



Using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-R in the Montessori Classroom

Space and Furnishings

1. Indoor Space

The Montessori classroom is an environment that is thoughtfully and deliberately prepared for the developmental needs of the mixed age grouping of children. The classroom will be clean and well maintained, organized, and free from clutter and visual distraction. The indoor space should provide natural light, be well-ventilated, including operable windows, be temperature controlled for optimal comfort, and provide ample space to comfortably accommodate shelving and furniture, and defined areas and spaces for individual, small group, and large group activities. Shelving may be arranged to avoid large, open spaces as a method of encouraging walking and careful movement by the children but will not obstruct supervision by adults.

The Montessori classroom should be fully accessible to children and adults with disabilities and be in full compliance with ADA requirements and standards.

2. Furniture for routine care, play, and learning

All furniture in the Montessori classroom will be child sized, sturdy and in good repair. Children may choose to engage in activities at tables, or floor rugs/mats used especially for “work” with materials. With the mixed age grouping of children, most should be able to rest their feet on the floor and rest their elbows on the table when using table and chair. Although there may not be a chair or table space for every child during instructional times of the day, there will be during meal times.

The Montessori prepared environment includes careful consideration of storage space for convenient and easy access to furnishings (such as nap mats) and additional materials/activities. Each child will have a storage area for work and/or projects within the classroom. Convenient storage for a change of clothes will be accessible from the classroom area. Cubbies may be outside of the classroom area but a child will be supervised when accessing outdoor clothing.

The Montessori classroom may include a woodworking bench; a station specific to water activity (such as dishwashing or cloth washing) and will include numerous activities for exploration of textures such as sand or rice.

3. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort

The Montessori classroom may provide “soft toys” during the instructional times of the day by offering tactile, fabric activities in the sensorial curriculum area, soft objects in the cultural/science area, and “story sets” with fabric figures in the language area.

Most Montessori classrooms will provide a significant portion of the room that is carpeted or covered with a large rug where children may use activities/materials individually, in small groups, or in a large group. There will be at least one to two areas of the classroom with soft furnishings, such as a bean bag, or larger pillows or cushions. These areas can be used at all times by an individual for relaxation free from distraction or interruption from others.

During non-instructional portions of the day, such as nap/rest time or after care, children may have greater access to soft toys, pillows, or other soft furnishings. These might be located in other classrooms which are used by children during other times of the day.

Montessori classrooms do include a number of ways that children may relax and find comfort. In addition to a quiet area, there may be a reading corner, a "Peace" corner, and a place where a child may sit with a friend or teacher and choose an activity that brings comfort, or simply choose to observe and reflect.

4. Room arrangement for play

The Montessori prepared environment is integral to the workings of the classroom. Shelving and furniture is carefully and thoughtfully arranged to establish positive movement by the child and to provide ample space. Rugs, or mats, are used to designate individual or small group work areas and children are specifically taught to move around each others' work areas. The placement of areas of the classroom is prescribed so that more quiet activities will not be disrupted by more active activities. The Grace and Courtesy curriculum teaches children how to interrupt in a polite way, and how to ask before engaging in a work activity with a peer. Each curriculum area is well defined with shelves which are arranged by the scope and sequence of the lessons and activities in that area. All materials needed for a particular activity are self-contained within a tray or basket, and activities are arranged from left to right, top to bottom, and from simple to complex on the shelves for each curriculum area. This organization of activities on each shelf makes written labels unnecessary as children are aware of this organization and are taught to return activities to their proper place when they have finished with them.

Observation and supervision are fundamental to the Montessori system of education and the room arrangement provides for observation of each child at all times. While one teacher may be sitting with a child to present a lesson, the other adult in the classroom will be charged with supervision, and maintaining tone and positive social interactions.

5. Space for privacy

A child's need for privacy is respected in the Montessori prepared environment by furniture arrangement, and providing several quiet areas (reading, Peace, observation by child). Rugs, or mats, are used to designate individual or small group work. The Grace and Courtesy curriculum teaches and models how to interrupt in a polite way, respect a peer who wants to be alone, and how to ask to join in. Children may always choose to work alone at a table or work mat.

6. Child Related Display

The Montessori classroom is aesthetically pleasing, beautiful, and provides minimal visual stimulation and distraction on the classroom walls. This is by design and is supported both by the scientific observations of Dr. Montessori and by recent research which indicates the negative impact of visual

clutter and visual stimulation on the walls. There may be a limited number of fine art prints, a map, photos, books, and/or items from nature on the walls and shelves.

The display of children's work will be proportional to the amount of other visual displays and is dictated by a ratio of children's work to classroom displays with the majority being child created. Some classrooms may have a specific, but limited, display of children's work such as drawings, paintings, metal insets, or 3-D work. Children may also share written work such as environmental labels. It is, however, a child's choice to ask to have his work displayed.

7. Space for gross motor play

The Montessori program outdoor environment is as thoughtfully and carefully planned as the classroom. Multiple surfaces, ample space for a variety of activities, and a convenient access to bathrooms, water, and storage will be provided. The safety and health of the children is in evidence with ground cover, and well maintained equipment.

A Montessori classroom will have an ample indoor space which can be used for gross motor play. Activities such as "walking on the line" and "walking through the length rod maze" are available during all instructional portions of the day. A space large enough for large group activities is provided.

8. Gross motor equipment

The Montessori program and classroom will provide stationary and portable gross motor equipment in the outdoor and indoor environment for a significant portion of the child's day. This equipment will provide a variety of developmentally appropriate activity for a variety of skills and developmental levels.

Indoor equipment includes a "walking on the line" activity and using the Length Rods to create a "walking through the maze" activity. Many classrooms include yoga cards and a yoga mat for a child's use.

Personal Care Routines

9. Greeting/departing

Children and their parents are always greeted warmly by the school staff at drop off and pick up. Although children are encouraged to enter the classroom independently (without a parent but always with the supervision of a teacher), parents will be aware of and understand the specific procedure and routine for drop off and pick up. A child who needs assistance to engage in the classroom will be supported by the teacher.

Drop off and pick up is one of the methods and times used to communicate and share information with parents and staff.

10. Meals/snacks

All Montessori classrooms will follow sanitary conditions including the cleaning and sanitizing of tables to be used for meals and snack. All children and staff will wash hands before eating. A list of children's food allergies with the child's name and allergen will be prominently posted.

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Although children may engage in group snack at the beginning of the school year, a consistent routine and procedure for having snack with a friend(s) is taught when the group is developmentally ready. Children are able to participate in serving their own snack and its clean up. This enables children to eat when each is ready. Children having snack will be appropriately supervised by staff.

At meal times, staff will sit near enough to engage children in positive, appropriate social conversation and in the use of polite table manners. Children are encouraged to engage in pleasant social interactions independently. In programs which provide lunch for children, child sized serving utensils and pitchers are used. Children are asked to help in the setting of tables, and to clear the tables at the end of the meal.

11. Nap/rest

Montessori programs which are licensed will comply with all regulations regarding nap and rest. Ample space is provided for distance between mats or cots. Children are supervised at all times. Developmentally appropriate procedures and activities are provided for children who are non-nappers and/or early risers.

12. Toileting/diapering

Montessori classrooms maintain sanitary conditions including hand washing in a sink that is not used for food preparations. Bathrooms are observed regularly for cleanliness and order. Children are taught and encouraged to be independent in their toileting/diapering as is developmentally appropriate. Most classrooms will provide storage for a child's provisions that can be accessed by the child as needed. For programs which do not have child sized toilets, steps and handrails are provided for safety and independence.

13. Health practices

Note: *To fully comply with this item, staff and children must wash hands upon arrival in the classroom, before and after water play or messy play, when bodily fluids are involved, after touching trash can lids, or touching animals.*

Children in a Montessori classroom are taught and encouraged to use health practices independently. Specific lessons and materials teach hand washing, changing clothes, and the use of closures such as buttons, and snaps. Children are taught a healthy method for sneezing, coughing, and nose blowing. Some classrooms have a teeth brushing activity with individual supplies for each child.

14. Safety practices

Note: *The ECERS-R manual for this item specifically notes a list of potential indoor hazards but does not identify "choking hazards" as such. Child care licensing regulations for each state shall be complied with by Montessori programs which are licensed day care centers.*

In a Montessori classroom safety rules are explained to the children and are in effect at all times. The indoor and outdoor environments are designed to minimize safety hazards. Attention is paid to unsafe conditions which might arise.

Children are enrolled in a Montessori classroom based on developmental readiness as assessed by the classroom teacher and program director, and the child's parents and with their express written consent. A child who is still putting non-food items in his mouth would not be developmentally ready for a Montessori early childhood classroom setting. Montessori credentialed teachers who have graduated

from a Montessori Teacher Preparation Program accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education are specifically educated to work with children 2 ½- 6 years of age and to provide developmentally appropriate lessons, activities, and guidance in using the Montessori curriculum. The scope and sequence of this curriculum, and the research based didactic materials and lessons, are presented based on ongoing formative assessment and thorough documentation of readiness for each child. Therefore, this differentiated instruction is based on developmentally appropriate need of each child. A specific lesson in the safe use of each material is required before the child may independently choose an activity or material. Small items as part of a lesson or activity are, therefore, presented to the child, who is ready, in a particular manner. The child is closely observed to assure his appropriate use of the materials. If a material is being used in an unsafe or disorganized way, the child will be given a repeat lesson or will be asked to choose a different activity.

The mixed age grouping of children in the Montessori classroom balances the numbers of students of each age for the 3 year age span. Therefore, at the youngest age of the range (2 ½-4) there will typically be only up to 8 children with no more than half of these being children under the chronological age of 3. Parents who choose to enroll their child in a Montessori classroom are familiar, through observation and reading of a parent handbook, with the materials, the curriculum, and the education of the teacher and have participated in the assessment of their child's readiness to be enrolled in the Montessori pre-school classroom.

Language-Reasoning

15. Books and pictures

A Montessori classroom will have an extensive and rich variety of reading materials and language activities in the classroom. Books related to each curriculum area may be found in that area. A classroom will generally have a reading series used for instruction and accessible to children, and books that are developmentally appropriate for the mixed age group based on ongoing formative assessment by the teacher. The Montessori language curriculum includes activities for visual and auditory recognition, discrimination and memory; the teaching of letter sounds; the teaching of reading; handwriting and creative writing; and reading comprehension. The curriculum has an emphasis on phonetics but also includes sight words and irregular sound and letters combinations.

The books and language materials are rotated as interest dictates and will include materials and books related to themes and units of study. Teachers do generally read to the whole group on a daily basis. A teacher will read to a child who asks to be read to but often, it is an older child who will read to a young child on request of the younger child or suggestion of the older child. A variety of reading activities take place daily.

16. Encouraging children to communicate

The Montessori classroom provides a rich language environment for teacher-child interaction and peer to peer interaction. Children are given numerous opportunities daily to express themselves and share communication with others.

There are many activities in the language and cultural areas for children to link spoken and written language. "Picture story" is a dictation describing the child's drawing, or a photo chosen by the child. The moveable alphabet is a wooden box of cutout letters which is used to help a child write words, sentences, or stories on paper. Three part cards on a large variety of science and cultural topics give the child the opportunity to match a picture to its written word. As an extension, the child may create his own booklet by coloring the picture and writing the word.

These are activities initially given as a lesson. A child may then use any of these activities as a free choice activity.

17. Using language to develop reasoning skills

The Montessori classroom is rich in language and concept development. During a formal lesson with a material or activity, the teacher may provide the child with language which identifies the concept being taught. However, because the materials have a design and use that allows the child the opportunity for self-discovery through control of error, most often the child will be able to draw conclusions and make inferences about the concept being explored. Thus, the child is developing and strengthening his reasoning skills based on his exploration of the material and/or the lesson. The teacher's ongoing formative assessment and documentation of each child will guide her instruction specific to that child.

The scope and sequence of each curriculum area, and the integrated nature of the entire curriculum across areas, children are given numerous opportunities to expand their concept development and conversational skills.

A child is free to initiate conversation with peers or a teacher at any time throughout the day. Often, this conversation will be a sharing of a story, an understanding of a concept or activity, or steps in solving a problem. Children are supported and encouraged to resolve conflicts with one another through the Peace curriculum and the lessons of Grace and Courtesy. Generally, the teacher's role is not to solve the problem but to guide the child(ren) in resolving it themselves. This approach to problem solving, be it with a peer, or an activity encourages self-confidence and creative thinking.

Because using a soft tone of voice is both modeled by teachers, and encouraged in children, it may be difficult to hear the exact verbal interaction between children or between a teacher and a child. An ERS assessor may, therefore, need to stand closer to a teacher during an observation to be able to properly score language examples.

18. Informal use of language

The Montessori classroom is rich in language and conversation. Informal conversations take place throughout the day between children and peers and children and teachers. Many of these conversations between child and teacher take place on an individual basis so that the teacher can be most responsive to the needs of each student. Teachers will vary the content and format of these conversations based on the developmental and individual needs of each student. Interactions can be in response to a child

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chosen use of a material, and social conversations that may occur at any time including meals, or outside time. Due to the generally quiet tone of the classroom, the content of these conversations may not be heard by any but those involved. It may, then, be necessary for an observer to stay in close proximity to a teacher in order to hear the interactions that occur.

The Montessori early childhood credentialed teacher is specifically trained in the language development of children in the birth to 6 years age range. The scope and sequence of the language curriculum includes the development of concept formation, vocabulary, conversational skills, and reasoning skills. The teacher and the child develop a strong, positive relationship that has the opportunity to grow over a three year period.

Activities

19. Fine motor

Almost every material and activity in the Montessori classroom directly, or indirectly, provides for the development of the hand from grasping to fine motor skills, including development of a pincer grasp. During the instructional portion of the day, these will include every activity in the Practical Life curriculum such as the use of tools that strengthen the hand and lead to development of the pincer grasp, as well as sewing activities such as bead stringing, sewing cards, and button sewing. The Art curriculum will include a variety of 3-D activities including peg boards, sculpture with a variety of medium, and parquetry blocks and boards; a variety of drawing and painting activities; and the use of tools including scissors. The Knobbed cylinders blocks, the puzzle maps, and the metal insets all require the use of a pincer grip as an indirect introduction to the use of a writing instrument.

All components of a material or activity are self-contained on a tray, basket, or container with all parts needed to complete the activity. These are accessible and easily seen by the children and are organized in a clear sequence on the shelves of each curriculum area. These are freely chosen activities and children are able to return the material, ready for the next use, independently because of the consistency of organization on the shelves. Labels are not needed to help children find what they would like to work with or where to return it when they done.

Some Montessori programs make provide toys such as Legos, and Lincoln logs during the non-instructional portion of the school day.

20. Art

The Art curriculum in the Montessori classroom provides a rich variety of medium and art tools which can be used to create “free art” based on individual expression and skill development. It is rare that a “model” which a child is expected to imitate is provided. Activities are provided within the integrated curriculum and which expand the experience of units of study.

As in every area of the classroom, children are able to expand a given activity over a number of days. Generally, each child will have a name card to put on his work that identifies his desire to continue his work on this project the next day.

21. Music/movement

The Sensorial curriculum in the Montessori classroom includes activities that can be used for the child's exploration of sound and rhythm. These include the Sound Cylinders and sometimes, collections of natural objects that make sound that can be used in a creative self-discovery sound learning activity. A quiet area may include a music source for a child to listen to a variety of music genres and styles. Many classrooms play classical music during the instructional portion of the day.

Free movement is encouraged in the Montessori classroom at all times. Specific activities may include a yoga activity, "walking on the line," or "walking through the length rod maze." At times, these activities will be accompanied by music, singing, or clapping of a rhythm.

A foundational concept of Montessori philosophy is a limit on the number of materials or activities of any specific kind. This deliberate limitation of any one kind of material enables children to develop a number of executive functioning and social skills such as encouraging patience, learning to take turns, the sharing of a material, concentration, attention, and problem solving. Therefore, during the instructional portion of the day there will not be enough musical instruments for at least ½ of the students. During the non-instructional portion of the day, a box of musical instruments may be provided for free choice activity.

Singing and movement activities are included on a daily basis, often in a large group setting or lesson. If a given activity requires "props" there will be enough for every child to choose what he would like to have. Many movement and music activities are related to a unit of study, such as learning indigenous songs and dances when studying a country or continent. Adult guests are invited to share a musical talent, a dance, or cultural activity.

22. Blocks

The Montessori classroom has a variety of block materials which not only provide opportunity for construction and creativity, but which teach the child a variety of concepts related to spatial discrimination of geometric form, balance, dimension, and shape. Each set of the research-based materials in the Sensorial curriculum enables the child to explore a given concept. Many of these materials include ten pieces each as an indirect teaching of the base ten system of mathematics. The materials are available for free choice at all times.

A formal lesson on the safe use of each material is given individually based on developmental readiness and interest. Children are then free to explore the materials through creative construction. By combining multiple sets of materials (a total of 200 pieces) individual, or small groups, are able to create elaborate structures making use of their knowledge of size, width, length, diameter, height, shape, and balance. Accessories such as toy cars, people, and animals are not included so that children can use their imagination to pretend as they play and create stories to go with their structures.

As children work together to create significant structures they are learning cooperative play, creative thinking, problem solving, and conflict resolution. They are also indirectly using mathematical concepts, physics, and exploring "engineering" concepts and design.

During the non-instructional portion of the day, unit blocks, large hollow blocks, and other constructive building materials may be provided for play. Many Montessori outdoor environments include materials that can be used for creative construction such as landscape ties, used tires, plastic piping, etc.

23. Sand/water

All Montessori classrooms provide a variety of sensorial materials (beams, rice, etc.) and water for pouring, scooping, spooning, basting, using tools, such as funnels, eyedroppers, sponges, and more complex Practical Life activities such as hand washing, baby washing, rock scrubbing, dish washing, and table scrubbing.

Most outdoor environments will include a sandbox, and if space permits, water activities.

24. Dramatic play

The Montessori classroom provides a variety of activities that enable children to imitate and act out roles they observe adults participating in. There will be opportunities for housekeeping, such as sweeping and mopping the floor, washing dishes, bathing a baby doll, and a number of food preparation and serving activities. There are many other activities such as plant watering, flower arranging, and window washing that let children assist in caring for their classroom. Often these activities will include the use of child sized tools, an apron, or chef hat.

Like every other activity in the classroom, the child is given a lesson in its safe use. Following this lesson, however, a child, or small group of children, may engage in “pretend” as they work together on a number of these tasks of their choosing.

There are a number of activities in which children get to use a tool such as a hammer, a screw driver, a wrench, or ratchet. The food preparation activities give children the opportunity to use kitchen tools. They also get to serve food to their peers.

In the Cultural curriculum, there are often activities to explore replicas of animals indigenous to a given location, to dress in indigenous clothing, and to prepare and eat food associated with a particular culture.

In the outdoor environment, many schools provide opportunities for gardening, raking, snow shoveling and bird care. With a number of portable playground toys, such as buckets, shovels, structures, and wagons, children can use their imaginations to create a number of play themes.

Dr. Montessori’s scientific observation of children over a period of 45 years, and in cultures around the world, demonstrated that children preferred to engage in activities they observed adults participating in rather than “making believe” that they were engaging in these activities. By providing lessons and activities that allow children to engage in this real way, they develop confidence, competence, and a sense of being capable and significant.

If a child chooses to create a “pretend” story around these real activities, he is able to do so in a way that not only benefits imagination but which encourages the development of positive self esteem. The teacher generally will not intervene unless the child is not using materials in a safe way.

During the non-instructional portion of the day, some Montessori programs may provide “dress-up” activities that a child can choose.

25. Nature/science

The Science curriculum is an integral part of the cultural curriculum. Most Montessori classrooms will include collections of natural objects, such as shells, rocks, leaves, a number of plants placed around the room, and at least one classroom pet.

The botany and zoology scope and sequence gives children the opportunity to learn vocabulary, identify parts of plants and animals, and their natural habitats. There are a variety of activities for exploring the world of plants and animals.

The physical science scope and sequence includes activities, tools, and experiments to investigate the physical world and its forces. Just a few of the units of study include weather, seasons, geography, the solar system, and simple machines.

Large group activities may include science lessons such as dissecting a flower, or fish, exploring weights of various liquids, and other teacher directed activities designed to explore scientific concepts.

Although there will be a number of concrete materials for children to explore, there will also be books, photos, and other activities to extend the child’s experience and exploration.

26. Math/number

The Montessori Math curriculum is a research-based curriculum with a scope and sequence that includes lessons and activities for 1:1 correspondence, counting from zero to 9,999, recognition of numerals, combining numerals and quantities, comparing quantities, measurement, time, and money. This area is responsive to the developmental needs and interests of the children and materials will be rotated as needed. Materials for the recognition and labeling of geometric 3-D and 2-D shapes will be found in the Sensorial area.

As in every curriculum area in the Montessori classroom, lessons and activities are incorporated into the daily activities of the classroom. Activities such as table setting, serving snack, counting members of the classroom, determining daily temperature using a thermometer, and using a calendar give practical application to the activities.

27. Use of TV, video and/or computers

Televisions, videos, and computers are generally not included in the Montessori early childhood classroom. If a video is shown it should be related to a unit of study. Any use of computers should be carefully monitored and time limited.

28. Promoting acceptance of diversity

Respect for all ethnicities, cultures, and customs is foundational to the Montessori system of education which is found on all populated continents. The cultural curriculum includes materials and activities which provide exploration of physical geography, peoples, clothing, housing, animals, food, music and dance. Items that reflect this respect for all people and cultures can be found throughout the classroom.

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A variety of books, photos and activities provide for exploration of gender roles, occupations, abilities, and family structures.

Special attention is paid to include reflections of the diversity of the classroom student population, and the community through food, music, celebrations of holidays, cultural symbols, and art.

Interaction

29. Supervision of gross motor activities

Montessori teachers provide supervision to all children at all times to assure the safety and health of all. Activities and equipment to encourage gross motor development is developmentally appropriate for the mixed age grouping of children and teachers will provide individualized lessons, support and guidance as needed.

The Montessori Grace and Courtesy curriculum teaches and encourages children to take turns, develop patience and self regulation, cooperative play, and how to engage in back and forth conversations, and solving of conflicts with a peer. Teachers provide developmentally appropriate guidance and structure for positive interactions which enable children to learn how to solve problems independently.

30. General supervision of children (other than gross motor)

Most Montessori classrooms are organized using a “up person- down person” structure for supervision. At any given time, one teacher (lead) may be working with a child, or small group and the classroom co-teacher, or assistant, will be responsible for monitoring and supervising the entire group of children and the classroom environment. In a co-teaching situation, the teachers will take turns being the lesson giver and the observer. There is, therefore, always one individual who is responsible for supervising the entire group. The teacher who is working with children will, however, visually scan the environment on a regular basis. If the teacher charged with supervision is called to assist a particular child (ex. Restroom) this will be communicated to the “down person” so that she will maintain visual supervision of the entire group until the other adult is available.

Montessori credentialed teachers are always eager to discuss a child’s work with him if he initiates this conversation. This conversation might include questions about his work, additional information about the skill or concept, and share opinion about the work. Rather than direct praise such as “Good Job” the Montessori teacher might ask about the work and how the child feels about his accomplishment.

Montessori credentialed teachers have a deep respect for independent exploration, “auto- learning” and self-discovery. Therefore, the teacher will not disturb a child who is at work unless the material is being used in an unsafe or chaotic way. Children are given the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and further exploration with a material or activity.

Conversations between teachers and children are generally an individual interaction. Montessori classrooms have a quiet tone during the instructional portion of the day and these individual conversations may be difficult to hear by others.

31. Discipline

Montessori credentialed teachers have a minimum of 30 hours of child development focused on birth to 6 years of age. They are well versed in behavioral expectations and developmentally appropriate practice for the children in the mixed age grouping.

The carefully and thoughtfully prepared environment, the scope and sequence of the curriculum in each area, the mixed age grouping of children, and the understanding of child development and classroom management, gives the Montessori credentialed teacher the tools she needs for the positive guidance of children's behavior. Consistency between adults in the classroom is achieved through ongoing communication, and professional development.

Most Montessori schools will have a referral source list of professional who can be contacted when additional knowledge or support is needed in working with a specific behavior issue.

The Montessori Grace and Courtesy curriculum and the Peace curriculum teaches children how to engage in appropriate social behavior, develop empathy and respect for others, and to solve conflicts with peers. Teachers guide children toward independent resolution of difficulties.

32. Staff-child interactions

Montessori teachers will reciprocate with appropriate physical contact which is initiated by a child. The teacher will respond to a child's emotional tone and need in a manner that is developmentally appropriate for each child. A child's feeling will be validated and the child will be encouraged to express his feelings and the situation resulting in those feelings. Guidance will be provided to solve problems when the child is ready.

The Montessori Grace and Courtesy curriculum is based on mutual respect for all members of the classroom community. Children are taught how to share positive conversations by listening and speaking in turn. They also learn how to politely interrupt and ask for attention.

33. Interactions among children

The Montessori Grace and Courtesy curriculum teaches children how to interact with one another and adults in positive, and appropriate ways. The Montessori credentialed teacher is the tone setter and should model respectful social skills at all times.

Peer interactions are generally quite positive, respectful and supportive. Children may work alone or in a small group at any time during the day.

Program Structure

34. Schedule

The Montessori classroom will include an extended, uninterrupted instructional period of 2 ½ -3 hours in the morning, and may also include an additional instructional period in the afternoon. During this time, children are encouraged to freely choose their activities and the teacher will give individual and small group lessons. If all children are engaged in meaningful, self-chosen activity, the teacher may be observing and documenting based on her knowledge of formative assessment and observation skills.

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Transitions should be as carefully planned as every other aspect of the Montessori environment. Several transitions will be dictated by the child as he is able to move from activity to activity independently. If the classroom has a group “circle” time, children may not be required to attend if still engaged in an activity. It may take some children longer than others to complete a cycle of activity and they will, therefore, join circle on a schedule that allows them to complete their activity.

There may be transitions that include the entire group such as preparing to go outside, or having lunch. These times should be carefully planned but will likely be longer than 3 minutes. This gives children the opportunity, as is developmentally appropriate, to learn social norms for standing in line, how to wait patiently, and how to learn body control and regulation.

Outdoor play will occur daily, weather permitting and should include at least an hour of outdoor play across the day during one or more outdoor times.

35. Free Choice

The Montessori Classroom provides at least one extended, uninterrupted free choice work period, usually in the morning. During this time, children engage in self chosen activities either individually or in a small group. The teacher can use this time to present individual or small group lessons based on observed developmental need and child interest.

Montessori teachers respond to each child’s need and developmental level. Supervision is provided at all times so that children are safe from hazards. Activities are added, and/or changed, as the teacher’s observation indicates need. Individualized instruction based on ongoing formative assessment of each child is provided as needed.

The Montessori Grace and Courtesy curriculum and the Peace curriculum provide a structure and model that supports children in conflict resolution, and solving problems.

36. Group Time

The Montessori credentialed teacher provides group activities and lessons to small groups as well as large groups of children. These large group activities are developmentally appropriate for the mixed age group of students. Children are generally not required to attend these large group activities.

Small group lessons are presented based on student need and groups may well change for various lessons or activities. During the extended work period, children may chose who they work with and on what activity.

37. Provisions for children with disabilities

The Montessori credentialed teacher must complete a course of study which includes techniques for working with children with special needs. Because individualized instruction is informed by ongoing formative assessment, children with special needs are taught in a manner and a rate that is customized to their needs.

Montessori schools have a referral source of professionals who can assist the teacher and the parents in creating a “best practices” plan for each child with special needs. A team approach including parents, classroom teacher, and other professionals assures that the child’s needs will be met.

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Parents and Staff

38. Provisions for parents

The collaboration of parents and teachers is integral to best meeting the child's needs. Regular communication with families is in the form of direct, individual contact as needed, classroom newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, and parent education sessions.

Parents may be provided with variety of experiences for participating at the school, including serving on a Board of Directors, sharing a talent or knowledge with the classroom, and volunteer work for the school.

In many programs, parents are asked to assess the classroom's strengths and weaknesses at least annually. If needed, parents can be referred to specialized professionals in the community.

39. Provisions for personal needs of staff

Most Montessori programs provide for staff with staff restrooms, a separate room for breaks, and professional development.

40. Provisions for professional needs of staff

Building arrangement should include an office or other private space for parent conferences, meetings, or professional development. This office should include room for program administration and storage of files, etc.

41. Staff interaction and cooperation

All staff in a Montessori school should have a job description which clearly outlines the role and responsibilities of the position. Adults who work together in the same classroom with the same group of children will have regular planning time together. Communication methods between classroom staff, teachers, and administration should be clear and convenient. A Montessori program should model cooperation, support, and professional friendship among and between staff.

42. Supervision and evaluation of staff

The staff at a Montessori program should participate in regularly scheduled supervision and evaluation. Peer support and guidance should provide improvement plans that are seen as beneficial.

43. Opportunities for professional growth

Employees new to a Montessori program should receive an orientation about the school, and the classroom in which they will be working. Non-credentialed teachers should be given the opportunity to learn about Montessori philosophy, and methods of child management consistent with the philosophy. Books and other materials should be available for staff.

Opportunities for ongoing professional development should be provided and supported by the school on a regular basis.

