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An Introduction to the Montessori Environment

A Montessori Education encompasses all areas of the child's life: academic, social, emotional and physical. Montessori Instructors, referred to as Director or Directress due to their role of directing what is going on in the environment, are specially trained in all areas of child development. Although some schools have specialists (music, art, physical education...) children are typically exposed to all academic areas by one Directress.

The environment is prepared to support the child's natural curiosity, needs, wants and desires. The Directress and any assistants in the room prepare the room before the children arrive. As the age of the children increases, the children can participate in the preparation of the environment (sharpening pencils, making sure there is an adequate paper supply...).

Materials in the classroom are purchased or created by the Directress. Most materials are beautifully crafted out of quality materials, such as wood, so as to last and to be as natural as possible. Materials are designed to meet the needs of each child and are intended to be used by the children. The materials are set up on shelves the children care for (straighten and clean every day). The children choose work freely from the shelves. Work is set up in an orderly fashion from easiest to hardest, simplest to

most complex. Some work will remain on a shelf year round, while other materials may be put out or withdrawn depending on children's interest and curricular planning. A material that is not used by the children over a period of time is usually removed from the environment. Changing the work in some way or re-introducing it at a later date is often used to regain the children's interest in the material.

Children are either presented lessons on a material before using the material or explore the material independently. Many times in a Montessori environment the child is allowed and encouraged to make discoveries. The Directress encourages exploration. Exploration is one of the components of a Montessori education that motivates children to think independently. The explorative nature also fosters a love of learning not always found in other methods of education.

Over the course of the year the newsletter will unveil different components of the Montessori method of education.



Tips From Teachers: Montessori At Home

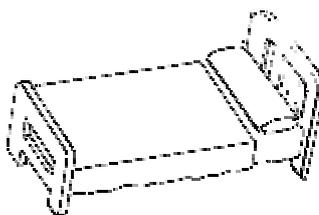
Parents who actively seek out and choose a Montessori education for their children often look for ways to implement Montessori activities at home. Following are some ideas for incorporating Montessori into your home environment.

Kitchen:

- Keep bowls, plates, cups and utensils in a low cabinet so children can prepare their own food as independently as possible. Breakfast cereal can be kept in a small container so children can get their own breakfast. Milk or other liquids can be kept in a small pitcher. The small pitcher ensures not too much of the liquid will be spilled if the child has an accident. If the child does spill, allow them to clean up the spill.

Bedroom:

- Keep clothing in dressers the child can open. Encourage the child to make choices in regards to their clothing. The child can choose their outfit the evening before so a battle of wills does not start off the morning.
- Keep a change of bed linens in an accessible spot. Encourage the child to strip and remake their bed when needed or appropriate. Then the child can assist in laundering their own bed linens.



Bathroom:

- Keep the child's toiletries accessible and kid friendly (nothing too fancy or unusable). Allow the child, as early as possible, to participate in their own care of self.
- Keep towels low so a child can get and replace their towel.

Family Room:

- In lieu of a toy box, try setting up activities on shelves. If you have too many toys for this to be feasible, think about putting some away and rotating them. Montessori classrooms don't typically show every possible material – materials are rotated to keep the child's interest.
- It is perfectly acceptable to expect children to have good manners and control themselves. To that end, leave out some delicate, but replaceable items. Just because you have children in your home does not mean you can't also have some of your own beautiful items on display.

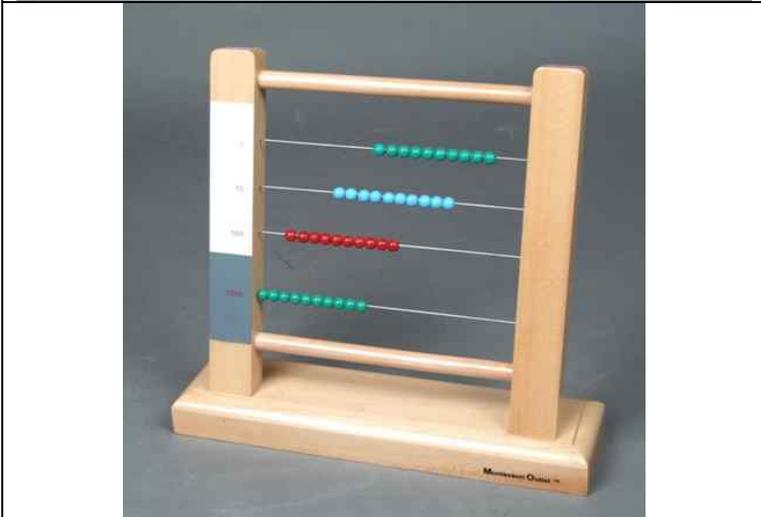
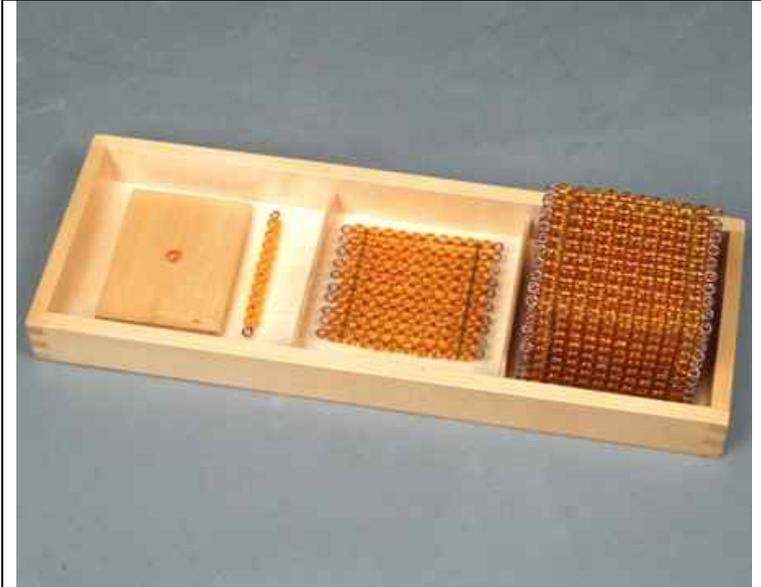
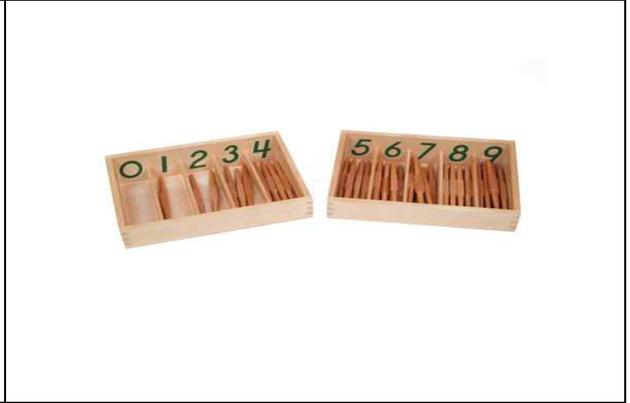
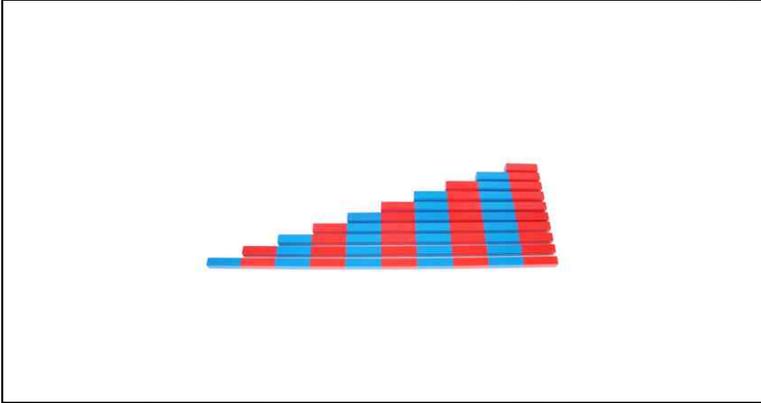
Play/Outdoor Space:

- When Dr. Montessori proposed and set up her first classrooms, the room was set up with a garden area readily available and accessible. She recommended having gymnastic type equipment in the garden/play area for the children to have gross motor activities when needed. Not all Montessori, school or home environments are set up in such a way. However, if you have the opportunity to have a garden and/or play area outside your living area encourage your child to move from one area to the next. The play equipment need not be huge, formal, nor expensive. Space to run and play is enough for many children. Adding variety to the outdoor play area is beneficial (obstacle course, climb through tunnel, slide...).



Magnificent Montessori Materials: Mathematics

Mathematics materials move from simple to complex: red and blue rods, spindle box, golden bead material, stamp game, bead frame, advanced bank game. Initially the children handle and touch each piece. As the child gains an understanding of concepts, they learn representations of quantities.





Q & A

Q: I recently observed a Montessori classroom for a day. I was very impressed, but I have three questions.

1. There don't seem to be any opportunities for pretend play.
2. The materials don't seem to allow children to be creative.
3. Children don't seem to be interacting with each other very much.

Any help you give me in understanding this would be appreciated. Thank you very much, BD

A: I applaud you for taking the time to observe in a Montessori environment. Until you observe in a Montessori environment you may not truly appreciate all that Montessori education provides for your child.

Pretend play is encouraged in a different way than in a typical, Piagetian environment. Montessori environments don't typically have dress up areas or play kitchens. Rather, we help the child learn about a variety of people (instead of dressing up like other people) and we use miniature versions of real kitchen objects. So, children in a Montessori environment prepare food and do so with items their size.

Children do actually participate in pretend play, it just isn't directed by the Montessori Directress. Many, many times I have observed children using the knobless cylinders and

turning them into space ships, dinosaurs, people... Although I observed the 'pretend play' I did not intervene because it was not harmful to the child nor to the work.

Observing the child using the material in this way also provides insight to the Directress. It shows what the child is interested in as well as areas the child may want to explore (transportation, space, dinosaurs...). Unless a material is being misused or the actions are deemed harmful, most Montessori Directresses will not interfere in the pretend play behavior. In this way, the children are allowed to be creative.

In a Montessori classroom there is quite a bit of interaction between and among the children. However, it is respectful interaction so you don't tend to see out of control behavior. You may see two friends working to build the pink tower or a small group of friends learning the Banker's Game. There are some materials that are more appropriate for an individual child, but children are able to work next to or near their friends. Appropriate interactions and relationships by Montessori children are observed in and out of the classroom. Observe during outside play time and you will see lots of interaction!

Any Montessori/education related questions can be directed to the editor at:

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