



FACT SHEET:

MONTESSORI PROGRAMMES

Montessori classrooms are multi-aged learning environments, based on Dr. Montessori's stage theory of human development, which she called The Four Planes of Development. In the first plane from birth to age six, the child is characterised by his or her "absorbent mind", absorbing all aspects of his or her environment, language and culture. In the second plane from age six to twelve, the child uses a "reasoning mind" to explore the world with abstract thought and imagination. In the third plane from twelve to eighteen, the adolescent has a "humanistic mind" eager to understand humanity and the contribution he or she can make to society. In the last plane of development, from age eighteen to twenty-four, the adult explores the world with a "specialist mind" taking his or her place in the world. Maria Montessori believed that if education followed the natural development of the child, then society would gradually move to a higher level of co-operation, peace and harmony.

Birth to 3 years Programmes

The first three years of life are the most fundamental in the development of human beings and their potential. The infant's physical development is phenomenal and apparent and inspires our care and attention. Yet a profound and less obvious development is taking place within the child.

During the first three years of life the child's intelligence is formed. They acquire the culture and language into which they have been born. It is a period when the core of personality and the social being are developed. An understanding of the child's development and the development of the human mind allows environments to be prepared to meet the needs of the infant and foster independence, motor development and language acquisition.

Nido (Italian for 'Nest')

This is the name given to the early childhood setting for children from eight weeks old to the developmental milestone of walking independently. This programme is created especially to support working parents.

Infant Community

After they begin to walk, children join the toddler group where their primary motor coordination, independence and language are cultivated. Rather than a classroom, it is a nurturing community where very young children experience their first structured contact with other children.

Parent-Infant / Parent-Toddler Programme

The Parent-Infant Programme provides an environment in which parents and children from 8 weeks to 3 years interact with the guidance of a trained Montessori educator. Parents learn how to observe what their children are doing, do in order to know what experiences to offer them.

Increasingly, these programmes are offered in Montessori Early Learning Centres as part of a long day care format.

MONTESSORI AUSTRALIA FOUNDATION LIMITED

3 to 6 years Programmes

Montessori 'school' starts at 3 years of age. The 3 to 6 year old child is undergoing a process of self-construction. The application of the Montessori philosophy and the specifically designed Montessori equipment aids the child's ability to absorb knowledge and continue this path of self-construction. Acquisition of one's own first culture is the child's central developmental drive in the first plane of development.

The pre-school environment serves this drive abundantly, bringing the world to the child. Globes, maps, songs, land forms, collections of pictures of life in different cultures, and much more, is offered, with the aim of helping the child to grow as an individual appreciating the larger context of his or her world.

Children's House

The 'Children's House' is the pre-school and/or long day setting for children from three to six years of age. Often called 'Stage 1', children in a Montessori Children's House preschool will normally attend 5 days a week, with 3-4 year olds attending morning sessions, then moving to the full day session in the final year (extended day). Montessori Early Learning Centres offer this programme within their long day care settings.

There are four main areas in the pre-school program: Practical Life, Sensorial, Language and Mathematics. Considerable emphasis is also placed on Creative Arts, Music, Science, Geography and Cultural Studies.

Practical Life: The Practical Life component of the Montessori approach is the link between the child's home environment and the classroom. The child's desire to seek order and independence finds expression through the use of a variety of materials and activities which support the development of fine motor as well as other learning skills needed to advance to the more complex Montessori equipment. The practical life materials involve the children in precise movements which challenge them to concentrate, to work at their own pace uninterrupted, and to complete a cycle of work which typically results in the feelings of satisfaction and confidence. Practical life encompasses four main areas: Control of Movement, Care of Person, Care of Environment, and Grace and Courtesy.

Sensorial: From an early age, children are developing a sense of order and they actively seek to sort, arrange and classify their many experiences. The sensorial component provides a key to the world, a means for a growth in perception, and understanding that forms the basis for abstraction in thought. The sensorial materials give the child experience initially in perceiving distinctions between similar and different things. Later the child learns to grade a set of similar objects that differ in a regular and measurable way from most to least. Each piece of equipment is generally a set of objects which isolate a fundamental quality perceived through the senses such as color, form, dimension, texture, temperature, volume, pitch, weight and taste. Precise language such as loud/soft, long/short, rough/smooth, circle, square, cube and so on is then attached to these sensorial experiences to make the world even more meaningful to the child.

Language: Maria Montessori did not believe that reading, writing, spelling and language should be taught as separate entities. Pre-primary children are immersed in the dynamics of their own language development and the Montessori approach provides a carefully thought-out program to facilitate this process. Oral language acquired since birth is further elaborated and refined through a variety of activities such as songs, games, poems, stories and classified language cards.

Indirect preparation for writing begins with the practical life exercises and sensorial training. Muscular movement and fine motor skills are developed along with the ability of the child to distinguish the sounds which make up language. With this spoken language background, the directress begins to present the alphabet symbols to the child. Not only can children hear and see sounds but they can feel them by tracing the sandpaper letters. When a number of letters have been learned the movable alphabet is introduced. These cardboard or wooden letters enable the child to reproduce his or her own words,

then phrases, sentences and finally stories. Creativity is encouraged, and the child grows in appreciation of the mystery and power of language. Other materials follow which present the intricacies of non-phonetic spelling and grammar. Because children know what they have written, they soon discover they can read back their stories. Reading books both to themselves and others soon follows.

Mathematics: Mathematics is a way of looking at the world, a language for understanding and expressing measurable relationships inherent in our experience. A child is led to abstract ideas and relationships by dealing with the concrete. The child's mind has already been awakened to mathematical ideas through the sensorial experiences. The child has seen the distinctions of distance, dimension, graduation, identity, similarity and sequence and will now be introduced to the functions and operations of numbers. Geometry, algebra and arithmetic are connected in the Montessori method as they are in life. For instance, the golden bead material highlights the numerical, geometrical and dimensional relationships within the decimal system. Through concrete material the child learns to add, subtract, multiply and divide and gradually comes to understand many abstract mathematical concepts with ease and joy.

Primary School

The primary school years programme incorporates either separate classrooms for children aged from six to nine years (Stage 2) and nine to twelve years (Stage 3), or single classrooms for children aged from six to twelve years.

Children work in a research style of learning, in small groups on a variety of projects which spark the imagination and engage the intellect. Lessons given by a trained Montessori teacher direct the children toward activities which help them to develop reasoning abilities and learn the arts of life.

Children, at this age, are driven to understand the universe and their place in it and their capacity to assimilate all aspects of culture is boundless. Elementary studies include geography, biology, history, language, mathematics in all its branches, science, music and art. Exploration of each area is encouraged through trips outside the classroom to community resources, such as library, planetarium, botanical garden, science centre, factory, hospital, etc. This inclusive approach to education fosters a feeling of connectedness to all humanity, and encourages their natural desire to make contributions to the world.

Secondary School

The Montessori program for children aged 12 to 18 years is based on the recognition of the special characteristics of adolescence. Adolescence is an age of great social development, an age of critical thinking and re-evaluation, and a period of self-concern and self-assessment. It is a transition from childhood to adulthood with the corresponding physical, mental and sexual maturation. In early puberty the adolescent finds it hard to concentrate on academic and structured learning. Above all adolescence is like an odyssey - an arduous yet exciting adventure - where the adolescent tries to find his or her place in the world.