

Montessori explained - Grace and Courtesy

There were certain things that Montessori saw were very important for children's natural development. As part of a series of articles, Barbara Isaacs will explain some of the key principles of the Montessori approach including practical ideas which can be used at home.

Visitors to Montessori classrooms usually comment on the calm atmosphere which they encounter. The key contributing factor is the environment which offers children an extensive range of activities from which they can choose according to their interests, and which responds to their developmental needs.

They engage with the environment in a purposeful manner; this engagement supports concentration and development of physical, social and cognitive skills. The challenge, risk and achievement these activities offer the children also boost their self esteem and self worth. The outcome usually is a satisfied child behaving in a reasonable manner, reflecting the example set by the older children and the adults in the environment.

Modelling is an important aspect of children's learning during the early years. They do not only model what their older or more able friends do, but they often model how they work with the activity. The teachers are very important in the modelling process as they, too, set an example for the children. Often, they are the first adults outside their families with whom the children establish a lasting and meaningful relationship.

Integral to the calmness is the grace and courtesy we see in the environment. There is an expectation from the teachers as well as the adults, that they act in a respectful and polite manner. Calm voices are encouraged and time is taken to explain consequences of inappropriate behaviour. The ground rules are set with the well-being of the group in mind, this social aspect of the classroom is



Helping each other wash-up after a snack

highlighted at every opportunity. Whilst the children are engaged in solitary activities, working in pairs or three and fours, they are well aware being part of social unit which expects politeness and respect.

In practical terms it means that children will be encouraged to use please and thank you appropriately. They will be shown how to ask to share an activity with a friend, using words rather than actions – “May I join you” or “May I work with you” is more effective than snatching. Offering a friend a biscuit or a drink, knowing how to behave during snack, when getting ready to go outside or for an outing and welcoming a visitor are all part of helping children adopt an appropriate etiquette encouraging co-operation and respect. These behaviours can be demonstrated to children through role-play but above all, they need to be present, visible and evident in the behaviours of the adults as well as the older children in the classroom. That way they will become part of every day life for all the children both at nursery and at home. They reflect children's “social embryonic stage” as well as their “sensitive period for social aspects”. Montessori noticed that there were certain periods of particular sensitivity that kept occurring in the children. In the next issue, the Sensitive Periods children move through will be explained. ■

Barbara Isaacs, principal, MCI London

BOOK REVIEW

Montessori Insights for the parents of young children

By Aline D. Wolf

Aline D. Wolf's slim booklet (51 pages) is for parents/carers of children primarily under the age of seven.

Her purpose is to offer what she considers to be the best of Maria Montessori insights to today's parents and to suggest how these principles can be applied in a world that is significantly different from the world in which Montessori developed them.

The importance of the early years, preparing your home for a toddler, sensitive periods, gaining independence, the selection of toys, the question of television and discipline are some of the areas looked at in this booklet.

The reader is taken through many of the fundamental principles of Montessori in a clear, informative and thoughtful manner with plenty of references made to more in depth works should the reader choose to delve a little deeper. In addition, each section is complemented by numerous practical activities.

As a Montessori teacher I found the content of the book very parent friendly with just the right amount of information for today's busy parents. It is thoughtfully written, offering a wonderful, practical insight into Montessori at home for today's parents/carers.

The booklet is priced at \$6.00 (£3.20 approx.) and can be ordered from www.parentchildpress.com

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