

Family Connection

FEBRUARY 2023

“Through concentration, important qualities of character develop. When the concentration passes, the child is inwardly satisfied, he becomes aware of his companions in whom he shows a lively and sympathetic interest.”
—Maria Montessori, *Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents*, p. 22



Concentration is the Key

By Heather White

The power of concentration is so immense that it establishes the basis for a child’s development, allowing even the youngest child to develop their character and social behavior. Through careful observation, Maria Montessori recognized the sacredness of this skill, stating, “Concentration is the key that opens up to the child the latent treasures within him.”

DIDACTIC MATERIALS

In an effort to allow children to unveil their inner treasures, Montessori carefully designed materials intended to awaken their attention and promote purposeful engagement. Each of these materials was designed to meet the child’s developmental needs and to encourage repetition. With clear and distinct steps and a built-in control of error, the child is able to navigate the challenges within the work independently as they utilize creativity and problem solving to figure out each material. Devised to promote focused attention, these activities fascinate the child, allowing them to become fully absorbed in the process of meaningful work, thus supporting the development of their concentration.

PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

Through her observations, Montessori also discovered that young children have a desire to engage in the practical activities they see adults doing. They sought to not just imitate the work of adults, but to do meaningful practical work themselves. With this knowledge, she developed an area of the curriculum we now refer to as “Practical Life.” Activities such as sweeping, hand washing, pouring, and polishing provide purposeful work for the child that encourages them to become completely involved in the activity for its own sake. These activities help develop the child’s coordination and

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independence while simultaneously building their attention to detail and supporting their ever-growing concentration. As Montessori has said, “A three-year-old educated according to Montessori pedagogy becomes master of his hand and undertakes with joy a variety of human activities. These activities allow him to develop the power of concentration.”

THE MONTESSORI ENVIRONMENT AS PROTECTOR

The Montessori classroom environment is designed to protect the child’s concentration. The ideal conditions are established to provide children with the time and means for deep engagement. The long periods of uninterrupted work time in the classroom allow students ample time to become fully engrossed in meaningful work, creating the conditions that support focused attention and intense concentration.

THE MONTESSORI TEACHER AS PROTECTOR

The Montessori teacher learns of the sacredness of the child’s concentration, understanding that “the birth of concentration in a child is as delicate a phenomenon as the bursting of a bud into bloom.” The teacher takes careful precaution not to disturb or distract a student who is focused and engaged in their work at all costs, not only as a way to show respect for the child and their work, but also to protect the ongoing process of developing concentration. For students who may be having a harder time discovering this purposeful work, the

teacher connects the child to the materials, utilizing careful observation and awareness of each child’s individual needs and interests to help them discover activities that are engaging and meaningful.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONCENTRATION

Maria Montessori’s scientific observations have allowed her to reveal the importance of concentration in a child’s development. Her research emphasized that the child’s entire personality develops based on their ability to concentrate, unveiling the process whereby a child’s social-emotional nature is established as they become more in control of their mind and body. Given the appropriate environment and guidance, Montessori showcased how children are able to explore and investigate, teaching themselves and building their own unique mind.



She told us:

The first essential for the child’s development is concentration. It lays the whole basis for his character and social behavior. He must find out how to concentrate, and for this he needs things to concentrate upon. This shows the importance of his surroundings, for no one acting on the outside can cause him to concentrate. Only he can organize his psychic life. None of us can do it for him. Indeed, it is just here that the importance of our schools really lies. They are places in which the child can find the kind of work that permits him to do this.

Next cohort deadline is March 30

You and Your Child’s Montessori Education: Early Childhood

A course designed for families interested in incorporating the Montessori philosophy into their homes.

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Montessori at Home

Setting up the home in ways that encourage your child to be independent can help them grow a sense of pride and responsibility for themselves and their home.

Here are a few of examples that help set the stage.



1. Prepare for Lunch

Children at any age can play a part in preparing and packing a lunch. Designate shelves that your child can reach independently with healthy choices available and an expectation that packing lunch is their responsibility, based on their ability. A toddler may be picking out their fruit or crackers, a three- or four-year old may be packing everything other than their main course, and an elementary-aged child can prepare and pack the entire meal on their own.

2. Clean Up

Offering cleaning supplies that are size-appropriate for your child reinforces that cleaning up after oneself is an expectation and provides the tools that allow your child to do so easily.

3. Foster Independence

Having access to sinks and counters is an important step in encouraging independence for your child. Providing stools or standing platforms to access these areas allows for possibilities for independence that would otherwise not exist.

A PEEK INSIDE

Care of the Environment

By Heather White

Respectful communication, service to others, and appreciation for nature all figure into the Montessori concept of care for the environment. This way of perceiving the environment as an integral part of one's own character fosters a relationship between child and place and child and community. Such a concept is practiced first when children learn how to keep an area tidy and clean up after themselves. Through this, children gain a sense of agency within an environment which also nurtures a sense of appreciation for their surroundings. The narrow scope of environment that young children possess (their classroom and home) expands into an understanding of stewardship during the teen years when young adults can engage in initiatives to care for their communities at large.

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Infant & Toddler

The youngest children will have limited abilities to care for their environment. Learning at this age includes many self-care skills like using a tissue to blow their nose and toilet training. Visitors to these classrooms will observe toddlers caring for their environment by learning to set their work out on a floor rug, put their work away, and roll up the floor rug when finished.

Early Childhood

Maria Montessori wrote, “Never help a child with a task at which he feels he can succeed.” This age group embodies that sentiment completely. Children in the Early Childhood classroom are eager to do things for themselves. Awareness of self and environment expands as children learn how to wash their hands, sweep the floor, water plants, and even feed the classroom pet. Many programs introduce children to gardening, too, which brings the outdoors into the young child’s concept of environment.



Elementary

Students in this age group begin to see relationships past themselves and their classroom. They might decide to serve another population with projects like donating the produce from their vegetable garden to a local meal program. The idea of stewardship of the land also develops as children become motivated to make an impact in their neighborhoods.



Secondary

Maria Montessori envisioned the adolescent as part of an *erdkinder* or earth school where they would participate in taking care of the environment through growing food and engaging in practical work to prepare them for adulthood. In modern Secondary programs, students’ concepts of community and stewardship expand to include state and even global initiatives. Secondary student groups are capable of forming partnerships and alliances with local organizations for sustainability programs, social services, and more.



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