

Literacy in Montessori

An Introduction

- **The Montessori Method**
 - Teaches to the Whole Child and the Whole Brain
 - Is supported and promoted by pediatric neurologists and neuropsychologists because it effectively trains the mind to work more efficiently through hands-on learning and multisensory activities—“good at doing things”, “building better brains” (see Hughes article)
 - Timing is everything—you have to teach the children who are developmentally “ripe” for learning—Montessori’s Sensitive Periods for learning
 - The Montessori materials were designed to teach multiple skills simultaneously (for example: mastering the three finger grasp using the knob cylinders)—presenters will talk about other ways that children are learning several things simultaneously through various activities
 - We follow the individual child in Montessori

- **Individualized Curriculum**
 - Allows the guide to identify the appropriate pace for each child
 - Helps us with early identification of learning differences (research shows that early intervention can dramatically improve development)
 - Eliminates group competitiveness and comparisons
 - Each child can be challenged at a pace that is comfortable and developmentally appropriate for that child
 - Allows us to make adjustments in our teaching because of gender differences—for example, boys’ brains generally develop more slowly in the areas responsible for fine motor skills necessary for writing

- **The foundation of literacy is the spoken language**
 - Rich verbal experiences are essential to the development of children’s brains
 - The Montessori classroom allows the children to engage in a dynamic, socially interactive environment that promotes verbal development
 - Research does not suggest drilling children or use of flash cards for rote memorization
 - The child is immersed in language all around him in the classroom—from the practical life area (“tongs”, “slicers”, “sifters”), sensorial (“geometric solids”, “knobless cylinders”, “binomial cube”), geography (names of countries, bodies of water, types of land), etc.
 - Multiple languages can be learned simultaneously as the brain is ripe for language acquisition prior to age 10
 - Recognition of speech begins at birth through ages 6 or 7

- **Ongoing debates about teaching reading—research has shown that the best approaches are ones with phonics at the core**
 - We introduce children to phonemic awareness through games and activities at Circle and individually, like the “I Spy” game, “Taking a trip”, songs, rhyming, things that go together, etc.
 - When the child learns to isolate initial sounds there is developmental readiness for learning letters
 - We introduce the sounds of the alphabet using the Sand Paper Letters
 - In practicing with just a few letters and sounds, the child can make several words
 - Child and guide interact and discuss meanings of words they are making
 - The child can “write” the words with the Movable Alphabet
 - The next step is simple word building and decoding letters to sound out words
 - Then the child is ready for easy phonetic readers like the Bob Books—reinforcing skills
 - Move into discussions of meaning and content with teachers and parents
 - Begin to learn about parts of speech, expand vocabulary
 - Interdisciplinary—using language lessons to simultaneously learn science, geography, social studies, etc.

- **What to expect from Montessori Primary**
 - We follow each child individually—different skill levels, different paces
 - *Most* children who complete the three year cycle and do not have developmental delays or learning problems are reading when they graduate (at an advanced level)
 - Even children with significant learning challenges have a solid foundation when they leave
 - Eager to learn, independent, resourceful, intrinsically motivated

- **What can parents do at home to support literacy?**
 - Talk, read and sing to your children
 - Surround them with language
 - Maintain ongoing conversation about what you and they are doing
 - Play music, tell stories and read books
 - Ask children to guess what will come next in a story
 - Play word games
 - Ask your child to picture things that have happened in the past or might happen in the future
 - Rather than asking yes or no questions, ask open ended questions, like: “what do you think...?”

- **Introduce Panel**
 - Kim and Aimee will lead us in Circle exercises
 - Keyla—Pre-Writing exercises
 - Aimee—Sounds
 - Mandy—Controlled Spelling and Writing
 - Keyla—Reading
 - Kim—Parts of Speech