

Family Connection

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“Since we have the means to guide the child, it is clear that the formation of man is in our hands. We have the possibility to form the citizen of the world and the study of the young child is fundamental to the peace and progress of humanity.”
—Maria Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, p. 93

A PEEK INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Research in the Montessori Classroom

By Heather White



Traditional approaches to education follow a delineated curriculum, specifying what and when a child should learn. Montessori education, on the other hand, encourages children to follow their interests. The environments are carefully prepared to invite the child to explore a variety of topics. Classroom guides share impressionistic lessons or stories that weave a tale or give a dramatic presentation of history designed to spark the child’s interest and open the doors for research endeavors.

Early Childhood

In a Montessori Early Childhood (EC) classroom, research is encouraged through the use of “Who Am I?” story cards. The child reads a card (or has a card read to them by an older classmate or a classroom teacher) describing a distinctive plant or animal and attempts to find the corresponding picture card. For children who have begun reading, they can also match the corresponding label.

EC students will be empowered to gather facts about a variety of topics including plants, animals, biomes, and continents. For children of this age, research will likely focus on very basic facts such as an animal’s appearance, habitat, and food and will encourage the child to draw pictures representing this information.



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Elementary

Elementary-aged students often enjoy extending the exploration of “Who Am I?” story cards that began in EC classrooms, gathering facts about a particular plant or animal of interest to them and creating their own “Who Am I?” story card which they will either add to the classroom set or use to assess their classmates’ knowledge in a game-like fashion.

Elementary students will utilize report organizers to showcase research findings, providing areas for students to write information they have discovered in accompaniment with printed or hand-drawn pictures. The older the child gets, the more comprehensive the report organizers will become with increased space for written responses. Additionally, the variety of topics students will investigate will also expand to now include subjects including states, presidents, other famous historical figures, and elements.

Upper Elementary students will likely not need these report organizers, gathering information and sharing their findings in more personalized manners. Instead, they will enjoy showcasing their knowledge through the creation of creative final products including slideshows, posters, models, and written reports.

Secondary

Secondary students complete complex projects that include research and presentation, illustrating a culmination of learning and mastery of concepts. They may likely present their findings using some of the same tools as their Elementary-aged counterparts including slideshows and written reports, but the level of intricacy and depth of information shared will be considerably more developed.



Given the expansion of the world which occurs during adolescence, natural extensions to real-life research experiences will occur, providing Secondary students with opportunities to engage in research outside of the home and classroom settings that deepen their knowledge and awareness.

Register for our family course!

You and Your Child’s Montessori Education: Early Childhood

A course designed for families interested in incorporating the Montessori philosophy into their homes.

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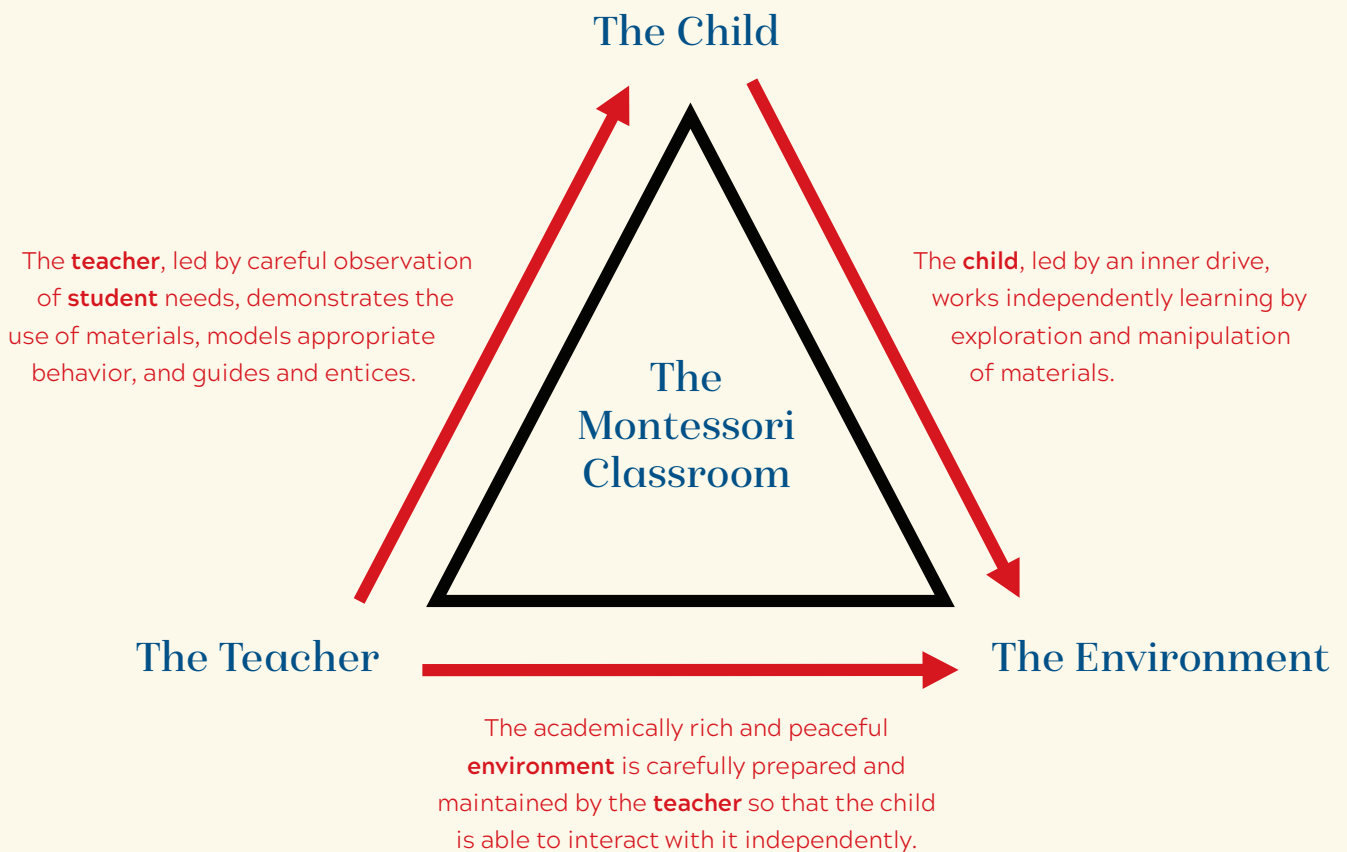


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The Prepared Environment Triangle: The Relationship Between Child, Teacher, and Classroom Environment

By Heather White

A symbiotic relationship exists between the child, their teacher, and the Montessori classroom environment. These connections create a learning triangle that is a hallmark of Montessori pedagogy.



→ The child, teacher, and classroom environment each embody a vertex of the triangle.

→ The red arrows indicate the nature in which each of these vital elements of Montessori pedagogy influence one another.

→ The teacher's actions impact the child and the environment and the child acts upon the environment and interacts with the teacher when guidance or support is needed.

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THE TEACHER

In Maria Montessori's words, "The teacher's task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child." The teacher's objective is to prepare the classroom environment in a way that encourages independence, allows freedom within limits, and establishes a sense of order. They take time to observe each student's interests and developmental levels, ensuring that materials are available to meet each child's needs. They sequence materials and arrange the classroom in a way that is visually appealing and inviting for the children. This work continues on a daily basis as the teacher works diligently to reset the classroom environment, ensuring the beauty of the space is maintained and the child continues to be able to interact with it independently.

In addition to their important role of preparing the classroom space, the teacher also acts as mentor and role model. Based on careful observation, teachers identify individual student needs, then demonstrate the use of materials and model appropriate behavior to help gently guide the children along their path for learning.



"The child, through individual choice, makes use of what the environment offers to develop himself, interacting with the teacher when support and/or guidance is needed."

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The Montessori classroom is known for its simplicity, visual appeal, and individual tailoring to meet the needs of the children it houses. It is a calm, orderly space that is carefully designed to encourage

students to explore and investigate in a way that allows them to educate themselves. Every element is arranged at the child's level and presented in such a way to allow the child to interact with it freely, without relying on the assistance or support of the teacher. As Montessori said, "The first aim of the prepared environment is, as far as it is possible, to render the growing child independent of the adult." From the size of the furniture and the height of artwork hung on the walls to the arrangement of materials on the shelves and the accessibility of items needed for basic self-care, each and every element of the prepared environment is arranged in a deliberate manner that provides accessibility to the child, encouraging their sense of independence and self-confidence.

THE CHILD

Maria Montessori believed that children were led by an inner drive to learn and explore. Their curiosity about the world around them and their individual interests

inspire them to engage with the environment that has been carefully prepared to meet their needs. The materials are practical and self-correcting, empowering students to identify and learn from their own errors. In the event that they become confused or frustrated, the guide is available to offer support and encouragement before they quietly fade once more into the background, allowing the child to continue independently exploring and engaging with the environment that has been carefully prepared to meet their needs.



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