on open shelves, and they work in specific work areas. Over a period of time, the children develop into a “normalized community,” working with high concentration and few interruptions. Normalization is the process whereby a child moves from being undisciplined to self-disciplined, from disordered to ordered, from distracted to focused, through work in the environment. The process occurs through repeated work with materials that captivate the child’s attention. For some children this inner change may take place quite suddenly, leading to deep concentration. In the Montessori preschool, academic competency is a means to an end, and the manipulatives are viewed as “materials for development”.

In the Montessori preschool, five distinct areas constitute the prepared environment:

- **Practical Life** enhances the development of hand-eye coordination, gross motor control, and cognitive order through care of self, care of the environment, development of social relations, and coordination of physical movement.
- The **Sensorial** area enables the child to order, classify, and describe sensory impressions in relation to length, width, temperature, mass, color, pitch, etc.
- **Mathematics** makes use of manipulative materials to enable the child to internalize the concepts of number, symbol, sequence, operations, and memorization of basic facts.
- **Language Arts** includes oral language development, written expression, reading, the ability to make decisions, self-discipline, study of grammar, creative dramatics, and children’s literature. Basic skills in writing and reading are developed through the use of

sandpaper letters, alphabet cut-outs, and various presentations, allowing children to link sounds and letter symbols effortlessly and to express their thoughts through writing.

- ***Cultural Activities*** expose the child to basics in geography, history, life sciences, and earth sciences. Music, art, and movement education are part of the integrated cultural curriculum.

The preschool environment unifies the social, physical, and intellectual functioning of the child. Its important function is to provide children with an early and general foundation that includes a positive attitude toward school, inner security and a sense of order, pride in the physical environment, abiding curiosity, a habit of concentration, habits of initiative and persistence, the ability to make decisions, self-discipline, and a sense of responsibility to other members of the class, school, and community. This foundation will enable them to acquire more specialized knowledge and skills throughout their school career.

-Excerpted from "*The Whole School Montessori Handbook*" by David Kahn, Sharon L. Dubble and D.Renee Pendleton