

## “Montessori in the Home”

By Deborah Brinker

One of the most important aspects of a child's success in school is building a strong home/school connection. Using Montessori techniques in the home will help to strengthen this connection. When a child's surroundings at home closely mirror those at school, it makes the transition smooth for him, thus making it easier for him to absorb the information he receives. We believe that things like letting children help around the house, which is key when setting up a “Montessori home”, are part of the “spiritual values” parents should model for their children. I feel my role as a Montessori teacher is to educate the spirit as well as the mind. In doing so, I do not attempt to refer to a higher power or religious theology. I believe that the spiritual values such as compassion, peacefulness, sharing, and love can be taught not only by having positive role models, but also through communication, conflict resolution, problem solving and exposure to people of different ages, social classes and cultures.

According to the Montessori philosophy, letting the child do things for himself is one of the best ways to build self esteem. Even at a very young age, children are capable of acting independently. Children need a sense of belonging and being needed. They obtain this sense of belonging by participating fully in the routines of every day life. “Help me do it myself” is the life theme of the preschooler. By setting up a home environment that enables the child to take care of himself throughout the day, the home environment itself becomes the child's teacher. This is called the “prepared environment”.

There are two main things I suggest when setting up the child's environment: 1) Look at the room through your child's eyes, and, 2) Use a Montessori classroom as a model. If a child was designing a room for himself, he would use child-sized furniture, low hooks for his coats or towels and low shelves for his toys. Nothing would be out of reach or “too special” to look at and touch. Can you find ways for your child to participate in meal preparation, cleaning, gardening, and caring for clothes, shoes and toys? Provide as many opportunities for independence and success as possible. Things that we find so simple are learning experiences for him or her. When looking around the Montessori classroom, what do you see? It is filled with cultural, artistic, and scientific activities. There is no junk food, no television, and no computer. Books, toys, and other educational materials are carefully chosen and of the best quality. The Montessori school environment is arranged according to subject area: cooking, cleaning, gardening, art, caring for animals, library corner, etc. The child is never forced to attend a lesson or do a piece of work. The teacher is trained to model kindness and consideration, to observe the child, and follow her interests in suggesting work, to give careful, individual lessons, and to refrain from interrupting when the child is deep in concentration. This fosters a lifetime love for learning in the student. It is the role of the adult to prepare, and continue to prepare the environment, to link the child to it through well-thought-out introductions to books and materials, projects and lessons, which nurture the child's exploration and creativity. Children taught this way often surpass both the

level of education of their peers, and the knowledge of the adult in all areas. They then learn to find answers for themselves.

Here are some tips that I suggest when trying to incorporate the Montessori philosophy into your home. I think you will begin to see great changes in his or her self esteem and skill level.

- Buy clothing that your child can easily put on and take off by himself
- Use child-sized furniture in your child's room. Give her a low table and mirror, drawers that she can open easily, and low hooks so that she can hang up her own clothing.
- Make your child's room bright, attractive and simple. It should not be overly stimulating.
- Remove from your child's sight any objects that you value and fear may be damaged.
- Give your child his own cleaning products (i.e. a small spray bottle, sponge, broom and dustpan, etc.
- Let your child set his own place at the table. (You can trace the outlines of a plate, napkin, and utensils onto a placemat)
- Treat your child with respect and consideration. This does not mean to always "give in" to your child. Just try to understand your child's ideas and feelings.
- Be flexible in your relationship to your child.
- Provide your child with definite structures that still leave room for freedom. He needs that security and guidance that firm, sensible rules provide.
- Consider your child's slower sense of time. Plan to spend some time each day in some activity with your child that will be leisurely and enjoyable for both of you.
- Don't do anything for your child that he can do for himself. If he protests, offer to do it *with* him.
- Provide your child with the freedom to choose and make decisions whenever possible. Do your real work and engage in pastimes when your child is around. Don't wait until she is out of the house. She needs to see the work carried out for a while at first, and then join in a bit at a time. Work time can also be quality time!
- Set an active and joyful example about what qualities are important in life.
- Commercial and passive pastimes such as going to the mall and watching TV are far inferior to cleaning, sewing, baking, drawing, building, and visiting with friends.
- Give your child as many opportunities for success as possible.
- Try to be positive in your dealings with your child. Find another way to tell her "no", "can't", and "don't". We do not believe in giving negative attention to misbehavior.
- Use precise language when speaking to your child. Never lie to him or her.
- Whenever possible, let your child use real objects (glasses, plates, etc.). They will usually rise to the occasion.

- Provide your child with opportunities to be with all kinds of children
- Model the behaviors that you wish for your child to follow.