

Notes to Observers

We welcome you to our class and hope you see many exciting and different exercises being worked on by the children. We call the exercises 'work.' The children take this seriously and need as little distraction as possible to continue with their work cycle. We ask that you limit your visit to half an hour, but visit us more often, as this distracts the children less.

Please enter the class as inconspicuously as possible so that you can observe the wonder of the environment as it normally functions. Try not to engage a child in conversation. If they come up to you with a question or to show you something try a smile, a simple compliment and that is usually enough for them to continue on with their work. Your child may be shy or excitable because of your visit. Please don't compare him/her to the other children, as his behavior is somewhat different from normal.

You will note that some of the children are deeply engaged in work, while others are not. The children are free to observe, as much learning takes place in this way. The degree of absorption in a task is an indication of the child's normalization. The normalized child is one who works independently, purposefully and with a spirit of joy. The children work on mats that demarcate their work. Please be careful not to stand on these.

You will see the teacher/directress give individual lessons and then leave the child without interruption to continue on his own. The child is also free to choose their own work as long as they have had a lesson on this specific exercise. The teacher redirects inappropriate choices or behavior. She also gives work choices to children who are not engaged in meaningful observation.

The work on the shelves is divided into different areas.

Practical life is where all coordination and concentration begins. The child works to control his movements and to build concentration through longer and more involved exercises. The exercises are real and lead to independence. These exercises are sequential and aid the child in the care of himself and his environment. These seemingly simple lessons are in fact the cornerstone of Montessori principles in that they lead to logical and sequential thought patterns. These patterns are indirect preparation for the Math materials, which are orderly and need high levels of concentration, gained from working independently.

Sensorial Exploration is aided by the beautiful exercises that have been designed to isolate one sensorial experience. The built in control of error enables the child to independently self- correct. The child's visual, auditory tactile and olfactory senses are engaged in different exercises. Children learn the vocabulary associated with these sensorial experiences, thus making them into concepts. The child is constantly trying to order their natural world and home environment. They spontaneously organize and classify colors, size, texture and sound. These materials aid them in this endeavor.

Our **Language** area facilitates phonemic awareness. The child learns their sounds using Sandpaper letters. These give the child a tactile, visual and auditory memory of the sound. They learn to write using the Movable Alphabet as well as practice letter formation on chalkboards or paper. Our class is surrounded by language in all areas of the curriculum. Various levels of vocabulary are used in the class by the three different age groups. The children observe more sophisticated ways of solving problems verbally.

Math materials aid the child in memorizing numbers and engage them in activities that combine numbers with quantities. The child can then move onto counting and number recognition using teens and tens. The four basic operations are introduced using the decimal system. The decimal system is introduced concretely, using golden beads. The child then progresses onto more abstract ways of working with these operations. Basic math facts for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division are learned by working with many different materials. Children are prepared for Math by their work with the Sensorial and Practical life exercises.

We have a growing **Cultural** area. Here we study the Earth, planets and rocks. Science experiments are often group activities but include some individual

exercises. The study of animals and plants are undertaken both inside and outside. Children learn about other cultures through celebrations and interesting objects in the class.

Art is an opportunity to relax and gather strength for the next challenging piece of work. The Montessori class offers painting, drawing and other new mediums for the child to experiment with. We practice simple skills such as cutting, gluing and collage.

As our class grows and the children progress, we will include more materials from each area.