

River Valley Charter School

Greater Newburyport Region

Excerpts from the Charter Contract

Abstract

Education Program

School Environment

Enrollment

EDUCATION PROGRAM

What educational theory will be the foundation of the program and how does it align with the school's mission?

Montessori Method

The River Valley Charter School educational program will be based on the philosophy and methods developed early in this century by Dr. Maria Montessori in her work with underprivileged children. Dr. Montessori found that by providing carefully designed materials and by following the child's lead in pursuit of knowledge, she could in fact educate children thought to be uneducable. Her methods were based on a fundamental trust in each child's instinctive desire to learn. They were also informed by theories of child development and learning that were rather new in her time. Most of these ideas are now generally accepted, but they are not successfully implemented in many of our public schools. The basic principles of these theories are as follows:

- Cognitive development follows a predictable **progression from the concrete to the abstract**. There are specific moments when children are most ready to develop and acquire certain skills. Educators must understand these levels and introduce material at appropriate times.
- Academic, social, and emotional development are interdependent; education must center on the **development of the whole child**.
- Every child has an **inner drive to explore** and discover the world around him. This innate curiosity will lead to productive learning if given the proper environment, resources, and guidance.
- Learning is most productive when **self-directed** and founded on individual interest.
- Learning is most effective when it takes place through **direct sensory experiences** and interaction with objects in their natural context.
- Information should be presented in a pattern of **whole-to-part**, and integrated through **interdisciplinary study**, so students can place it in context and understand how things are related.
- Learning must be enhanced and **applied**, especially in later years, by **going out** and doing relevant work in the community.

Implemented together as a comprehensive methodology, these principles form a foundation for motivated learning and high achievement, thus meeting our mission to produce graduates who reach their full academic potential and are self-reliant, productive citizens adept at critical thinking and creative problem solving.

Middle School

The RVCS middle school will continue with the Montessori approach, but will focus on the specific issues of early adolescence. Students 12-14 years old undergo dramatic physical, cognitive, and emotional changes. They experience conflict between their individuality and societal expectations. They are highly preoccupied with their social lives. For these reasons, they require a stable environment, close adult relationships, opportunities to collaborate, and work that is challenging and relevant in the real world.

Educators working within the traditional middle-school model have acknowledged the necessity of many of the elements we intend to incorporate. The National Association of Secondary School Principals, in their 1985 report "Schools in the Middle," noted the benefits of applied learning; focus on total growth and development (not just intellectual); differentiated learning; correlated and integrated curriculum; exploration; individualized instruction; interdisciplinary programs and teaching teams; multi-age grouping; and peer teaching. These are all time-tested basics of the Montessori method and will naturally be included in middle-school education at River Valley Charter School.

Motivation

Experience has shown that the Montessori environment exerts a powerful positive influence on a student who is disruptive, unhappy, or unmotivated. Such a student will become productive in the RVCS program because he will be empowered to direct his own activity; peers and teachers will model appropriate behavior and respect; the curriculum and materials will address his particular learning style; and teachers will have the time to work with him individually.

Early adolescents are particularly vulnerable to motivation problems in school. The RVCS program will be uniquely qualified to address the following issues commonly found in middle schools, as follows:

- It will provide **ample opportunities for success**, so students who think they can't do the work compete against themselves and learn from their mistakes.
- It will **match academic study to students' interests and their abilities**. Students will have individual learning contracts (ILCs) structured to their developmental level. Students will have many opportunities to choose from teacher-designed options, to select special-interest topics for independent study, and to try a variety of presentation techniques.
- RVCS students will **actively participate in setting their own goals** through their ILCs, which motivates them to follow

As the child advances through the last years of Elementary II and into Middle School, the pedagogic emphasis reflects his changing needs. The projects become longer term and more collaborative, with less reliance on the Montessori materials and more use of reference books, textbooks, computers, experiments, model building, mapping, drawing, music, and drama. There is more direct instruction from the teacher and the day is more tightly structured. Learning outside the school expands into internships and community service.

(b) Curriculum Design and Sources

The River Valley Charter School curriculum will be unique to the school. Using the services of a qualified education consultant, we will correlate the Montessori *Scope and Sequence* with the Massachusetts *Curriculum Frameworks*. (See Appendix F for a sample correlation from Montessori Made Manageable, Inc.) This comprehensive correlation will ensure full coverage of all the material in both curricula. The school will update and re-evaluate its curriculum yearly based on input from test results and school audits.

The RVCS curriculum will be overlaid to relate and apply the history, ecology, and culture of the Merrimack River Valley through our Curriculum Partners Program. This program will serve as the medium for connecting subjects among each other and to the larger community. It will also be a vehicle for older students' internships and community service. Partnering organizations will participate in developing this aspect of the RVCS curriculum.

Elementary Curriculum

While the Massachusetts *Curriculum Frameworks* are organized into learning standards within content strands, the Montessori *Scope and Sequence* is based on the *Five Great Lessons*, which present the emergence of the universe and the progression of human civilization. The RVCS curriculum will fully cover all the *Frameworks* content strands, while adhering to the Montessori principle of presenting information in a whole-to-part progression. For example, the first Great Lesson introduces the beginning of the universe, the emergence of matter, and the formation of the earth. Students take in this lesson and explore details according to their individual learning contract. Within this structure, the physical, earth, and space sciences sections of the Massachusetts *Science and Technology* curriculum are covered but students also comprehend the information within the larger context. See Appendix E for a complete description of the *Five Great Lessons*.

The elementary curriculum strongly emphasizes math and language, then uses them thematically to study other subjects. Literature is an integrating link for all academic disciplines. Emphasis is on open-ended research and in-depth study using primary and secondary sources, as opposed to textbooks and other summaries.

Mathematics will initially be taught with manipulative materials that demonstrate the interrelatedness of geometry, arithmetic, and algebra. Students must understand how to work with the manipulatives as well as how their findings translate into accurate conventional math computations. Students identify relationships, theorems, and formulae themselves. In addition, they learn about the people who first made these discoveries.

Language Arts will emphasize basic reading skills, using a combination of whole language and phonetics. Early in the elementary program, students will be introduced to the mechanics of the English language, the etymology of words, syntax, and parts of speech with the aid of the Montessori materials (see Appendix C). In addition to the written word, the language arts curriculum emphasizes other forms of communication, including debate, oral delivery, and group discussion.

Social Studies and Sciences integrate anthropology, astronomy, biology, chemistry, economics, geography, geology, government, history, philosophy, physics, political science, and sociology rather than teaching them as separate subject matters. The *Five Great Lessons* set the stage so the child can see and understand the extent of human labor necessary to accomplish all that is here in the present. For example, biology instruction provides the nomenclature needed to structure and relate facts and processes in order to develop an ecological view of life and a feeling of responsibility for the environment. Geography is presented to illustrate the ways in which topography and land forms have affected the histories of peoples and their civilizations. The study of human civilizations focuses on the material and spiritual "fundamental needs:" food, shelter, transportation, defense, clothing, art, religion, friendship, and character. The use of timelines, pictures, charts, and other visual aids supports the temporal sequences and the interrelationships of these disciplines.

Music, Art, Drama, Movement, Physical Education, and Foreign Language will be integral to the curriculum, with specialty classes for each. These subjects will correlate with and enhance themes currently under study. For example, while studying ancient civilizations, children research the development of music in a timeline; relating instruments, composers, musical forms, and literature to the country of origin, art, architecture, and politics of the times.

Curriculum Partners Program Example

"Local Children from Years Past" Project. One year in Newburyport's past will be chosen by the students to become a multidisciplinary theme spanning a semester. The starting point of immersion into the past will be a photograph of a class from the nation's first Free School in Essex, Massachusetts, founded in 1725, or the Kelley School, a local elementary school founded in 1873. Each student will be given the name of one child in the picture to research.

Each student will be expected to extrapolate details from the past to prepare an historical fiction about an actual child. The

lives. The year-one focus on humanities will include themes of exploration and new beginnings, identity, independence/interdependence, and the circle of life. The year-two focus on physical science themes will include balance, change, force, and movement. Students will ask large questions, look for patterns, and place information into the larger context.

World Languages One or more foreign languages will be offered.

Computer Literacy will focus on the impact of computer technology on human society, and will emphasize the use of computers and the Internet as tools for tasks that cannot be performed as effectively by other means. Students will learn to use the Internet and email for research and communication; database software for organization and retrieval of data and research results; spreadsheets and graphing tools for the evaluation of these results; and word processing, Web page design, and presentation software for communication of ideas and research results. In addition, well designed simulation software will be used to enhance students' abilities to explore, discover, and develop problem solving strategies.

Physical Education and Health Physical education will focus on cooperative games, team sports, individual sports, aerobic activities, and fitness. Health will be devoted to issues pertinent to the needs of early adolescence. Topics will include belonging, friendship, adolescent development, stress management, self-esteem, peer pressure, drug education, sexuality, nutrition, and balanced living.

Fine Arts will be integrated throughout the curriculum as well as part of a weekly elective period during which students select an area of exploration. Projects will vary depending on student interest.

Character Development will be a regular and explicit theme of class discussions. It will be continually reinforced through situational problem-solving, role-playing, the learning contracts, collaborative work, mentoring, and the multi-year relationships with teachers. RVCS teachers will have the Montessori training to be alert for "teachable moments," the circumstantial or developmental moments in which a student is especially open to a particular lesson. Character development will be woven through every other curriculum area. Literature, for example, can be used to observe and discuss protagonists' characters in relation to personal choices and environmental influences. History and current events illustrate the impact of personal character traits on society and posterity, for example those of Clinton, Hitler, or Ghandi.

Internships will provide experiences that build confidence and help our early adolescent students develop a broader view of their place in society. Our ongoing partnerships with a variety of local organizations will immerse students in the resources of the community, as well as draw the community into the education of its future citizens.

Each student will participate in an internship program. Seventh graders will rotate through assignments as classroom assistants in the Elementary I and II programs. Eighth graders will work with local partnerships or businesses completing mutually agreed-upon projects.

Each student will make two major presentations or exhibits each year about their internship. These will be based two different site categories (environmental, cultural, governmental, or architectural) and use two different presentation techniques (narrated tours at a facility, role-playing presentations, video productions, or interactive computer productions). The content of the presentation will involve a cross-curriculum approach to include: the presentation, a written information packet for the audience, calculation and a report of production costs, and the development of an evaluation tool to be completed by the audience after the presentation.

(c) Organization of Students and Faculty

River Valley Charter School will consist of Elementary I for ages 6-9, Elementary II for ages 9-12, and Middle School for ages 12-14. Our goal is an even distribution of ages within each group.

The elementary faculty will consist of one lead teacher and one assistant teacher in each classroom of about 23 children. In the middle school, there will be two teachers (one with a humanities background and one with a math/science background) and one assistant per 32 students.

(d) School Schedule and Calendar

The River Valley Charter School day will be six and one-half hours, from 8:30 to 3:00, with fee-based day care provided before and after school hours. The school calendar will follow the existing public school calendar—180 school days with observance of federal, state, and principal religious holidays. Vacation schedules may vary somewhat from the public schools, but the school year will contain at least the state minimum hours of instruction. Some vacation day care will be provided.

Assessment

How will student progress be assessed?

Student performance will be assessed with the following tools, all designed to determine and report individual progress toward specific benchmarks defined in the RVCS curriculum.

Language tutor. A portion of the day will be devoted to intensive, small-group or one-on-one English instruction. Initially, the tutor will shadow the child in the classroom to provide language assistance as the child pursues learning (and nonacademic) activities with other students and the head teacher. As the child's language ability improves, the tutor will phase out of the classroom, but will continue to provide assistance with reading and writing. This will be especially important in the middle school, where there will be a greater emphasis on reading comprehension and written language.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Culture

Please describe the culture or ethos you expect to create in your school.

The Montessori environment is a balance of two interdependent elements: students' freedom to explore and think for themselves and their responsibility to work and learn within the community. With the autonomy to manage time and make choices, students acquire a sense of ownership for their own growth and development. They accept responsibility for setting goals and completing assignments, as well as for being contributing members of the group.

There will be three overriding expectations for students' behavior while at school:

- **Purposeful activity.** Students will be engaged in their studies. Positive attitudes toward work develop as part of the classroom culture and are inculcated from the first day.
- **Responsibility.** Students will take an active role in their own education. They will help create their individual learning contracts and weekly work plans. They will learn to contribute to the maintenance and management of their own communities. They will be expected to contribute to the larger community through service and, in the later years, internships.
- **Respect.** Students will be respectful of themselves, others, each other's work, their classrooms and materials, and the environment.

The classroom culture promotes an atmosphere of order, calm, and civility that is quite remarkable to an onlooker used to traditional public schools. It helps free the teachers from constant disciplining and it allows the students to concentrate on their work.

Discipline and Conduct

Please summarize the school's discipline policy or code of conduct (the unabridged policy can be part of your attachments).

Discipline

The structure of the Montessori classroom eliminates many of the discipline issues found in other classroom environments. In the first days of every school year, the students and teacher together develop basic class rules. If additional issues arise, the class as a community establishes ground rules so that they will be able to learn from the situation. The consequences for not following the ground rules and not accepting responsibility will depend upon the severity of the issue and will follow a hierarchy of consequences laid out in the code of conduct, including parent intervention and removal from the classroom or the school.

In the Middle School, integrity and responsibility will be heavily emphasized. Students will be expected to keep their word and to pull their weight in collaborative projects. In cases where they step out of bounds through physical or verbal abuse, cooperative discipline results. Students take an active role in analyzing their own behavior and are encouraged to learn from their mistakes. See the Cooperative Discipline Student Action Plan in Appendix I.

Code of Conduct

A series of workshops involving students, their families, school volunteers, trustees, and staff will be held following completion of the admissions process. The focus of the workshops will be to create three separate handbooks outlining rules, policies, and procedures governing behavior: 1) the Student Handbook, which will cover the behavior of the students and logical consequences for stepping out of bounds; 2) the Staff Handbook, which will cover the behavior of all staff; and 3) the Volunteer Handbook, which will cover the behavior of all volunteers.

RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL

ENROLLMENT POLICY

Updated March, 2000

Recruitment

The River Valley Charter School will hold an annual enrollment period for applicants. The enrollment period will be advertised widely throughout the region and will include public information sessions for interested families. The annual enrollment period will last for a minimum of two months and will end in March, when a lottery will be held. Applications submitted after the deadline for any enrollment period must be resubmitted in the next enrollment period.

If the waiting list is depleted during the school year, the school will hold additional enrollment periods and lotteries as necessary.

Applications

Applications will be accepted from any child meeting the school's age requirements and residing in either Newburyport, Newbury, Amesbury, Salisbury or W. Newbury. Non-residents anticipating moving to the region may apply but will be placed in a separate lottery.

Lotteries to be held for the River Valley Charter School will be completely free of preference and based on fair practices. No student will be discriminated upon based on race, color, national origin, creed, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in English, physical or mental disability, academic achievement, or town of residence (within the school's chartered region). In addition, Montessori experience will not be required, nor used as a basis of admission.

Sibling Preference

In an effort to keep families together in one school, sibling preference will be granted. This will be accomplished in three ways. First, siblings of currently enrolled students will be placed in a separate lottery that establishes a separate sibling list. This sibling list will get preference for enrollment. Second, siblings of students newly applying will be given preference during lottery selection, as described below. Third, once a new student is enrolled, any siblings they have on the general lottery list will bump up to the sibling waiting list.

Public Lottery

All applications received by the deadline will be entered into a public lottery. Applicants will be placed in the lottery by age as of September 1 of the upcoming academic year. If there is a discrepancy between a child's age and grade last completed, then the child will be lottered with the age group of the grade he will be entering, as determined by the school Director.

Three separate lotteries will be held at the end of each enrollment period: one for siblings of currently enrolled students, one for general new applications and one for non-residents expecting to move into the region. Each application will be assigned a random



RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL

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WHAT OUR LOGO IS ABOUT Montessori's Five Great Lessons

Our logo is a representation of Montessori's Five Great Lessons and was designed by Libby Delana, a Newburyport resident. The child, as the focus, is juggling five objects – the World represents the Story of Creation, the Shell represents the Coming of Life, the Hand represents the Story of Humans, the Hieroglyphics represents the Story of Language, and the 8 represents the Story of Numbers.

Montessori uses its Five Great Lessons as an introduction to all topics, providing a "Big Picture" to demonstrate how the sciences, art, history, language, geography are interrelated. From that point, students are introduced to increasing levels of detail and complexity within these broad areas.

The Story of the Creation of the Universe describes how minerals and chemicals formed the elements; how matter transforms to three states of solid, liquid, and gas; how particles joined together and formed the earth; how heavier particles sank to the earth's core and volcanoes erupted; how mountains were formed and the atmosphere condensed into rain, creating oceans, lakes, and rivers. From this story, students are introduced to lessons in physics, astronomy, geology, and chemistry. For example, they learn about light, heat, convection currents, gravity, galaxies, planetary systems, the earth's crust, volcanoes, erosion, climate and physical geography.

The Coming of Life explains how single-cell and multi-cell forms of life became embedded in the bottom of the sea and formed fossils. It traces the Paleozoic, Mesozoic, and the Cenozoic periods, beginning with the kingdom of trilobites and ending with human beings. The teacher indicates on a time line where vertebrates began, followed by fish and plants, then amphibians, reptiles, and birds and mammals. This lesson is the basis for lessons in chemistry, nutrition, categories of animals and plants, care and requirements of different animals, and their interrelationship with an ecological system. Students are introduced to formal scientific language of zoology, botany, and anthropology.

The Story of Humans introduces human beings and their unique endowments of intellect and will. The aim is for the children to imagine what life was like for early humans. This lesson is the basis for lessons in prehistory and the emergence of ancient civilizations. Students are introduced to an analytical tool to compare cultures. They learn how climate and topography influence culture and political geography.

The Story of Language describes the origin, structure, and types of writing and speaking. It begins with a discussion of the Egyptians, who had two kinds of symbols, one for ideas and one for sounds. The story goes on to describe the Phoenicians, who used the Egyptian's sound pictures but not their idea pictures. Next, it describes



RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL

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Welcome to River Valley Charter School

WHO WE ARE

River Valley Charter School (RVCS) is a regional public school serving students from Amesbury, Newbury, Newburyport, Salisbury and West Newbury. RVCS opened in September 1999 with 160 students enrolled in grades 1 through 5 and will grow to 256 students in grades 1 through 8 in Year 2002. Our students enroll by means of a lottery with the only preference given to siblings. Each classroom of 24 students has one Head and one Assistant Teacher providing a student-teacher ratio of 12 to 1. RVCS joins a population of over 200 public and 4,000 private Montessori schools in the nation, but it is the first Montessori public school to start "from scratch," with a majority of students having no previous Montessori experience. RVCS also joins a population of over 1,680 charter schools in 37 states, with 34 charter schools in Massachusetts.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools are public school started by parents, teachers, businesses and/or community leaders. In Massachusetts, these schools operate independently from local school districts, but are accountable to the Department of Education. Charter schools are held to stringent standards of accountability in Massachusetts. RVCS's application to the Department of education serves as a five-year contract between the Board of Trustees and the state. The state monitors progress towards the goals stated in the charter through annual site visit. Near the end of the five-year period, the school will go through a more detailed review process for renewal of the charter.

MISSION

"The mission of the River Valley Charter School is to provide a rigorous academic program based on the Montessori philosophy and rooted in the history, culture, and ecology of the Merrimack River Valley. Students will reach their full potential as scholars and as self-reliant, productive members of society. They will be adept at critical problem solving and will be fully prepared to succeed in future schools, careers, and civic life." The RVCS curriculum works with Curriculum Partners such as Massachusetts Audubon Society, Maritime Museum and Parker River Clean Water Association, utilizing the vast resources available in the Merrimack River Valley. This partnership allows students to use the community as both a source of knowledge and a means of applying what they learn.



RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL

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MONTESSORI PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY

Maria Montessori, MD

The River Valley Charter School educational program is based on the Montessori philosophy and methodology. Dr. Maria Montessori, the first female physician in Italy, began working with children in the early part of the century. At the request of local councilmen, she opened a child-care facility in the tenements of Rome where children were not being supervised as a result of their parents needing to work. She agreed to get involved with this venture as long as she could determine how best to work with the children. In 1906, Casa de Bambini (House of Children) was opened. Dr. Montessori continued with her medical practice, but she observed daily at the child care facility. Through her observations, she realized children learn on their own, that all adults need to do is provide the environment and materials to assist in the process. Dr. Montessori began to develop materials for the children to work with as she trained her staff as guides for the children. It was not long before very young children were reading and many people around the world were taking note of this great accomplishment. Casa de Bambini observers would ask Dr. Montessori how she had taught these young children to read and she would say, "Do not look at me, look at the children," for it is in the children where all elements of intelligence lie in wait for the adult to allow the learning to occur.

MONTESSORI PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY

US History

President Woodrow Wilson was one of the many leaders who expressed interest in Montessori education. In fact, President Wilson sent a representative to Rome to observe and meet with Dr. Montessori, who was subsequently invited to the United States with the intent to bring Montessori education to public schools. Unfortunately, the war began and Montessori education was put on a back burner. It was not until 1960 that the first Montessori school, The Whitby School, opened in Greenwich, Connecticut. Since that time, Montessori schools have grown throughout the country in both the private and public sectors.

Characteristics of a Montessori School

Multi-age Classrooms

Classes are three-year age spans in the elementary program and two in the middle school, maximizing curriculum options, encouraging cooperation, and fostering self-confidence in students who serve as role models.

What Makes Montessori Unique?

- ◆ Montessori schools begin with a deep respect for children as unique individuals. They work from a deep concern for their social and emotional development.
- ◆ Montessori schools are warm and supportive communities of students, teachers, and parents. Children don't get lost in the crowd!
- ◆ Montessori consciously teaches children to be kind and peaceful.
- ◆ Montessori classrooms are bright and exciting environments for learning.
- ◆ In Montessori schools, learning is not focused on rote drill and memorization. Our goal is to develop students who really understand their schoolwork.
- ◆ Montessori students learn through hands-on experience, investigation, and research. They become actively engaged in their studies, rather than passively waiting to be spoon-fed.
- ◆ Montessori is consciously designed to recognize and address different learning styles, helping students learn to study most effectively.
- ◆ We challenge and set high expectations for all our students, not only a special few.
- ◆ Montessori students develop self-discipline and an internal sense of purpose and motivation. After graduation from Montessori, they will find that these values will serve them very well in high school, university, and in their lives as adults.
- ◆ Montessori schools normally reflect a highly diverse student body and their curriculum promotes mutual respect and a global perspective.
- ◆ Montessori instills within students a love for the natural world. Natural science and outdoor education is an important element of our children's experience.
- ◆ The Montessori curriculum is carefully structured and integrated to demonstrate the connections among the different subject areas. Every class teaches critical thinking, composition, and research. History lessons link architecture, the arts, science and technology.
- ◆ In Montessori schools, students learn to care about others through community service.
- ◆ In Montessori schools, we not only teach; we facilitate learning, coach our students along, and come to know them as friends and mentors.
- ◆ Students in Montessori schools are not afraid of making mistakes; they see them as natural steps in the learning process.
- ◆ Montessori students learn to collaborate and work together in learning and on major projects. They strive for their personal best, rather than compete against one another for the highest grade in their class.

Individualization and Independence

The Montessori program consists of a prepared environment, scaled to children, in which each student is encouraged to choose individual work at his or her own educational level and proceed at a pace which is equally the student's own. Individualization, however, does not mean constant direct attention from the teacher but the learner does have an obligation to engage in meaningful work on an individual basis.

In order to provide individualization for all, the teacher will require students to be significantly responsible for the construction and independent execution of their own plans. The student must accept the responsibility of choosing challenging work and executing it without infringing on the rights of others who share the environment and who are also charged with their and independent and collective responsibilities.

Motivation

Montessori programs encourage "learning as its own reward." Children, however, who have spent a great deal of time in schools and/or homes which rely on rewards and punishments to shape behavior, may have difficulty in making the shift to an atmosphere where intrinsic motivation is expected. Children are expected to leave behind the rewards and punishments of their former educational lives.

This will require a commitment on the part of parents, as well, to adopt a philosophy of parenting that supports both a sense of personal responsibility and intrinsic motivation.

THE MONTESSORI PHILOSOPHY AND METHOD

Dr. Maria Montessori developed the Montessori philosophy early in this century in her work with underprivileged children. Her methods were based on a fundamental trust in each child's instinctive desire to learn.

From the concrete to the abstract; cognitive development follows a predictable progression in this direction.

Development of the whole child; education must center on the whole child. Academic, social and emotional development are interdependent.

Inner drive to explore; Every child wants to discover the world around him. This innate curiosity will lead to productive learning given the proper environment, resources and guidance.

Self-Directed; learning is most productive when founded on individual interest.

Direct Sensory experiences; Learning is most effective through interaction with objects in their natural context.

Interdisciplinary Study, Whole-to-Part; Information should be presented in this pattern, and integrated so students can place it in context and understand their interrelation.

Applied Learning; learning must be enhanced by going out and doing relevant work in the community.

Public School Montessoriana

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Ideas and information intended to improve the lives of children and adults associated with public Montessori programs

Parent Misunderstanding Is Costly—and Avoidable

By Jane Carol Manner

When our public Montessori school opened four years ago, I naively expected that parents who chose us as a magnet option for their children would do so with some knowledge of what we would try to provide.

Those of us who were the charter staff members of the school were at various stages of our own Montessori knowledge and training. A few were fully certified, others had begun training on their own prior to being invited to join the school. Still others had limited knowledge of Montessori education.

Those who fell in the latter category, however, had been selected by the principal and lead teacher because they held personal philosophies of education which aligned them very strongly with Montessori principles and practice.

We recognized that, like us, our parents would represent many different levels of Montessori background. This proved to be true.

Some knowledgeable parents who had been paying tuition in private schools fairly leapt at the chance to avail their children of a Montessori education at public expense. Others, however, seemed to enroll for reasons less related to familiarity with the philosophy and practice.

As time went on, parents had opportunities to express their reasons for student enrollment. Motivations such as neighborhood, newness of the school and its equipment and media coverage of a "new and exciting concept in education" were commonly offered.

Still others indicated that their children had been having problems in traditional classrooms. They saw our school as a chance for a new beginning with a different and promising concept which might cure the difficulties that had plagued them in their former schools.

We began to discover an extraordinarily wide range of parental information (and often misinformation) about Montessori, as we sought to provide parent training during that first year.

A common misunderstanding revolved around the concept of independence and the related issue of individualization of instruction. We recognized that for families joining us with older students, special efforts were often necessary in the interpretation of our philosophy and mission, as they frequently had expectations that had been molded in more traditional schools during the earlier years of their children's education.

Our attempts to provide such training never waned, because, with an influx of new parents and students each year, the need to interpret the philosophy to a new audience did not decline. In addition to our direct efforts, a growing asset has been the increasing number of returning parents who informally offer their views and experiences to the new.

Educating Parents

Parents with longevity in the program can be a great help in educating other families about our particular delivery system for educational excellence. A problem

arises, however, when new parents focus only on what their student will receive from the Montessori program, without attending to what will simultaneously be expected. A big part of our job becomes to make the reciprocal nature of this relationship clear. And we have concluded that the optimal time to convey this message is prior to enrollment.

Our efforts to explain this reciprocity have taken a number of avenues. Our most effective strategy, however, resides in the weekly tours offered to prospective parents and children. This represents the first forum in which we can interpret the Montessori message to those considering our school.

It will come as no surprise to most Montessorians to discover that this may be the true "critical period" for instilling the foundation for wise decision making on the part of parents of prospective students. Our interactive tours may be the most important strategy we possess, because questions posed by parents during these frequent events invariably provide departure points for the description of important elements of our philosophy.

Face to face with inquiring parents, our lead teacher or another knowledgeable staff member can informally check for understanding, and dispel much misinformation. Some parents who would not be comfortable with a program in which traditional grades are not assigned, for example, are able to discover this information and consider it before applying.

A concomitant to offering individualization is the responsibility of each learner to use this freedom wisely.

This means, among other things, that the student must accept the responsibility of choosing challenging work and executing it without infringing on the rights of others who share the environment and who are also charged with their own independent and collective responsibilities.

It may seem ironic to some that this independence is much more than a personal asset; its reciprocal is responsibility to one's colleagues and environment. When some parents discover the demands this new system will place upon their children, they are surprised.

Motivation

A second area in which parents of new students have frequent misconceptions is that of intrinsic motivation.

Those who have been told that Montessori programs encourage "learning as its own reward" usually find this an attractive offering.

Parents want children to seek and enjoy education. They often don't, however, recognize that children who have spent a great deal of time in schools and/or homes which rely on rewards and punishments to shape behavior, may have difficulty in making the shift to an atmosphere where intrinsic motivation is expected.

When such students demonstrate problems functioning in an environment without the rewards and punishments to which they have been accustomed, parents often question why we won't reward and punish behavior.

This common question reflects the fact that although parents may favor the description of our program in promoting intrinsic motivation, they often have not thought through the reality which can evolve as children are expected to leave behind the rewards and punishments of their former educational lives. It will require a commitment on the part of parents, as well, to adopt a philosophy of parenting that supports both a sense of personal responsibility and intrinsic motivation. This is a commitment which should be undertaken with clear acceptance prior to applying for admission.

Without establishing these understandings and shared objectives in advance, we are potentially placed in the position of trying to justify our philosophy to those who disagree fundamentally.

It is inefficient at least, and tragic at worst, when parents discover after the fact that they have not fully understood our goals.

We are a choice. We need not, and should not, be in the business of trying to convince parents that we are the correct one for their children. Our efforts must emphasize an educated consideration of what we offer during the critical period for that consideration: prior to enrollment. This is best effected through personal, responsive contact prior to application.

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Interdisciplinary

Planning Form

Specials

Computers
Gym
Integrated Arts
Library
Music
Spanish

Reading

LANGUAGE

STORY OF WRITING

Reading

Phonics: initial/end sounds
short/long vowels
word families
initial/end blends
sight words
magic E words
open / closed syllables

Guided
Paired
Independent
Comprehension Analysis
Vocabulary/Word Studies
Dictionary Skills

Writing

words to simple sentences
sentence analysis
punctuation • period, !, ?, commas, other
capitalization
paragraphing

Creative: poetry, stories, other

Research: fact finding • reporting

Story Elements: start, middle, end
characters, setting, plots
topic sentence

Sequencing

Parts of Speech: article • noun • adjective
verb • adverb
pronoun
conjunction
preposition
interjection

Compound / Root Words

Prefixes and Suffixes

Synonyms, Antonyms, Homonyms

Contractions

Abbreviations

Alphabetizing

Mechanics: Manuscript & Cursive

Social Science

HISTORY

TIME LINE OF LIFE
TIME LINE OF MAN

Personal Time Lines
Calendars / Parts of week/year
Seasons
Clocks: analog and digital
Time Zones
Sequencing

Science

PHYSICAL SCIENCE

CREATION STORY

Laws of Attraction and Gravity
3 States of Matter
Solar System
Sun & Earth & Moon
Earth's Composition
Scientific Inquiry

Geography

Continents
Land Forms
Mountains & Volcanoes
Tectonic Plates
Water Forms
Work of Water
Work of Wind

Habitats

Rain Forest
Savannah
Desert
Forest
Marsh
Plains
Ocean
Wetland

Flag Studies
Map Studies
Countries & Cultures

Cultures: Fundamental Human Needs

Biology

Living and Non-Living

ZOOLOGY

Vertebrates/Invertebrates
5 Vertebrate Kingdoms
body functions
body parts
Habitats

BOTANY

Plants
Seeds
parts and functions
Trees
parts and functions
Nutrition Pyramid
Food Chain

Math

MATH

Numeration: 100
Place Value: Simple/Other Families
Operations: + — x + / Concrete
Static
+ — x + / Abstract
Dynamic
Word Problems: + — x + / Abstract
Graphing
Estimating
Fractions: Equivalence/Simple Operations
Measurement: money
time
temperature
linear
volume and capacity
weight
Roman Numerals
Geometry: Lines • Angles
Planes • Polygons : Triangles

Lower
Elementary