



THE MONTESSORI EARLY EDUCATION CURRICULUM

(For Children from 2 ½ to 6 Years Old)

PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE AND CARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

EDUCATION OF THE SENSES

LANGUAGE

MATH

CULTURAL STUDIES

The Montessori Curriculum for children between the ages of 2 ½ and 6 years is based on the following five areas of learning:

- 1. Personal Independence And Care Of The Environment**
- 2. Education Of The Senses**
- 3. Language**
- 4. Math**
- 5. Cultural Studies**

In the Montessori system, children are placed in age groups spanning three years (e.g. 3, 4 and 5-year-olds work together). The younger children are inspired and encouraged by example and the older ones can help teach the younger ones. The full curriculum is designed to be completed over a 3-year period.

1. Personal Independence and Care of the Environment (Practical Life Exercises)

Children have an innate desire to become independent and take care of their own personal needs and to gain the skills to help others. The Montessori curriculum supports this inner drive by providing an environment and the necessary materials to support the path to independence.

- Exercises in personal hygiene
- Dressing
- Care of clothing

These are an integral part of the early childhood Montessori classroom. Activities to support the many skills young children need to accomplish on the way towards independence are all taught as specific lessons, with their own set of materials e. g. dressing frames, hand-washing exercises etc.

In order to work independently in a mixed age group, children are taught the rules of the classroom and how to move and work successfully within it.

- Handling the many Montessori materials
- Using floor mats
- Tidying away work
- Looking after classroom pets and plants
- Taking care of books
- Preparing snacks and meals

These skills are all taught as separate exercises that are designed to give children the freedom and confidence they need in order to work at their own individual pace in the classroom. Exercises in grace and courtesy are presented daily during circle time and in small informal group lessons.

The children learn how to behave in certain situations and acquire the social skills essential for everyday living in society.

The children develop a sense of personal dignity, an understanding of their own culture and an awareness and respect for people of all ages and traditions.

Having the appropriate social and language skills enables a child to engage positively in the classroom community and beyond. Early conflict resolution skills are taught and attention is given to making good choices.

Exercises are designed to teach the child how to:

- Ask for something
- Introduce oneself
- Wait one's turn
- Offer help to others
- Make eye contact
- Apologize
- Shake hands
- Welcome visitors
- Work cooperatively
- Offer refreshments
- Walk with a partner
- Behave at the table
- Behave in public places

Through the social interaction involved in carrying out these exercises, the children develop the ability to work harmoniously in a carefully prepared environment.

Exercises for the development of fine and gross motor skills are carefully developed as part of the practical life curriculum.

- Rolling mats
- Pouring liquids
- Threading
- Cutting
- Using utensils
- Sweeping
- Carrying chairs
- Walking carefully
- Carrying materials to a work space

These activities develop dexterity and coordination and are closely linked to other areas of the curriculum.

The practical life component of a Montessori early childhood curriculum is the underlying foundation for success in the other four areas of the curriculum. Each task allows the child to gain independence, and to develop a sense of order,

concentration, responsibility and coordination of movement. Children gain enormous freedom and confidence to work successfully both independently and cooperatively. The future success of the elementary Montessori environment is based on this core foundation of learning skills.

2. Education of the Senses (Sensorial materials)

The Montessori sensorial curriculum allows the child to discriminate and order the impressions that have entered through each of his senses. Scientifically designed materials that isolate each sense help develop the child's intellect through hands-on exploration.

The child learns to separate and classify forms, colors, textures, tastes and smells. Exercises in this area refine the senses and develop skills in thinking, judging, concentrating, comparing and sequencing. The materials offer unlimited opportunities for the development of vocabulary and the essential development of dexterity that will lead to writing and reading.

The sensorial curriculum is divided into the following areas:

- ❑ **Visual Sense:** Children learn to discriminate by size, length, dimension, color, similarity, difference.
- ❑ **Tactile Sense:** Children learn to by touch. They match sandpaper and fabric of varying textures according to their similarities. They order material from rough to smooth and learn to contrast and compare.
- ❑ **Auditory Sense:** Children continue the process of matching, ordering contrasting and comparing, this time using various sounds, musical bells, instruments.
- ❑ **Complex Senses (weight, heat, shape, smell, taste):** Children explore all of the above qualifies by using carefully designed materials and exercises which sharpen their senses at a time when they have a particular developmental interest in this work (sensitive period).

The sensorial exercises are designed to prepare the child for more complex learning in language, Math and Cultural Studies.

3. Language curriculum

Language in the Montessori early childhood curriculum focuses on the following areas:

Oral Language

- ❑ Listening
- ❑ Speaking

Written Language

- ❑ Reading
- ❑ Writing

The curriculum is designed to meet the young child's innate need to acquire language. Significant emphasis is placed on building vocabulary and oral competency. Through the use of the Montessori materials, children acquire a rich vocabulary for labeling, describing, comparing and contrasting their environment and the people in it.

Precise terminology is used. Discussion is encouraged, and the children are given the appropriate language to engage in a meaningful exchange as they get on with their work.

Small group and circle activities are organized on a daily basis. These are opportunities for the children to enjoy a wide variety of language activities that are carefully designed to enrich their oral expression and strengthen their listening skills.

- Rhyming words
- Nonsense words
- Opposites
- Animal families
- Nursery Rhymes
- Story telling
- Singing games
- Poetry
- Role-playing

In essence, language enrichment is embedded in the Montessori curriculum and is a central point of focus when the teacher is giving a lesson in any of the other curriculum areas.

Written language is introduced to children at about 4 years of age. Skills are taught separately by careful use of specially designed materials.

- Pencil control
- Letter formation
- Sound/letter recognition
- Phonetic blending
- Word/picture matching
- Sentence construction

These exercises, when presented in sequence, lead the child to levels of competence in reading and writing skills. Children are encouraged to write their own "books" and so experience the joy of communicating their thoughts to others. Literacy skills develop rapidly as the child's own inner drive to learn is supported by a carefully prepared program designed to meet this stage of activity. With the Montessori program, it is expected that children will be reading by the time they are six.

4. Math

The Montessori early childhood math curriculum is firmly based on learning through experience. Children use a wide variety of carefully constructed materials to lead them to an understanding of the value and sequence of numbers 1 to 10. From there they are introduced to larger amounts and learn the concept of making groups of tens, hundreds, thousands (the decimal system). Number notation and place value are taught as the child develops an understanding of number concepts.

Four and five years olds are introduced to the basic operations of addition, multiplication, subtraction and division at a concrete level so that they gain a real concept what these concepts really mean.

Geometry is introduced in the early childhood program through the use of materials which are classified according to qualities e.g. "these shapes have three sides, they are called triangles," "the four sides on these shapes are all the same size, they are called squares." The child learns to discriminate, classify and name circles, squares, rectangles and polygons, always using materials to guide her.

Fractions are introduced, again in concrete form, and an introduction to the concept of equal parts of a whole lays the foundation for further work at the elementary level. Always, the child builds upon what she already knows and systematically progresses from concrete examples to abstract. She discovers number patterns, sequences and rules by handling the materials.

On completion of the early childhood curriculum, the child will demonstrate through the use of materials, an understanding of the following:

- Number value, sequence, and symbols from 1 to 1,000
- The four basic math operations
- Odd and even numbers
- Skip counting (early preparation for memorization of number facts)
- Reading and recording numbers for all of the above activities.

The program has the advantage of being able to meet each child's individual learning style and pace of development. Children who are not ready to complete the early childhood curriculum by the end of this cycle will continue the work at the elementary level where there are special linkage materials to bring about the understanding.

5. Cultural Studies

The Montessori early childhood cultural program is based on an integrated study of science, the social sciences and the arts. Children are exposed to a rich, stimulating variety of activities based on hands-on learning.

In keeping with the Montessori philosophy of education, the children first experience general rules of the universe (e.g. the division of land and water). These are gradually broken down into smaller parts (e.g. continents/oceans, countries, provinces/states, cities, etc.)

Stories of animals and children from other lands help the children to understand fundamental needs and how these are influenced by climate, environment and lifestyle. Cultural differences and similarities are explored through music, dance, costume and food. Festivals and traditions such as Christmas, Hanukkah, Chinese New Year, Diwali, St. Patrick's Day are celebrated through the arts, stories, geography. Working with cultural materials helps the children become aware that they are part of the large family of humanity.

Simple science experiments that demonstrate the qualities of matter: magnetic/non-magnetic; solid/liquid; living/non-living are made by the children as part of the study of their environment.

Weather observations and experiments help them to appreciate the variety of clothing, homes, food that exist to meet people's needs.

Materials are available to help the children label, compare and classify the parts of plants and animals. Particular emphasis is placed on having plants and pets in the classroom and around the school. The children learn how to take care of these so that they thrive. They undertake experiments to discover the needs of plants and seeds.

An understanding of the passage of time is developed through the use of the clock, the calendar and personal timelines. This lays the foundation for an understanding of history in the elementary years.

Art, music storytelling are all explored through a variety of media and structured programs. Children are encouraged to incorporate an activity from these streams as part of their cultural project work.

In short, the Montessori method of education introduces children to a wide variety of subjects in an integrated way. The information obtained by the child through practical activities is retained and forms a solid base for learning through the elementary years and beyond.