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Newsletter for Parents

Dear Montessori Parents

We are looking forward to a very successful conference in Knysna with it now being sold out. We hope your child's head of school will give you feedback and share their experiences with you.

As an association, we receive many calls from parents seeking guidance in selecting an authentic Montessori school and it is often difficult to provide this as there is so much individuality among schools. However, there are also many aspects of a Montessori school that any parent can reasonably assume to be in place should the school be calling itself Montessori.

Based on some Frequently Asked Questions that our Exco has compiled, we wanted to share with you some of the things you can look out for, or recommend to your friends, in exploring Montessori education and schools.

Please feel free to send us your questions or comments at any time so that this newsletter for parents is able to satisfy more of your needs. You can email contributions or questions through to me at president@samontessori.org.za

Warm Regards
Sam Streak
SAMA President

What are the basic things parents should look for in an authentic Montessori School? (not in order of importance)

- Vertical Grouping (Mixed Ages), with at least a three year span between ages.
Traditionally Montessori classes are grouped 3-6 years, 6-9 years, 9-12 years, 12-15 years and 15-18 years. Some schools, due to logistics, may extend the 3-6 age grouping down to 2 ½ years or up to 7 year olds. This implies that there is no separate Grade R or 0 in a Montessori school. The 3-6 class may include children preparing for primary school but they are not separated from the rest of the class. Maria Montessori emphasized the importance of preparing the classroom environment in accordance with the natural laws of development, applicable to the particular plane of development. According to Dr Montessori, these planes of development follow the age spans, 0-3, 3-6, 6-9 and so on.
- An uninterrupted work cycle of approximately 3 hours in a mature class (i.e. a class that has a core of normalized children)
"Concentration is the key that opens up to the child the latent treasures within him". Maria Montessori expressed this idea throughout her writings and it is imperative that the child be given the opportunity to develop his/her concentration through meaningful work, free from adult interruption or intervention.
- Generally larger child : teacher ratios are more effective in a Montessori classroom as smaller

ratios tend to inhibit the development of independence in the child.

- A prepared environment based on reality and nature and not fantasy.
- Particularly in the 3-6 environment, few group lessons, with the focus on individual learning and lessons. Developmentally the children in the older age groups prefer working and interacting with their peers. Here the focus is on smaller group, co-operative and collaborative learning experiences.
- Children working at their own pace.
In a Montessori classroom, each child is working at his/her own pace, within a vertically grouped environment. This allows for natural inclusion of children with special needs as the pace of learning is based on the child's potential.
- There is an understanding that the work of the child is different to the work of the adult.
"The adult works to perfect his environment; the child works to perfect himself."
- Staff who are trained and qualified as Montessori directresses/directors/assistants.
It is important that all teaching staff are trained and qualified to work within the prepared environment. It is internationally accepted Montessori Best Practice that those working and teaching in Montessori schools should hold Montessori teaching qualifications and undertake Continued Professional Development.
- A Montessori classroom should be clean, neat, ordered and well-equipped with predominantly Montessori equipment and materials. These should be accessible to the children – at child height – and should always be complete and in good condition.
- There are several basic learning areas that should be included in a Montessori 3-6 classroom: Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, Maths, Cultural Subjects and areas for art, creative expression and music. In the primary and higher levels, there should be also be areas for Language, Maths and Cultural Subjects. Cultural Subjects includes botany, zoology, history, geography, science, physics, chemistry, astronomy, geology and other similar subjects.
- A sense of happiness and peace should prevail throughout the school, with the children showing signs of being comfortable and without fear.

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