

Family Connection

JANUARY 2024

“Praise, help, or even a look, may be enough to interrupt him, or destroy the activity... The great principle which brings success to the teacher is this: as soon as concentration has begun, act as if the child does not exist.”

—Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*

FOLLOWING THE CHILD

BY HEATHER WHITE



Maria Montessori once said, “Anyone who wants to follow my method must understand that he should not honor me, but follow the child as his leader.”

This quote has led to the popular phrase in the Montessori community, “follow the child.” This common statement is one of the core tenets of Montessori philosophy, but what did Dr. Montessori really mean when she offered this encouragement?



RELY ON OBSERVATION

Staying true to her roots as a physician and a scientist, Maria Montessori was one of the first educators to observe children. Instead of forcing activities on them, she simply observed. She watched how they developed and what they needed.

Through her observations, she began to see these children in a new light, recognizing their ability to work together, empathize, demonstrate respect for one another, choose meaningful work, and remain focused, without the need for punishment or reward.

She realized that children instinctively began to teach themselves; they were able to learn when provided a carefully prepared environment.

It was then that the “follow the child” philosophy was born.



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THE TEACHER'S ROLE

In a Montessori classroom, the teachers are not the leaders. Instead, the children light their own path and the adults stand back, observe, and engage only when it is necessary to help facilitate the learning process. Even when a child is struggling, Montessori educators will resist the temptation to intervene, allowing the child to make discoveries and solve problems independently. The child learns they can overcome struggle without an adult "saving" them which increases their confidence.

In order to assist the children in this process, Montessori teachers are tasked with preparing an attractive and nurturing environment that facilitates the child's learning and provides gentle guidance along the way. In this way, the educator is seen as the link between the child and the environment in what Maria Montessori referred to as the Prepared Environment Triangle.



Instead of a traditional classroom where the teacher is the focal point and children receive whole-group instruction, in a Montessori classroom, the children are often working independently or in small groups on a task of their choosing.

Visitors may find it hard to spot the teacher at first, as it is the educator's goal to protect the child's environment, blending in and fading to the background, offering guidance only when it is necessary.

Following the child means taking the time to get to know children, carefully observing their natural tendencies, their interests, and their needs, and then using that information to inform one's practice. This approach allows Montessori educators to meet children where they are. Montessori teachers listen to the children and guide them gently in the right direction, while also offering them the necessary encouragement to make choices, solve problems, and take risks socially, emotionally, and academically.

Montessori teachers follow the child by preparing the classroom, providing meaningful, engaging activities to children in a way that beckons their attention and exploration. They offer invitations and opportunities for learning and discovery. Perhaps most importantly, however, they respect and honor the child's natural progression, allowing time and space for development.

WHAT DOES "FOLLOWING THE CHILD" LOOK LIKE?

Montessori environments are often astonishing to those who are unfamiliar with the philosophy.

Parents' Role in Supporting & Extending Play

schleich® and Montessori: Part 6

The American Montessori Society is proud to partner with schleich, the maker of high-quality, hand-painted toy figurines and accessories.

In this multi-part series, you will learn the important role that realistic toys, such as schleich materials, have in learning within Early Childhood Montessori classrooms and homes.



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• Use language to ask open-ended questions



Be Careful About Saying “Be Careful”

By Heather White



When a young child reaches out to touch a hot stove or tries to stand up on a wobbly stool, the first phrase that likely comes to mind is “Be careful!”

These words do not hold much meaning, however, for a two or three-year-old as it remains unclear what might be dangerous or what they can do differently to remain safe. It can be more effective to give clear, explicit directions, helping children better understand the hazard. Furthermore, there are plenty of teachable moments when it is rewarding for children to take healthy risks. In

these moments, adults can empower children, helping them learn to listen to their bodies and trust their own instincts.

Next time, in the moment, before the words “Be careful” slip out, pause and consider if the child is really at risk. You may consider interjecting with specific information or may determine that this is an opportunity to step back and empower the child to take healthy risks.

Here are some things you can say instead of “Be careful”:

Does it feel stable?

Do you see the edge there?

This side is sharp.

Hold the handle of the pan here.

This part is very hot.

Let me know if you need help.

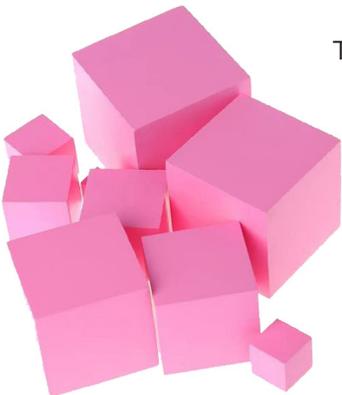
**PEEK
INSIDE**

Montessori Materials Flow

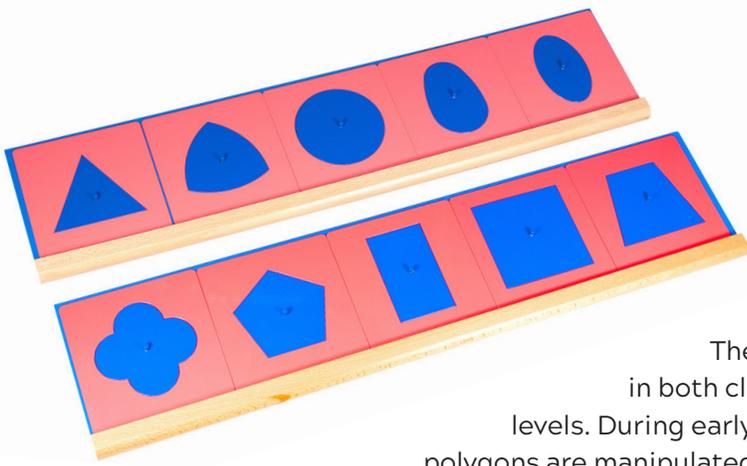
BY CYNTHIA CONESA

One of the hallmarks of Montessori education is the use of elegant materials, designed to lead children from concrete concepts to abstract representations of a variety of concepts. The early childhood materials—which introduce the child to basic concepts like numeration, phonetics, and geometric shapes—are seen again in elementary classrooms but with new purpose as children develop the ability to think differently about the world around them.

The elementary age child will encounter and use many of the materials used during early childhood, but at a higher level. The geometry materials provide a useful illustration. For example, the pink tower, used by the younger child to explore seriation and dimension, is used in the elementary classroom to study the concept of volume. Hence, a material that is explored sensorially in Early Childhood is used to explore geometric and algebraic concepts in Elementary.



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The geometric shape materials are also utilized in both classrooms, but on entirely different cognitive levels. During early childhood, circles, squares, triangles, and other polygons are manipulated to feel the difference between straight and curved edges, obtuse, and acute angles. “Metal Inset” shapes are carefully traced, promoting coordination and fine motor control as preparation for writing. The constructive triangles material encourages the child to explore what happens when two or more triangles are combined. For example, any two triangles, depending on which kind, will make any number of different quadrilaterals; and six equilateral triangles will form a hexagon. These materials allow the young child to both explore and learn the correct vocabulary for a variety of shapes.

In the elementary classroom, the same materials can be found on the geometry shelf. Although the child will continue to manipulate the planes and solids, they will begin to study them from a mathematical perspective as well, identifying and measuring, for example, types of angles, bases, altitudes, and diagonals. They will learn how to measure perimeter and area of polygons, and volume and surface area of solids. The older child is able to explore these properties on an abstract level thanks to their emerging power of reason.

All the materials that the child works with during early childhood are direct or indirect preparation for work during the elementary years, and, in this way, can be viewed as a bridge linking the different levels of the curriculum.



Next cohort deadline is January 10

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