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*Three Tree Montessori School offers Montessori learning environments in which children are encouraged to explore, learn, and interact in a diverse community that fosters independence, critical thinking, and learning for life.*

**Montessori Resources:**  
[amiusa.org](http://amiusa.org)  
[mariamontessori.org](http://mariamontessori.org)  
[montessori-namta.org](http://montessori-namta.org)  
[aidtolife.org](http://aidtolife.org)

**What does my child do at school all day?**

*Paula Walters  
 TTMS Executive Director*

This is the question parents ask no matter what type of school their child goes to. The joke between my children and me tends to go like this: "How was school today? Good. Did you learn anything? No." Our public sector high school sends home report cards and homework, but sometimes I question what all those piles of paper really tell me about my children's ability to be successful in the world? Alternately, there's the elusive world of Montessori.



The AMI (Association Montessori Internationale) curriculum is incredible but worked on only in the classroom environment...or is it?

Just watch your toddler as they pour their own glass of juice or carry plates to set the table. Observe your four-year-old tracing the letters on your license plate or giving their friends or family a "presentation or lesson" on something, or dividing some of their food to share with a friend. And how about asking

your eleven-year-old to make the grocery list for the family this week or pay the bill and figure out the tip when you are out to dinner?



It's natural for parents to want to see and support their child's classroom work, but how? With conventional schooling a parent can help with homework completion and drill test questions, but parent support in a Montessori model may take a little more practice. It's often the observation of the practical applications of the lessons learned and the ability to ask the right questions when something comes up that keeps us informed.

When you hear your elementary child talking about polar bears, ask them what polar bears like to eat, where do they live



and where you can learn more about them. You might find out that your child went to the library and then worked with a friend to build a diorama to go along with their written report.

With a primary age child, you can often learn more from them when they are having a conversation with another child, or parent. If that doesn't work, having the names of some of the Montessori materials might be just the thing to get them chatting. Asking, "Did you work on the sandpaper letters today?" could evoke a quick no. Or it could get your child thinking and sharing with you some of the other "work" they may have done.

If you are one of those parents whose child talks to you about what they do at school each day, count yourself lucky. But if you are like the rest of us, you might need some additional tools. Here I have included a short list of the names of some of the materials from the primary and elementary classrooms. Drop them into conversation with your child once in a while. Let me know how this works, and don't hesitate to ask about other Montessori materials. We'd love to help you learn more about your child's day.

"The environment must be rich in motives which lend interest to activity and invite the child to conduct his own experiences."

~Dr. Maria Montessori



### Primary List

**Practical Life Area** (and **Expression**)— sewing, sweeping, table washing, carrot cutting, work in the garden, dressing frames (buttons, bows, hook & eye, zipper), painting, cutting, coloring and dish washing.

**Sensorial**— cylinder block, brown stair, red rods, color box I, 2, or 3, the bells (my personal favorite), geometry cabinet, geometric solids.

**Language**— sandpaper letters, metal inset, moveable alphabet, object box I or 2, the farm, labeling the classroom, and phonogram booklets.

**Math**— sandpaper numbers, red & blue number rods, spindle boxes, bank game, stamp game, addition charts (We have charts for subtraction, multiplication and division also), and small bead frame.

**Geography/Science**— world map or puzzle maps, geography folder, parts of the plant, leaf, flower or root, and land & water forms.

### Elementary List

**Language:** grammar boxes, command cards, suffixes, prefixes, compound words, word families, verb conjugation, logical analysis, poetry, sentence writing, paragraph writing, report writing, letter writing, story writing, dialogues, plays/drama, Great Books, history of the English language, study of style, calligraphy, Chinese calligraphy, and illumination.

**Mathematics:** wooden hierarchical material, bead chains, golden bead material, large bead frame, flat bead frame, stamp game, checkerboard, bank game, racks and tubes, squaring, cubing, binomial cube, trinomial cube, hierarchical trinomial cube, fractions, decimal fractions, word problems, peg board, positive and negative numbers, powers of numbers, and charts.

**Geometry:** iron insets, box of sticks, area material, Pythagorean theorem material, Euclid's plate, different polygons, sum of the angles of polygons, design work, and nomenclature.

**Geography:** map making, experiments, sun and the earth, work of air, work of water, globe, 3 states of matter, microscopes, periodic table, Where do we get our food/clothes from?, economic geography, and charts.

**Biology:** story material, body function material, needs of a plant, the leaf, the root, the stem, the flower, the fruit, the seed, Kingdom animalia, Kingdom vegetalia, tree of classification, and interdependencies of human beings.



**History:** timeline of life, blank timeline, timeline of human beings, timeline of American History, the hand chart, black strip, creation stories, time, and calendars.

**Music:** tone bars, xylophone, composition, singing, and clapping.

**Art:** watercolor, acrylic, tempera, collage, clay, drawing, sketching, book making, and charcoal.

## **It's a Lifestyle, not just a quality daycare.**

*Lynda Harrington*

*Lower Elementary Guide*

When we think of Montessori education, we usually see it in the context of a private school or child care center that follows an academic process established by the first female doctor in Italy over a hundred years ago. It is usually a preschool or a daycare for families who are looking for “something more” for their child. Parents often brag about how early their child has learned to read or write in cursive or how young they’ve been exposed to advanced math processes. These are certainly milestones for children that attend Montessori schools but raising children with some of the basic ideas that are cornerstones to Montessori pedagogy will transcend academics and any school or daycare setting.

Montessori is a holistic approach to educating children, where we aid in the growth of children (physically, emotionally and academically) and their families. It is

preparation for a productive, meaningful and peaceful life. Academics notwithstanding, you have probably begun to see some of the emotional and psychological changes that are fundamental to children raised in an atmosphere of absolute trust and respect.

Those of you who have begun adopting at home some of the techniques that are used in each class begin to see these changes almost exponentially. There is a peacefulness and a maturity that can often be found amongst Montessori kids. Even the youngest toddlers have an unusual sense of confidence when they are given the opportunity to dress themselves, pour themselves a glass of water, peel and slice an egg to share with friends or sweep up after a meal. A child, given these opportunities, receives a deep satisfaction at being capable of productive work and at contributing to the household and being a valuable part of the family (or classroom community).

Years of being allowed the freedom to experiment on one’s own environment, being allowed to make

“mistakes” without judgment, and the opportunity to do this within the safe boundaries set down by parents and guides, develops in them confidence, self-discipline, work ethic, deep concentration, and joy. These qualities are direct results of raising a child with the ideals developed by Dr. Montessori during years of observation; qualities that will become intrinsic within each of these children as they mature.

In fact, these qualities transcend time and culture as well. Montessori developed her methodology for Primary in Europe over a hundred years ago; but she further developed her Elementary curriculum and created pedagogy for infants and toddlers while living in India. Today, there are Montessori schools on six continents in almost every country because it is not only an effective way for a child to learn to read and write, but it is a way of raising human beings to prepare them for the realities of life. Being raised in environments that embody some basic ideals, like freedom with responsibility, independence, the prepared environment and the prepared adult, Montessori children all over the world have garnered the same, crit-



ical life-skills. Whether in San Lorenzo, Italy in 1907 or in Taiwan in 2012, children who are trusted to do things independently and who are held to a high standard of behavior, and who are ultimately respected and loved, will be the future that will transform the world.

Though the philosophy remains consistent, materials from classroom to classroom may vary; a small school in Kenya may not have the money to buy Nienhuis' spindle box materials. This is a critical material, however, for a young child to learn to count. But they can find sticks from trees to substitute which can be made beautiful and used just as successfully. The idea that a three year old is capable of counting to large numbers is still held by a guide in the US or in Kenya, and whether counting stones, sticks, spindle boxes or golden bead material, the child is treated with sensitivity and respect, given a beautiful presentation by the guide, expected to treat the materials with care, and is allowed to explore the materials freely. It is fundamental ideas like this that creates a transcendent quality in Montessori pedagogy; it isn't just a way of giving children in a daycare setting an academic experience but it is a way of living that will change your relationship with your child.

Montessori has become a way of life for many families in underserved communities as well. Crossway Community is one remarkable example of this movement toward whole community Montessori. This organization has become a center of growth for children and their parents in the greater Washington, D.C. area where they have integrat-

ed the Montessori methodology to help "reduce poverty and create social change." Along with providing housing to underserved single mothers and their children, they provide on-site parenting classes, AMI Montessori classrooms for the children, and sites to host events sponsored and attended by the greater

community. At Crossway (crossway-community.org), their fundamental principles include holistic education for children and their parents, community service, and accountability. There is upscale, low-income housing (on a sliding scale) available on site that has



Parents in this community are required to attend classes on a variety of subjects including parenting, health and safety, fiscal responsibility, and vocational training.

There are consultants who support the families in the care and maintenance of their homes and each family contributes to their on-site community

garden by planting weeding and harvesting. With non-profit organizations within the greater community regularly renting space in the facility, families are exposed to extracurricular activities to help them connect with other resources and to their neighborhood.

Crossway Community believes that if you address people's needs, give them tools, resources and accountability, families will thrive and this has indeed been the case for their community. Having giving assistance to over 20,000 families, they have found that this Montessori approach—including addressing needs of extended family members as well—has given many families a chance to succeed when it would have been impossible otherwise. They have also capitalized on community and cross generational resources to promote education, independence, social and life skills and financial literacy. By living, working, and learning together in the community, with the support of Montessori trained professionals onsite, they have experienced real

*"A great social mission that will ensure the child justice, harmony and love remains to be accomplished. This great task must be the work of education for this is the only way to build a new world and to bring peace."*

*~Dr. Maria Montessori*

housed over 600 families over the last twenty years Crossway has been in operation. The children attend traditional Montessori school from the ages of 3 months to 9 years.



change that has lasted much longer than other interventions. Having an approach that integrates the whole person, the whole family and the whole community has enabled this cornerstone of the Washington D.C. area to become a model for communities around the country, including Minneapolis, Minnesota and other parts of the United States, as well as the world.

The lessons of Montessori can transform communities big and small, from whole neighborhoods, to local schools like TTMS. In our own classrooms Montessori education works in your children on many levels. It educates their bodies, their minds, and their spirits. But the educational process goes beyond school; it effects who they are fundamentally. Independence, respect for the child, the prepared environment, and responsibility are some of the principles outlined by Dr. Montessori. When these principles are adopted by adults in their lives, children learn to independently problem solve, care for themselves and others, learn empathy, joy and peace. It was Montessori's belief that the pedagogy and ideals that she developed over a hundred years ago should be available to all children throughout the world, regardless of time or place, culture or socio-economic status. She also believed children were the only hope for the peaceful advancement of mankind. Those of us who have adopted these practices of educating the whole child can see such a bright future. As Dr. Maria Montessori said, *"A great social mission that will ensure the child justice, harmony and love remains to be accomplished. This great task must be the work of education for this is the only way to build a new world*

*and to bring peace."* Each day we are treating the children with respect, dignity and appropriate boundaries, we are working toward that end.

**Grace and Courtesy:**  
Jennifer Stocks  
Sitka Spruce Guide

There are an important series of lessons in the Montessori classroom that do not sit on any shelf. These are the lessons of Grace and Courtesy, which isolate and model appropriate movements and responses in relation to others. In short, Grace and Courtesy lessons could be described as Montessori classroom management, but these exercises are designed to *transfer* the management from the adult to the child so that he can control his own behavior. We adults in the classrooms are only putting the image of proper grace and courtesy movements and language out into the environment for the children to see, practice and choose for themselves to apply what they know. This strategy for imparting social skills differs greatly from the conventional instruction of manners to children, which typically relies on the adult to verbally prompt the child in what to say and do as situations arise. Think of how often we find ourselves saying,

"What do you say?" to our children! However, this and other such phrasing leaves the child dependent upon the adult to manage and prompt good behavior and etiquette. This doesn't mean that a



child can never learn the correct response— children can easily learn the conditioned responses of "thank you," or "please," but not necessarily know what it truly means or when to

correctly apply each term. Therefore, the Grace and Courtesy lessons in the classroom are strategies designed to lead to functional independence, but they can only happen when the child is in a community. These lessons are essential for the social growth of the children.

Within the classroom, Grace and Courtesy lessons are given in small groups and can be used to respond



to issues that arise at school or in a community in general. These lessons model movements that have a social effect or context. They can be as simple as how to carry a work rug (so you don't hit anyone with it), or how to walk around a rug (so as to avoid disturbing or damaging someone's work), to what to do when you're finished working at a table (push in your chair), or what to say if someone calls you a name that you don't like ("My name is Jennifer, and that is what you can call me.")

These lessons can be given when we see social conflict spontaneously happening in the environment, such as children turning work rugs into Light Sabers, or crowding past each other to use the sink instead



of waiting their turn. If the lesson is prompted because of the behavior of a specific child, that child is typically not invited to the first few presentations in order to avoid finger-pointing. If the child has already had a lesson that deals with the behavior, for example, not saying “please,” then it is okay to gently remind the child (away from the other children) that that was one of

the times they could have said “please,” or waited in line, etc. It’s good to note that not all of these lessons need to be responses to behavioral issues. Some lessons can generate out of simple hygiene practices such as, “What to Do When You Have to Sneeze or Cough,” or, “How to Use a Tissue.” Grace and Courtesy presentations are offered to every child throughout the year for as long as they are in the Primary environment. However, it must be remembered that since the adult is the core provider of these examples, anything important enough to present to the children must be important enough for all of us adults in the classroom to practice, too. It is always good to remember that children will do what you *do*, not as you *say*. With this said, Grace and Courtesy lessons always show the children what we *want* them to do and say, never what we *do not* want them to do or say. This eliminates the possibility of the children modeling the undesired behaviors. This is where the literal, positive phrasing that Montessorians love comes into play. This phrasing and positive modeling works because of the child’s absorbent mind and need for orientation and adaptation—the child *wants* to know what he is supposed to do and how he is supposed to act. We must trust that the child will understand the concepts that we as guides and parents are trying to convey, but we must also remember that it is okay if we have to continue to present the lesson until

the image is finally taken in by the children and owned as their own. Honestly, I can’t even count how many times and in how many different ways I have presented how and when to push in a chair! At the conclusion of every Grace and Courtesy lesson I always end with the phrase “Now you know how...” This is not, “Now you must do...” As adults entrusted with guiding the children in their development of social relations, we must always keep in mind that the psychic work (internal processing) precedes physical expression—the Primary children are still at the stage of what Dr. Montessori called the so-

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cial *embryo*. All we can do is simply present the circumstances within the environment for the children to begin to express these behaviors, but we

must leave the children at liberty to make use of these means. They will remember when they remember—and we will internally rejoice when that happens!

Grace and Courtesy lessons will be successful when our intention and our preparation as the guide address the child’s interest, dignity, and respect; the child’s self-worth must be preserved through offering the lessons with respect and a courteous regard for self and others. Children are naturally inclined towards feelings of benevolence towards others. They only become rude because they have adapted to the culture in which they find themselves, a culture that is some-



times so concerned with the self to the point of inconsideration for others. There is encouragement in meeting the child's natural interest and in helping to empower the child to know what to do and say. Grace and Courtesy is a way of thinking, both of the teacher and parent and eventually the child, who, once he has this grace and courtesy fused into his personality, will grow to be a gracious and courteous adult.

### **Transitions:**

*Jennifer Mason  
TTMS Office Manager*

*"With regard to the child, education should correspond to them, so that instead of dividing the schools into nursery, primary, secondary and university, we should divide education in planes and each of these should correspond to the phase the developing individuality goes through." ~ Dr. Maria Montessori*

Second only to the launching of a new school year in the fall, the month of January is a season of transition at Three Tree Montessori School. We experience the turn of a new calendar year, and the earth is tilting its way back toward warmth and light. So, too do our children experience transition here at school: leaving the hallway and crossing the classroom threshold; finishing the morning work cycle and preparing for lunch; moving from the half-day program or napping to becoming an "extended day" elder in the primary classroom; moving from toddler to primary, from primary to elementary, and beyond. We adults are assistants to and witnesses of the child's own process of independence, of becoming a person of her time and place.

A cornerstone of Montessori philosophy is to "follow the child," to offer "just enough, at just the right time." Classroom guides are always observant for signs of readiness for what comes next exhibited by the children in their classroom communities: readiness for the next lesson, for greater responsibility, and even for transitioning beyond their community when the time comes. The environment which has nurtured the child over the years becomes a bit confining to the child moving into a new plane of development. This month, we have several children who have just made the transition from their old class to their new one. Though it is bittersweet to bid adieu to a classroom elder, it is exciting to know she or he is embarking on a new adventure, and they are welcomed into their new community with open arms.

These internal transitions also mean we are welcoming several new children into our school community this January: ten toddlers and three primary children, to be exact. These children are already beginning to put down roots in their new communities. We look forward to deepening our relationships with these new children and their families as we enter into partner-

ship to support their growth and development.

A few of the big questions parents have expressed over the years are, "Will Montessori education prepare my child for the 'real world'?" and "How will my child weather the transition from Montessori to another school?" On January 8<sup>th</sup>, we held our annual Alumni Panel parent-  
ed night. Our



**Our Charming TTMS Alumni Panel**

panel was comprised of six TTMS alumni who ranged in age from 7<sup>th</sup> grade to young adult. These six young people eloquently answered these and many other questions. For some, the departure from TTMS was just last year and therefore quite recent; other panelists were looking back from a vantage point of several years away from

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Montessori. Interestingly, none of the questions posed involved grades, or performance on tests. Parents wanted to know how the panelists were supported by their parents, and what kind of relationships they have with their parents. They asked how it felt to transition to a larger school

and therefore a larger social group. They wanted to know how a Montessori education prepared them for middle school, and beyond. And how about peer pressure?

A common thread among the panelists is the perception that the creative, hands-on learning in Montessori helped prepare them to be engaged, responsible, independent, creative learners with critical thinking skills. According to one panelist, “Montessori changes how you think; it changes your perspective.” Others mentioned that they “catch on quickly” to concepts presented in class. Independence fostered by the Montessori classroom plays out in other ways: when asked whether any of the panelists’ parents have to nag them to do their homework, the answer was an across-the-board “no” – it’s just done as a matter of course. (Perhaps all those classroom jobs and home responsibilities such as making one’s lunch have pay-offs after all!). Parents of panelists expressed the trust they have in their children to take responsibility for their own learning, and panelists indicated they had trust in and from their parents.

Another theme among the panelists was the emphasis on social dynamics, collaboration, and problem-solving in the Montessori classroom. As one panelist put it, “The elementary classroom is like a family; you don’t have the option of not resolving conflict.” It also extends to their willingness to talk to their teachers to ask for help, sometimes even assisting their friends who are reticent to reach out to their teacher themselves. Perhaps because Montessori holds

relationships and social cohesion in as much importance as academic achievement, the panelists did not indicate a problem with peer pressure. Though some panelists expressed some initial difficulty or trepidation with the transition into middle school—particularly with regard to the much-larger social group they were moving into—the self-knowledge and awareness of others seemed to translate into being comfortable in their own skin – a great inoculation against peer pressure.

Not a bad outcome at all, when you consider the most-desired skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century worker are anchored in communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.

*“How strange that the nature of life is change, yet the nature of human beings is to resist change. And how ironic that the difficult times we fear might ruin us are the very ones that can break us open and help us blossom into who we were meant to be.” – Elizabeth Lesser, How Difficult Times Can Help Us Grow*

