

Family Connection

MARCH 2023

“It would seem to me that children are very well disciplined indeed when they can all move around in a room in a useful, intelligent, and free fashion without doing anything rude or unmannerly.”

—Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*, p. 5

FREEDOM AND DISCIPLINE

By Cynthia Conesa



What does freedom with discipline mean, and what does it look like in the Montessori classroom? While it varies from classroom to classroom, due to each teacher’s personal style and approach, we can state with certainty that freedom should not be misunderstood to mean that children may do whatever they want to do. It may be helpful to examine and discuss some perspectives from the field.

Following are a few best practices for what freedom means in the Montessori prepared environment:

Freedom of Movement: Choosing purposeful work and fulfilling the need for activity

Freedom of Choice: Discovering one’s needs, interests, and abilities

Freedom of Time: Working at one’s own pace

Freedom of Repetition: Repeatedly visiting a material, a work, or a concept to develop concentration and mastery

Freedom of Communication: Collaborating with peers in order to plan, discuss, and problem solve while building social skills

Freedom of Mistake Making: Learning from errors and learning to self-correct

FREEDOM AND THE PREPARED ENVIRONMENT

The child’s freedom can be viewed through the lens of the prepared environment, which is rich with developmentally appropriate materials that

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provide a match with the child's developmental needs. Once children fix their attention on some material or activity in their environment, they have a purpose and are generally well-disciplined. Montessori explains it like this:

The questions of freedom and discipline are connected with work. Given the necessary freedom, suitable materials and environment, what the child longs for is work.

DISCIPLINE

Self-discipline, for the Montessori student, is developed by learning to work within limits that are simple, clear, consistently upheld, and that reflect the underlying values of the classroom community—respect, cooperation, safety, and peace, among others. Children help define the rules that determine what behaviors are and are not acceptable to promote a healthy and happy classroom climate conducive to learning. The environment itself provides behavioral boundaries. By learning to work within agreed-upon parameters, the child develops the ability to handle increasing levels of freedom and more control over their actions and choices. In this way, discipline is gradually developed from within.

THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Perhaps the children themselves express it best. During a discussion with a group of Upper Elementary students, I asked, *What does freedom with responsibility mean to you?*

The discussion elicited comments like:

- We are free to work when we want, but we are responsible for using our time effectively and getting our work done.

- We are free to do things like talk, but not to over-do it.
- We have the freedom of many privileges, but the responsibility to use them wisely.
- We have the freedom to use the materials, but the responsibility not to misuse them.

Continuing the discussion, I asked, What is a well-disciplined classroom? to which they responded:

- It's precise, but not perfect, with everything in its place.
- It's following a routine, and everyone being nice to each other.
- It's orderly, but not like the military.
- It's when all the kids know what work they're on, and they just sit down and work.
- It's controlled, but happy.

And finally, I asked, What does it mean to be self-disciplined? They replied:

- It's persevering when the work gets tough.
- It's recognizing you made a mistake, correcting it, and not denying it.
- It's believing in yourself that you can do something really hard.
- It's containing your emotions in tough situations.

The prepared environment—physical and emotional—meets the academic and social needs of the child. While materials match the developmental needs and interests of the child, behaviors are kept in check by the environment. Thus called to purposeful work, the child develops self-discipline from within.

Next cohort deadline is March 30

You and Your Child's Montessori Education: Early Childhood

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Tips for Play-Based Learning at Home with Your Children

By Rebecca Leigh

Excerpted from the Montessori Life Blog

Most families are well aware of the notion of “learning through play” and many wish to start this as early as possible with the babies and toddlers, using play activities at home to give their children a head start on their learning. For those families keen to learn and play with their children, just how involved should this be? Should you be constantly trekking to the craft store for craft supplies? Or stressing about how to make your activities? Here are a couple of suggestions from our blog.



Have Fun and Be Creative

Set up a simple art area at home which could be as basic as crayons and paper, or easels, paints, and plastic aprons! Make a small and colorful book corner in your living room or child’s bedroom or set up a magnetic board in the kitchen with animals and letters. You are not setting up “school” but making a fun place for your child in which to discover, create, and explore.



Explore the Sensory

Use a sandbox, water in a bucket outdoors, or a bowl of dried noodles, and let your child enjoy sensory play by drawing shapes, numbers and faces, or finger painting with water on an outside wall. Outdoor play gives plenty of scope for sensory activities, like swishing through piles of fallen leaves, messy play with mud or rocks, or even just walking barefoot on the grass. You could also set up a “sensory kitchen” outdoors with lots of potential for creativity and fun!



Be Creative with Reading

Your children are never too young to be read aloud to. You can employ silly voices as you read or dress up as your favorite character while you turn the pages. Fostering an early love of reading can aid your child’s cognitive and language skills and result in great bonding time as a family over shared beloved books.





A PEEK INSIDE

Growing Spelling Skills

By V. Kulikowski

Maria Montessori created a Language curriculum that emphasizes phonetic learning first. This allows spelling skills to develop alongside writing and reading. Children will first learn phonetic words before focusing more on sight words and then etymology (word origins). In all the classrooms, extensive reading builds pattern recognition of words and how they are spelled. As children move beyond phonetic reading, they begin to scan for word shapes and letter patterns which leads to reading proficiency.

Visitors to Montessori classrooms will observe children working with a variety of Language materials, all of which ultimately support the development of spelling skills.

Early Childhood

Children in the Early Childhood classroom have a robust Language area filled with materials that encourage sound exploration. The sand tray is used first to practice single letters, but children can later practice sounding out and writing words even before their hands are coordinated enough to properly grip a pencil through the use of classroom materials. A moveable alphabet is used to practice letter-to-sound recognition and spell out the names of objects. In the Early Childhood classroom, inventive spelling is not only accepted, but encouraged as children practice using their knowledge of letter sounds to piece together the sounds they hear in words, often resulting in misspellings, especially if a word is not phonetic. Yet, this is an important part of the journey to learn traditional spelling. Through inventive spelling, children hone their ear for letter sounds and gain confidence. As they move through the Early Childhood Language materials, older children discover sight words and learn that there are rules to spelling. And those rules structure the arrangement of letters in words.

Elementary

Spelling skills continue to grow for children in Elementary programs. They learn how to spell different sound blends and memorize sight words. Etymology, the study of word origin, is introduced to older children. In this, children learn the root of a word and its meaning, helping them decipher meanings and even spell unfamiliar words. As children in Elementary programs practice spelling through writing, reading, and word study, they learn to see letter patterns and notice when a word does not look “right.”

Secondary

The study of word origins can be explored further by students in these classrooms. With over half of English words derived from Latin or Greek roots, Secondary students become well-prepared to read and understand new vocabulary. In addition to learning the meaning of a word’s root, they also learn to recognize prefixes and suffixes which give further clues when a new word is encountered.



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