



National Newsletter

February 2011

Newsletter for Parents of SAMA Member Schools

Dear Parents

Many parents are often rather taken aback when they first enter a Montessori environment and see the shelves covered with beautiful materials. 'How do the children know what they can and can't do and how will they know where to put things back?' After an observation, parents are impressed by the way in which the materials are so carefully chosen by the children and the respect and diligence with which they are handled.

Maria Montessori, using her initial training as a scientist, developed these materials after she herself had observed children working with early prototypes. She spent a lot of time refining their design or painting them another colour. Her careful study of the way in which children used the material and the reasons why the materials were of benefit to the child ensured that no piece of Montessori material in the prepared environment was there by chance. Students learn in their training to dissect each piece of equipment, figuring out the reasons why it is in the classroom. Take the pink tower as an example.

The direct purpose of presenting the material to the child is to build a tower from the biggest cube to the smallest cube. Indirectly, the children are also developing a host of other skills like fine and gross motor coordination, eye-hand coordination, sequencing and visual discrimination skills.

As the keeper and custodian of the prepared environment, the directress has the task of making sure that the shelves are ordered, clean, and that every piece of equipment is in good repair and ready for use. She will spend many afternoons and evenings preparing new sets of card material, because once a child begins to show an interest in a given area, her role is to provide the nourishment that feeds the need of the child at any given time.

The beauty and precision with which both the 'store-bought' and hand made materials are made makes for an aesthetically pleasing environment. A real children's house, filled with treasures that they will use to grow and develop. The fact that they are within easy reach of the child, means that they have the freedom to choose work that calls to them. This intrinsic motivation within each child is further given freedom, in that a child is allowed to work with any given piece of material as often and for as long as s/he likes. Repetition and perfection are human tendencies that if given the space and time to emerge will lead to concentration and normalisation. The role of the directress is to observe that purposeful work is happening and to guide and direct the child that needs it.

I encourage you as parents to observe your child at work in their environment. It is a worthwhile experience and will give you insights into how and why your children are benefitting so much from the Montessori school you have chosen for them!

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