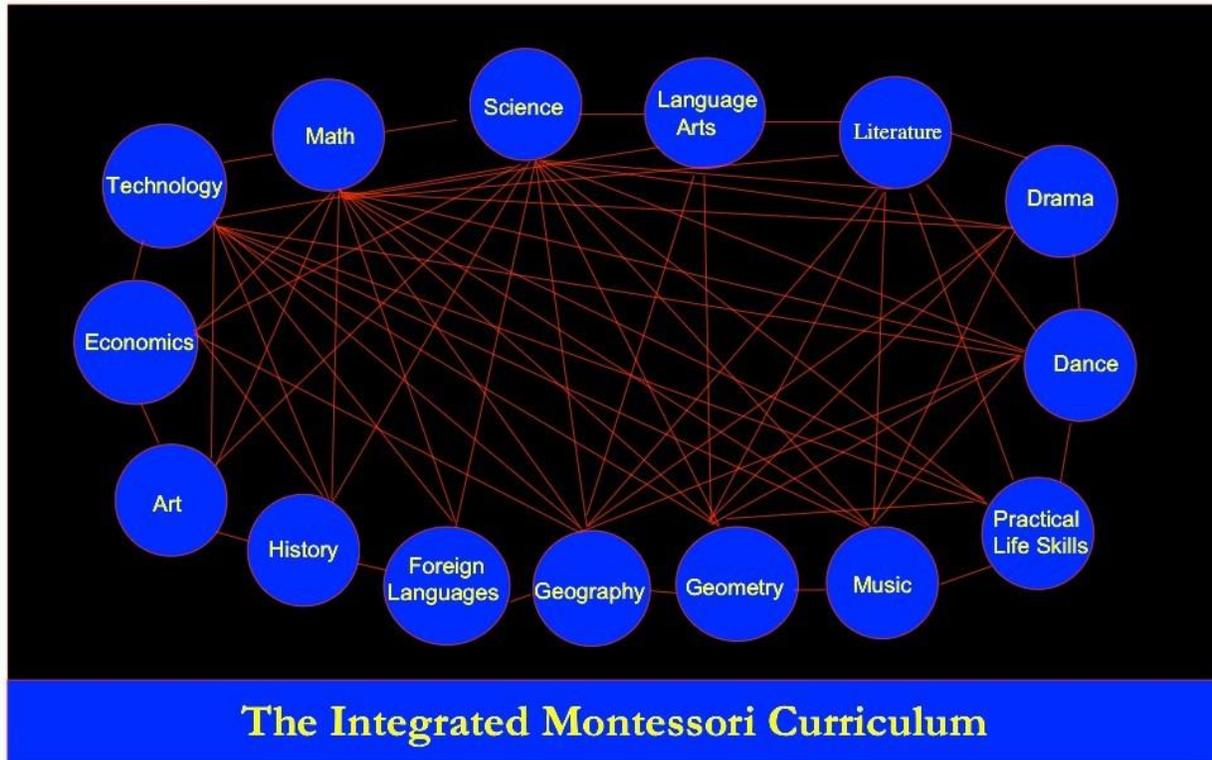


Montessori is Much More Than the Materials or the Name

by Tim Seldin



The following very brief introduction was prepared by Tim Seldin, President of The Montessori Foundation during his years as Headmaster of The Barrie School in Silver Spring, Maryland (1971-1993).

Montessori schools are designed to prepare children both for university and for life.

There are three key ideas that are central to the mission as a Montessori school:

- It is not the adult who shapes the child; it is the child who, through his experiences, creates an adult human being.
- Teaching is not something that one can do to another; we can only facilitate the natural process of learning.

– There is a clear connection between one’s sense of self, of being fully alive and open to new ideas and experience, and ability to learn.

Recognizing this, we are engaged in a process of facilitating the development of self-actualized renaissance men and women. Such people are ‘teacher-proof.’ They have learned how to learn and see school as a center of an enjoyable, lifelong experience. Children with values such as these will normally go on to college, perhaps after first taking a year off for work or travel, as the natural extension of their previous education. There is a great debate over the appropriate balance between Montessori’s objective of cultivating the child’s spontaneous interest in learning and the expectations of parents and society.

Normally, a school is perceived as the transmitter of culture from one generation to the next, through a formal curriculum. This is certainly an important part of the mission. However, as a Montessori school, we are equally committed to the development of responsible members of the human family and the protection of the child’s fragile spark of curiosity and creativity.

Most children know far more about the world before they start school than they will show a few years later when they have learned to be passive learners who don’t trust their senses, intellect, and imagination. Therefore, our greatest task is to help our students to rediscover their brain’s ability to think, intuit, discover and to develop a sense of independence, sequence, and order – to learn how to learn.

(Parents) come to us seeking quality programs and services! Their highest priorities are:

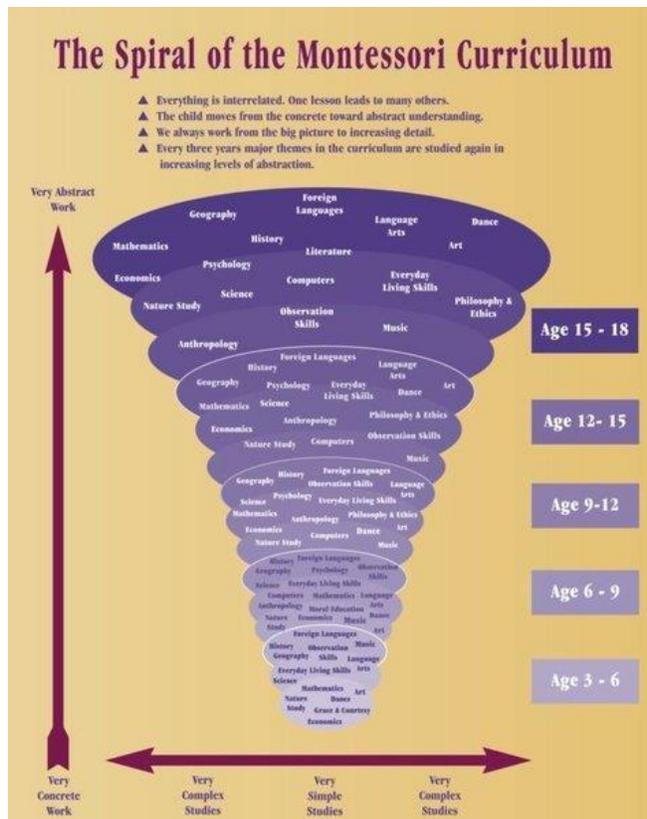
- 1. academic excellence**
- 2. character development**

Clearly, they expect their children to be well-prepared for college, but, beyond this, they are looking for a school experience that will offer something special. They want a school experience that is intellectually exciting and that will develop a wide range of talents and interests. The delivery of these services is difficult to document from the school's end, and, from the parent's end, even more difficult to evaluate. Thus, parents expect to be kept abreast of the programs that address these goals and their children's progress in each program. As a result, we work carefully to maintain this delicate balance.

The curriculum can be thought of as having two aspects:

1. The school's basic expectations for what will be first introduced, worked on, or reviewed and targeted for mastery by 85 to 90 percent of all students at each age/grade level.
2. The lessons that arise out of the children's natural curiosity. While we follow a planned syllabus to give us cohesion and structure, we should never be satisfied with a year spent giving students set lessons from a prescribed syllabus. By providing children with all sorts of books, pictures, specimens, and artifacts, we can almost guarantee that we will encourage their curiosity and expand their scope of learning. By this, we mean to suggest that, instead of moving through the set curriculum more quickly, we allow children to explore additional related topics that capture their interest.

Montessori curriculum is designed to intrigue children and develop a lifelong love of learning. No topic is presented just once and forgotten; lessons are introduced quite concretely in the early years and are reintroduced later at increasing degrees of complexity and abstraction. Students gain experience and develop skills at one level of understanding, which prepares them for more complex lessons at the next level.



The spiral of the Montessori curriculum has no end, and the depth to which any topic can be pursued is limited only by a student's interests and ability. At the same time, our expectations are quite high; challenging each student to his/her fullest individual potential, establishing a clear standard of achievement and quality of thought and work. We encourage accelerated students to expand their studies horizontally, researching topics at greater depth and a more sophisticated level of thought and analysis.

Our course of study is consciously multi-disciplinary. It is an examination of the natural world and the human experience that interconnects the traditionally separate subject disciplines. Units of study cut across the curriculum, weaving together, as one example, the land, flora and fauna, folktales, art, dance, poetry, architecture, history, everyday life, and cooking of a country under study.

The curriculum has no outer limits except for humanity's knowledge and imagination. At the same time, our core curriculum has been carefully structured to establish benchmarks for achievement by most students by the end of each level.

At its finest, Montessori is an incredibly elaborate model of education. We don't advocate using all these tricks and devices simply to make the school day pass more pleasantly or to prepare students for their standardized tests at the end of the year. The real aim of education, as we see it, is to prepare

children to live lives filled with personal satisfaction, as responsible, concerned citizens of the Earth.

An important element in achieving that goal is the development of knowledge and understanding about the world: civilization. However, along with this must come self-knowledge, self-respect, compassion, and a mind and heart open to new ideas and information. Our goal is to help children to learn how to learn.