



## From the SAMA President's Desk

Dear Parents

My thoughts for this letter have been prompted by the many queries our office receives regarding Grade R and the Montessori curriculum. I thought it would be prudent to share our expectations of our member schools in offering quality Montessori education, and



hopefully give some clarity.

The Montessori preschool programme is a rich, integrated, process-based curriculum that weaves a wide range of developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for children. A child who spends the full three years in the Montessori 3-6 class will experience far more than the

limited content of a conventional Grade R class.

The mixing of the three-year age span reflects the importance of offering children the opportunity of learning as a community, just like a family. It is seen as a natural organisation of children's learning and co-operation.

We observe the older children consolidate or test their experiences, skills, and knowledge through their interactions with and mentoring of younger children. They reflect on their own practices or understanding of concepts while giving lessons and sharing ideas. We often witness their natural inclination to give a lesson to a younger or new child as well as a young child's readiness to learn from an older child.

We see acts of empathy and compassion as the children are mediated through conflicts and challenges with one another. The range of ages allows each child the opportunity to find a peer with whom they can connect or turn to for varying reasons and needs throughout the day.

The child has a three-hour work cycle, which supports spontaneous learning and the child's natural rhythm, as well as

opportunities for responsible learning rather than the shortened periods of time imposed on their learning in a conventional Grade R classroom.

The Montessori curriculum is based on the developmental needs of children. It provides them with experiences to develop in all spheres – emotionally, cognitively, socially and physically. It is not designed to teach specific content or to prepare a child directly for any specific future schooling, but rather to provide the optimum conditions in which children can learn. This approach is supported by recent discoveries in cognitive neuroscience and developmental psychology.



The practical implication of this is that while Montessori schools do not set out specifically to prepare

children for Grade 1, they provide the framework in which children develop the skills that will enable them to succeed not only in Grade 1, but throughout schooling and life outside school.

Grade R classrooms are often part of the formal school building and in such cases the influence of formal learning is strong. For example, a Grade 2 teacher may take the Grade R class, with older, developmentally inappropriate expectations of the young children or the uniformity of their environment.

We implore you to not put pressure on your directresses to imitate or use traditional Grade R practices in the erroneous belief that this will help children adapt; this erodes the essence of a good Montessori environment. Examples of these are worksheets and rote counting, which are completely developmentally inappropriate, as the Montessori classroom provides

many materials that give the child more than what any worksheet will provide.

All independent schools are permitted by the government to implement their own curricula and are not required to do the National



Curriculum or apply CAPS.

So please, before you move your 5-year-old out of a Montessori environment, I recommend you spend a morning observing the children at work in a Montessori environment, and discuss with your child's directress any questions or concerns you may have.

**“The secret of good teaching is to regard the child’s intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown to grow**

**under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim is not only to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his innermost core.”**

Maria Montessori – To  
*Educate the Human Potential*

Warm regards  
Jacky



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