

Fleetwood-Bawden Montessori Alternate Program

Fleetwood-Bawden is proud to house a Montessori alternate program for students in Grades 1 through 5. Although there are many similarities between our regular elementary classrooms and that of a Montessori classroom, some of the distinguishing features that make it unique are as follows:

- a teacher educated in Montessori philosophy and methodologies appropriate to the age level of the students;
- a program which is characterized by the teaching of subjects in an integrated fashion wherever possible;
- a schedule which allows large blocks of time to problem-solve, observe and understand interactions and connections in knowledge to create new ideas;
- a diverse set of Montessori materials, activities and experiences that foster physical, intellectual, creative and social independence;
- multi-age classrooms to foster a sense of community.

The staff of Fleetwood-Bawden work closely with the Lethbridge Montessori Society to ensure quality Montessori programming and community support.

History and Philosophy

Maria Montessori (1872 - 1952) was the first woman in Italy to earn a medical degree. Early in her career, while pursuing studies in anthropology and human development, she became fascinated with the learning potential of young children. After years of observation and research in the field, she formulated her theories of child development and designed specific didactic and self-correcting materials for the child's use. These are commonly referred to as Montessori Materials. They assist children in absorbing fundamental concepts for language and mathematical development while allowing them to explore history, geography and elements of the culture in which they live.

Through years of observation and scientific study, she created a system that looked at the development of the entire child. She believed that all children possess an intellectual and creative potential, an internal desire to learn and the ability to direct themselves in this learning.

In carefully prepared classrooms, children are ideally grouped together in multi-year age spans where they have the ability to learn the role of following and then leading. Classes are both multi-aged and multi-graded and are based on specific planes of development.



“Education is a natural process carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not just by listening to words, but also by experiences in the environment.”

~"Maria Montessori

Montessori Curriculum

The Montessori method provides materials and exercises in the classroom that await each child's "moment of discovery" in various areas.

The materials are innately enticing, appealing to the child's natural interests and instincts, and actively engage them in "academic discovery," learning and work. They provide a progression from hands on learning to abstraction, involve physical movement, are aesthetically designed, isolate one skill problem, and allow for self-correction.

Materials/Exercises can be divided into three main groups:

Practical Life

This area refines everyday gestures, activities and behaviors which the child sees the adults around them perform. Exercises focus learning on caring for themselves and the environment, social behaviors and movement. This area develops concentration, co-ordination, social skills, and independence.



Sensorial

This area refines the child's sense of discrimination. The materials and exercises do not present the child with new impressions, but rather order, categorize and systemize the vast assortment of impressions they have already received and will continually go on receiving. The child will then develop abstract concepts on her own through working with materials.



Academic

Language: Children in a Montessori environment are introduced to reading and writing phonetically through the use of hands-on materials that focus on vocabulary development, the preparation of the hand for writing and the introduction of the sounds of the letters of the alphabet.

Math: In a Montessori environment, Mathematics is approached in a concrete hands-on manner. Beginning with materials to understand the concepts of 1 to 10 (quantity and symbols), the child is then able to move into all areas of mathematics learning about larger numbers (1, 10, 100, 1000's), teens, skip counting, geometric shapes and fractions all in their concrete form. Mathematical abstraction comes later in the elementary program.

Science, geography, history and a second language is also introduced.

Cultural

These areas are supplemented and enriched by additional activities in the classroom such as group theme work, music appreciation, singing, choral speech, creative movement, arts, and games.

The Montessori Classroom

- supports growth in the child
- works towards greater independence and problem solving and toward the enjoyment of learning
- encourages mature sense of justice and fairness, respect for oneself, other people, and the planet, understanding the patterns of the Universe
- supports greater skills in oral and written communication and responsible group membership
- Contains a diverse set of Montessori and Mainstream materials, activities, and experiences
- Schedules that allows for blocks of uninterrupted learning time
- Classroom atmosphere that encourages social interaction by providing personal, small groups, and whole class learning activities and integrated curriculum including areas of exploration
- Availability of library with resource books and multi-media equipment
- Identifiable ground rules
- Aesthetically pleasing environment
- A records keeping system
- Personal and group instruction
- Regularly scheduled parent and child conferences
- Diagnostic (standardized) testing periodically
- A partnership developed with the family

Daily activities:

- Encourage intrinsic motivation, spontaneous activity, and self-education
- Encourage cooperative learning through peer teaching and social interaction
- Encourage growth in cultural experiences and knowledge
- Encourage competencies through repetitive experiences
- Foster development from sensorial learning to abstract ideas
- Foster the development of the imagination and creativity
- Provides learning activities through physical and outdoor activity

FAQs

What is the Montessori method?

The Montessori philosophy focuses on the development of the whole child. It is based on three principles: observation, individual liberty, and the prepared environment. Dr. Montessori noticed that children had five tendencies: to move, to repeat, to refine and explore, to communicate and to engage the mathematical mind. Current educational concepts such as individualized learning, readiness programs, multi-graded age groups, team teaching, and open classrooms reflect many of her early insights. Dr. Montessori's passion for peace both internally for the child and externally in the world is a theme throughout the Montessori theory and practice. With these principles and themes, an environment where children are respected and intellectually stimulated according to their specific development and personal interests is created.

What are the benefits of multi-aged classrooms?

Montessori classrooms are multi-aged. Current educational theories and studies show that "students in multi-aged classes tended to be higher or better than those in single-aged classes in the following areas: study habits, social interaction, self-motivation, and attitudes toward school." (Gayfer, 1992).

The benefits of multi-aged classrooms include:

- less competition and more cooperation in work and play between older and younger children;
- a wider range of knowledge, experiences and abilities to draw upon in the multi-aged setting;
- higher motivation towards learning;
- respect for one another's individual abilities and experiences;
- children who are more likely to include all others in their games;
- appropriate peer modeling, especially when older children are role models for the younger ones;
- interaction and friendship opportunities are easier with a wider range of ages;
- a greater sense of security and belonging is evident; and,
- children develop responsibility, kindness, friendliness, diplomacy, language skills and self-respect.

What is the prepared environment?

Dr. Montessori believed in a prepared environment which included two important aspects: the physical space and the trained guide. The physical space needs to be clean, materials organized and with purpose in a logical manner, and child-sized furniture to invite the child into the space.

The guide or teacher is required to be well educated in the characteristics and tendencies of children at various developmental stages and have the desire and knowledge to engage the child into the learning environment and the materials within it.

How is work assessed?

Work is assessed mostly through observation, as the child interacts in the prepared environment. The materials have inherent checks, so by observing a child working with a material, a trained guide can observe if the child has understood the concept.

There are individual meetings where the teacher and the child discuss current and future work. Standardized tests are given to enable children to learn how to take a test as well as to provide teachers with more information for tailoring lessons for each child.

Is Montessori right for my child? For my family?

Through daily experience, Montessori children develop empathy for others of all ages, creative and reasonable ways of thinking and confidence. Montessori environments are right for many children who are self-motivated, naturally have an inquisitive mind and want to socialize in a safe, caring community. Montessori education is right for families who value their child's voice and perspective, who trust in their child's innate ability to learn and who consciously choose an alternative way of teaching children.

How do the children learn to socialize and share in the classroom?

There are a limited amount of materials in a Montessori classroom. With the limited material as well as limited adult interaction, there are times when more than one child would like to work with a particular material at the same time. This interaction fosters discussion and the children develop patience, empathy and in later years, collaborative negotiation. Teachers give "grace and courtesy" lessons as early as three years of age, and continue throughout the nine years to remind and encourage the children to negotiate fairly and with empathy in the classroom.

How do Montessori children do when they enter "mainstream" programs?

In a Montessori school, a child's inherent desire to learn has been encouraged and strengthened. They have been allowed to follow their own interests in depth, and this, along with experiencing the benefits of a multi-aged classroom for five to eight years, and extensive socialization which includes freedom and responsibility, Montessori children demonstrate a broad understanding for what mainstream programs offer. They are confident and often try out for sports, arts and music opportunities. They also understand the necessity for homework, group projects and testing. Because they have formed deep, caring relationships with children of various ages, they tend to make friends easily and choose appropriate work partners and peer groups.

What can a Montessori Education offer my child?

Montessori education offers children an environment to break down and understand processes at their level, test out hypotheses and find solutions. Montessori-educated children gain wisdom as well as broad general knowledge, solid leadership and team skills, and a sense of belonging to society. A child's strong qualities of confidence, maturity, and self-motivation will enable them to engage in the community at large.

What does the concept of freedom in a Montessori classroom mean?

Through the years, a Montessori child is taken on a tour of the classroom and the materials. This journey is paired with the ability to choose what and when to work. The children are given the parameters to work in the class, including knowing they have the responsibility to clean up after themselves, waiting until another child is finished using the material and/or has negotiated their role in the work, and waiting and/or asking for a lesson on an interest. This freedom paired with responsibility enables the child to develop confidence when given the opportunity to have a voice in his/her own education.

How is character addressed?

The education of the child's character is as important in a Montessori environment as academic education. This includes the children learning to take care of themselves, their environment and each other, including cooking, cleaning, building, gardening, movement, grace and courtesy and being involved in their local and international communities.

How is Physical Education handled in a Montessori framework?

Movement is one of Montessori's core principles and the philosophy stresses the importance of movement for muscle growth, muscle memory and mental development. By the time the child is six years old he/she is physically dextrous both in fine and gross motor skills. Add to this the robust characteristics of the Elementary child and you have a recipe for success through activities that build confidence, focus and character.

Barriers to Discovery – how can I help my child in the “discovery” process?

As adults, we all need to be aware that “helping” the child is often a barrier to learning, especially if we give “tips” or “tricks” to “speed up” the learning process. Children need to struggle and figure things out themselves. Many times when a child is on the verge of discovery or of finally understanding something, he/she will discuss or practice the work at home. Remember to allow your child the time to continue his/her journey of discovery by not showing him/her short cuts but rather by encouraging the intellectual process of thinking and figuring. Mental activity will create awareness and understanding.