



Montessori Glossary

Absorbent Mind: Montessori believed that children from ages 0 - 6 have an absorbent mind; that is, they are literally absorbing the sights, sounds, words, and impressions that are all around them. During this time period, they learn without any effort or exertion. Please see sensitive periods for more detail.

The Acquisition of Culture: The period from ages 6 -12 is a period of development Montessori called the Acquisition of Culture in which the basic standards, expectations, rules, and laws are internalized. It may be as simple as knowing, "our culture writes left to right, top to bottom." Once conscious, it opens the door to the appreciation of other cultures, i.e., "the Hebrew culture writes right to left."

Casa dei bambini: This Italian term is literally translated as "children's house". It was the name of the first school that Montessori started, back in 1907. The term has come to represent the 3 - 6 classroom, indicating a beautifully prepared environment containing all the materials necessary for a child's development.

Cycles of Activity: Work initiated by the child will naturally follow a cycle to its end, which is signified by the return of the material to its proper space. The teacher honors this natural completion by allowing the child to work uninterrupted. The basic concept behind the cycle of activity is that it allows the child to become absorbed in work and complete the task to satisfaction.

Concrete to Abstract: The classrooms are filled with hands-on materials Montessori believed that knowledge proceeds from the hand to the brain. Each material presents an abstract concept such as addition or scientific classification. As the student works with the concrete material, the abstract idea begins to form in his mind. Then the student no longer needs the material as he or she has internalized the concept and is ready to proceed with abstract work (pencil and paper).

Control of Error: In order to allow for work to be completed independently, most Montessori materials (especially those in Practical Life) contain a built-in control to let the child know whether or not the work is being done correctly. For example, a sorting work will have the same number of items in each category; if the items are sorted incorrectly, the number of items in each category will be uneven thus enabling the child to self correct.

Cosmic Education: The Greek word "cosmic" refers to the order and harmony of the universe. Cosmic education refers to the Five Great Lessons, which impress upon students the relationship between themselves and the universe. The lessons are as follows: The Beginning; The Timeline of Life; The Coming of Humans; The History of Writing; and The History of Math. In the elementary curriculum, the lessons that will follow will all fall under the heading of these great lessons giving students "the big

picture” (see whole to part below) into which they will place the body of academic work that they will do.

Director/Directress: Montessori preferred to use these terms rather than “teacher”. The idea is that the Montessori directress is a guide; someone who gives children the tools they need to teach themselves, rather than actually teaching. These terms are still used today, although you will often hear “teacher” used as well, for clarity when talking to non-Montessorians.

Exercises of Practical Life: These exercises have been carefully developed to guide the child through learning the tasks of daily life. They include common household tasks like sweeping and scrubbing, as well as the development of fine motor skills through pouring and spooning. They are the basis of the 3-6 classroom, and help the child develop the important skills of concentration, attention to order, sequencing, and language.

“Going Out”: Related to the “acquisition of culture” is the concept of “Going Out”. Montessori believed that the elementary aged child was developmentally suited to learn from activities outside the school building, in the student’s community and in their natural world. At first, this may be excursions to the school’s outdoor area. Later this would take place as field trips connected with the children’s study of the Cultural subjects and giving back to the community through learning service projects.

Human Tendencies: Montessori believed that all people share some basic tendencies. Among these are exploration, work, communication, repetition, mastery, and perfection. They are seen across all cultures and countries. They are the driving force behind the development of culture and civilization.

Montessori education emphasizes learning through all five senses, not just through listening, watching, or reading. Children in Montessori classes learn at their own individual pace and according to their own choice of activities from hundreds of possibilities. Montessori classes place children in multi-age groups, forming communities in which the older children spontaneously share their knowledge with the younger ones.

Normalization: Normalization is the Montessori term for a healthy, well-adjusted child who learns effectively in any situation. Being in a Montessori environment for a period of years, working through the cycle of work and following grace and courtesy in the classroom, the child develops character and personality and becomes a contributing member of society. Please note that recently teachers have begun to refer to a group of children as “normalized.” When used in this way, “normalization” means that the class as a whole has internalized the cycle of work and the rules of the classroom, each at his or her own ability level.

Planes of Development: The four planes (or phases) of development are stages that children move through from complete dependence to independence. The first plane, infancy, includes 0 - 6 years of age. During this time, the child’s subconscious mind is absorbing everything around him. The next phase, childhood, occurs between ages 6 - 12. This time is one of conscious learning, as a child begins to explore the world.

Adolescence, from 12 -18, encompasses the next plane. During this time, there is some upheaval as the child develops rapidly. This is in contrast with childhood, which is

characterized by steady and reasoned activities. After this stage, the young adult enters maturity from 18 - 24 and can begin to find out how they fit into the world around them.

Prepared Environment: Maria Montessori observed that children's learning could be facilitated by an environment that was thoughtfully prepared, rather than randomly assembled. Facets of the prepared environment include work that is organized on shelves by curricular area, in order of difficulty. The work must also be complete, attractive, and accessible to the children.

Purposeful Movement: In Montessori, the child is given work to do that involves physical movement. The movement is not superfluous to the work; it is part of the work. In this way, a child's motor skills are developed and strengthened.

Sensitive Period: According to Montessori, children pass through stages where they are more readily able to absorb information than at other times. Children have sensitive periods for order, language, refinement of the senses and large motor skills, small objects, and social behavior. All of these periods take place during the 0-6 year plane of development.

Whole to Part: The fundamental principal for Montessori Elementary education is often referred to as "Cosmic Education." Science education starts with the "Big Bang" and moves logically to the formation of the solar system and earth's geology. In Geography the children learn about the globe first and later put in the details of countries and cultures. All lessons begin with a basic story or presentations that help children to see the larger picture. Montessori believed that the child's mind must first be satisfied by a vision of the whole, before it can satisfactorily deal with the parts. The understanding of the "whole" also gives children a frame of reference in which to place details about what they are learning.

Work: Montessori education speaks of the child as doing "work" in recognition of the vigorous labor involved in acquiring skills in the fine motor area, gross motor area, sensory discrimination, and in number and language concepts. The child chooses work and is then able to take responsibility for it. This forms character and enables the child to have a sense of self respect for what he or she has done. Please see "normalization" for more detail.