

Montessori Three-Year Cycle

Dr. Maria Montessori based her educational philosophy on the child's planes of development. Each plane spans six years, each with its own distinct characteristics. In a Montessori school, the children in the different environments are grouped based on the planes of development so that they can gain maximum benefit from the environment and the materials.

A three-year-old entering the primary environment spends the next three years with the same teacher who has the unique opportunity to observe and assist the child's development through the entire three year cycle. Having consistently observed the child over this long period of time, the teacher has a better understanding of how to facilitate each child's learning in their individual way. Having a consistent guide for the three years also gives the child the security they need to concentrate on the learning process.

There is also a social aspect to the three-year cycle. Because a child stays in the same classroom for three years (sometimes four), he has the unique opportunity to be a part of a community of mixed ages. Within the community the child is able to encounter social situations with other children both older and younger. The mixed age classroom has the advantage of providing the younger children with role models within the community. Observing the older children, they acclimate to the rules of the community and become a successful participant. On the other hand, the older children take on a mentoring and leadership role in the community by helping their younger friends. The model for leadership has been passed down to them by the children before them.

The materials in the primary environment introduce the child to concepts that build upon themselves over the three years. Many of the activities not only have a direct goal, like cleaning up after themselves or learning sounds and numbers, but they also indirectly lay the foundation for later work. Being in the same environment for three years gives the child the chance to revisit the foundational material while mastering the lessons and concepts. The younger child, observing the advanced work being done by the older children, gets interested and inspired. In mentoring the younger child and helping teach them, the older child is able to solidify and internalize their knowledge.

The child gains maximum benefit from the environment if he is able to complete the full three year cycle.

Source: Archana Sardar, Primary Directress



Parent Study Program

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