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*This newsletter is a monthly publication available during the school year. Subscribers may reprint the number of copies required for their school's use only.*

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## Start School Smart and How to Say Good-bye

### Start School Smart

The school year is about to begin and you want to help your child get off to a great start! Following are some ways to get (and stay) involved and to help your child be successful

- **Set up routines** (such as helping your child lay out clothes the night before, packing lunch...) Routines will help your child adjust quickly to school.
- **Be supportive:** Attend school functions such as open houses or evenings to learn about the Montessori Method. Your attendance and support show your child with actions, not just words, that you value their education.
- **Communicate:** Plan a method of communication with the school staff. How will you communicate with your child's teacher? Will you see them regularly and have the opportunity for face to face visits? Or will you be communicating via notes or e-mails? Communication needs to be open and clear between parent and staff for your child to have a successful school experience.
- **Follow through:** If staff asks you to send a backpack to school for student work, do your best to send a backpack daily.

The staff at your child's school wants to make this year the best ever for your child.

### How to Say Good – bye

Before leaving your child for the first day/week of school, discuss concerns or issues with the teacher ahead of time. Attend an open house event or arrange to meet the teacher. Tour the school before the school year starts. This helps your child feel more comfortable in the setting.

Discuss any special concerns with the Directress. Some schools allow parents to stay for a period of time as the child adjusts to the new environment. For other schools or parents, that is not feasible.

Before the first day, talk to your child about what is going to happen. Tell them you will take them to school where they will put away their belongings and then you will say good-bye. If your child is upset the first few days let your child know you will also miss them, reassure them that they will have a great day, and tell them you will see them in a little bit. Give your child one last hug or kiss good-bye and then leave. Although your child may be upset, most children quiet down within a few minutes of your departure. The staff will likely comfort your child and then help distract them by showing them a lesson or encouraging them to choose work.

Don't be surprised if the crying lasts for several days or restarts on Mondays. This is normal and typical of children. Keep the dialogue open between you and the staff so you can tell them anything that you think would make the transition easier. The Montessori staff is there to assist you and your child.



# Magnificent Montessori Materials

## Cosmic Education:

“One of the most fascinating characteristics of Maria Montessori was her ability to connect life at the moment with life in the distant past (Education for Human Development, p. 97).” Mario Montessori, Jr. wrote that his grandmother had an affinity for making connections of everyday living with connections of the past. He wrote that from her connections, Dr. Montessori developed Cosmic Education. Cosmic Education is a way to educate children so they are exposed to a grand picture of the universe and their place in it. Cosmic Education enables the child to see how they fit in the greater scheme of life. The goal of Cosmic Education is to unite the mind and the consciousness of all humans (Montessori, The Child, Society and the World, p. 111). Cosmic Education includes 5 Great Lessons. The 5 Great Lessons are stories told to the children in a lively and dramatic way so as to inspire more in-depth study. The Lessons include: Coming of the Universe, Coming of Life on Earth, Coming of Humans, Arrival of Communication, and Arrival of Numbers. The children are exposed to the Great Lessons yearly as they gain information each time they hear the stories. It is similar to re-reading a good book. Follow up lessons and activities are then based on the Great Lessons. After introducing the Coming of the Universe, students perform science experiments based on fundamentals such as gravity, water, and the states of matter.

Cultural studies consider all areas of humanity and allow the child to explore different areas (astronomy, geography, chemistry...) at different periods of time. Cosmic education is the basis for the Montessori cultural studies. This area of the environment is designed to work with the child's sensitive period of imagination. At the 3-6 level the child also utilizes their imagination, but in a different way. The 3-6 year old can begin to be introduced to ideas of the cosmos, but they are primarily interested in the more immediate – what is here and now. Each area in cultural subjects contains material that encourage independent study and hands on exploration. Following are some examples of work in the Cultural studies area:

History: telling of time, a child's personal timeline



Geography: globes, puzzle maps of the world. Continents, and countries; landform maps

Earth Science: experiments regarding, parts of the Earth

Biology: living/non-living sorting, classification of vocabulary (body parts of animals)

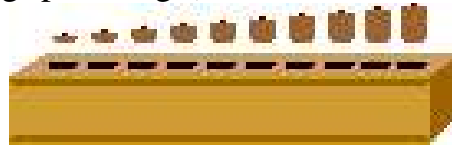


## Areas of the Montessori Classroom:

### Practical Life

The practical life activities meet the internal need a child has for organization. At every level, the practical life area helps the child to learn more about the environment and how to interact with the environment. Life skills, grace and courtesy, care of self, and care of the environment are examined in practical life. Examples of practical life activities include:

- Ø **Life skills:** pouring, sorting, cooking, bead stringing, paper cutting.
- Ø **Grace and courtesy:** offering food to a friend, asking for help, setting a table, hanging up a coat or backpack.
- Ø **Care of self:** blowing the nose, clipping nails, using dressing frames to learn how to zipper, button, lace and tie...
- Ø **Care of the environment:** table scrubbing, polishing (silver, shoe, wood)



### Sensorial

Activities in the sensorial area include materials that help the child learn to discriminate between height, weight, sight, taste and sound. Knobbed cylinders are pictured and exemplify how children learn height and width. In this area of the classroom the child works independently or with a friend to explore the relationship of items in the environment. The child is shown the material and then has many opportunities to repeat the exercises themselves.

### Language

The language area of the classroom assists the child in learning how language functions. Children begin by matching pictures (flowers, animals...) to increase their skill of discrimination. Eventually the child begins to discriminate letter shapes and letter sounds. Reading is taught phonetically, starting with objects and pictures. From sound work the child builds words using a moveable alphabet. Individual alphabet pieces allow the child to create phonetic words readily (mat, cut, sit...). Phonetic reading books are introduced when the child is ready and the students also listen to stories read by the teacher. The child also learns sight words in a variety of lessons. Grammar and word study are additional units of study within the language curriculum.

### Mathematics

The mathematics area of the classroom covers numeration, math operations and facts. The child is introduced to concepts in math, such as addition. Then through a series of different exercises using materials, the child practices and masters each mathematical concept or skill. After introducing a concept, the child works on memorizing facts. With each successive material and lesson, the child moves from very concrete (hands on) work to more abstract work. A kindergarten child can often add large operation problems ( $2361 + 1423$ ) because they have materials that help them solve the problem. Independent work follows lessons and students have an opportunity to practice until the concept is understood.

**Cultural** Discussed on page 2.





## Q & A

**Q:** My son just started at a Montessori school. He is having trouble choosing work. His teacher said she is giving him limited choices. What does this mean and how can I help him be successful?

**A:** Limited choices simply means the child is given two or three choices which he is then expected to choose from. For example, a four year old may be asked if they would like to work on the pink tower or the brown stair. The Directress is providing a limited choice. With only two choices the child can maintain their dignity and esteem, yet also be guided. As the year progresses your son will likely need less and less guidance. Sometimes a child is asked what work they would like to start on in the morning. If the child is indecisive, the teacher may say, "Would you like to begin with cultural studies or language?" Once the child selects one (cultural

studies) they may need additional help. The Directress could say, "What would you like to work on in cultural studies?" Especially for young children, this question may result in walking over to the cultural studies shelf so the child can see their choices. The Directress may remind the child of work they are familiar with or lessons they had in the last few days.

At home, you can help your child develop some self-directed skills. Allow your son to make decisions when possible. If it is of no consequence to you whether you have an apple or grapes for snack, ask him which he would like. For a young child, allow him choices in choosing his clothing. Your child may pick a pair of shorts he wants to wear and you offer two choices of shirts. As you observe your child readily making choices, allow him more freedom and less suggested choices. Your son will learn decision making skills, become more confident, and feel like his choices are respected.

## The Montessori Glossary: Prepared Environment :

One key component of the Montessori classroom is the prepared environment. The Directress in the classroom has extensively and intensively prepared the classroom for the children. As part of the classroom environment, the Directress is also a model of exemplary behavior and social skills for the children. The classroom is comprised of several different areas: practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, and cultural. According to Mario Montessori, Jr. in *Education for Human Development*, "...the prepared environment should bring the world at large, and thus the adult world, within reach of the child at whatever stage of development it is at a given moment." (page 20, 1976) To that extent, the room should be visually pleasant, reflect the organization of the material, and stimulate the child's interest in materials that will help them grow and develop.

