

Family Connection

MAY 2023

Respect for the Child: A Foundational Montessori Principle

By Heather White



“These children are not to be treated as in other schools, where we begin by examining how they are taught, whether they understand, and if they are disciplined. We have on the contrary to learn something else, essential and fundamental, something we should learn from the first day: how to respect the child.” (Montessori 2017, 3)

—MARIA MONTESSORI

Maria Montessori declared that children deserve the same respect as adults. She believed so much in the importance of demonstrating respect for the child that she emphasized the need for educators to develop an understanding of this practice first and foremost as part of their training. In an article for parents and caregivers, she once stated, “These children are not to be treated as in other schools, where we begin by examining how they are taught, whether they understand, and if they are disciplined. We have on the contrary to learn something else, essential and fundamental, something we should learn from the first day: how to respect the child (Montessori 2017, 3).”

Demonstrating respect for the child not only helps them develop confidence and capability, but also encourages them to show respect to others as well, inspiring courtesy, kindness, thoughtfulness, and compassion. Children learn how to treat others by observing the words and behaviors of the adults who surround them.

Model respectful interactions

One of the most impactful ways to demonstrate respect for the child is through interactions with them. Get down on the child’s level, making eye contact with them, letting them know they are heard and that their feelings and opinions are acknowledged and valued. Take the time to speak slowly and calmly, remaining patient and attentive.

Acknowledge the child’s feelings

Recognizing and validating a child’s emotions is a great way to demonstrate respect. When children seem to feel sad, angry, or frustrated, acknowledging those emotions, empathizing, and offering support validates the child’s experience and helps them feel seen.

For instance, if a young child is crying shortly after arriving at school and expresses that they miss their mother, their teacher might say, “You’re sad to be away from your mom. It’s okay to feel sad. I remember being sad when I was little and had to leave my mom, too. Would you like a hug or to go sit in the peace corner to listen to some music?”

Continued on next page



“We must respect the child and he must understand that he is respected.”

—MARIA MONTESSORI

Refrain from interfering

Maria Montessori emphasized the need for parents and educators to refrain from interfering with the child’s activity. In fact, she felt this established a strong foundation for encouraging children to show respect for others. In a conversation with parents, Maria Montessori (2017, 61) once said, “Because the teacher respects each child and refrains from interference, the children treat one another with the same kindness and respect.”

When a child is working on a task or solving a problem, giving them a chance to complete it independently demonstrates respect; it sends a message to the child that the adult acknowledges their capability, allowing them to internalize these feelings and realize their own potential. Avoiding interrupting provides an opportunity for children to discover and correct their own mistakes. Even in situations in which a child does not appear to need assistance, refraining from disrupting their concentration sends a message to them that the adult recognizes and values the work they are doing.

Allow the child to make decisions

The Montessori Method encourages the freedom to choose. Children should be provided opportunities to make their own decisions about the tasks they engage in, where and how they will move, and with whom they will socialize and when. Allowing a child to make these types of choices without being prompted not only helps them learn about the world around them but also builds their self-confidence. By providing opportunities for choice, adults can demonstrate their trust in the child and respect for their curiosity and ability to make their own decisions.

Respect for the child is a foundational principle underlying the Montessori Method. That children should be recognized as capable members of their environments and should be respected as such was a core belief of Montessori. As she once stated in her 1946 London Lectures (Montessori 2012, 132), “We must respect the child and he must understand that he is respected.”



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.

LEARN MORE AT:
amshq.org/familycourse



AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY®
education that transforms lives



What the Hand Does, the Mind Remembers

Sensorial Materials and Hands-on Experiences for Montessori Students of All Ages

By Heather White

The Montessori Sensorial materials are works scientifically designed to isolate a specific quality such as color, size, or shape to develop and refine the child's senses. Montessori (2012, 36) elaborates, "We call it material for the development of the senses, but sense development is merely the consequence of the urge to do something with the hands." Over the years these hands-on experiences allow the child to continue building a deeper understanding of the world around them and the development of their intelligence flourishes.

Early Childhood

Maria Montessori developed Sensorial materials for the three- to six-year-old child as a means to acquire clear, conscious information and to make classifications about their environment. Through work like the Pink Tower, Brown Stair, Baric Tablets, Smelling Bottles, Tasting Bottles, and Fabric Matching, young children can perceive qualities such as size, shape, color, texture, weight, temperature, smell, taste, etc. Since these exercises cover such a wide range of senses, Maria Montessori categorized them into eight different groups: Visual, Tactile, Baric, Thermic, Auditory, Olfactory (scent), Gustatory

Continued on next page



(taste), and Stereognostic (ability to identify an object through touch alone). The Sensorial materials are carefully and precisely introduced to the child in a way that helps them refine their knowledge and through their manipulation, the child is aided in better understanding their environment.

Elementary

Although Montessori did not develop Sensorial materials for the Elementary-aged child, hands-on activities abound at this level, continuing to provide meaningful experiences where students can develop a deeper understanding of the world around them. Elementary students have an innate interest in their place in the world. They learn how the world works and where their place is in it, becoming engrossed in the study of history, geography, astronomy, geology, biology, physical science, and chemistry through experiments, research projects, art projects, and going-out experiences in the community.

Authentic Montessori math and language materials also provide Elementary-aged students with a rich sensorial experience allowing them to grasp higher level abstract concepts with ease.



Secondary

Sensorial experiences look different, once again, at the Secondary level. Adolescents gain real-life, hands-on experiences through their work in the community. During Montessori's time, she envisioned this to be life on a farm, where students would fulfill the daily tasks required to maintain a farm, developing an understanding of economics, shelter, transportation, and so on, through their manual chores while strengthening their understanding of their connection to one another and to the land. Today, Secondary Montessori programs vary, with some having a farm as a prepared environment and others using different business opportunities for students. All Secondary students are provided with rich and real adult-level experiences where they learn how to organize themselves, care for others and their communities, and handle adult responsibilities. Examples might include growing a community garden or volunteering at a local food bank. Students may even feel empowered to organize their own outreach program based on a topic of which they feel passionate.



MontessoriLife THE OFFICIAL BLOG AND MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY

www.MontessoriLife.org