

The Montessori prepared environment is a living entity. It is constructed from aspects of life in many manners. The practical life area provides activities that foster self-care and care of the environment and meet the needs of the sensitive periods for order and movement (eg: the ellipse, the garment frames), the sensorial area presents activities that address the sensitive period for development and refinement of sensory perception, the language area meets the needs of the sensitive period for language via oral and aural engagement (eg: the sound game, the question game) and the mathematics area engages children with activities that allow the absorbent mind to become a conscious worker so the child can progressively work towards abstractions.

Each of these areas is thoughtfully constructed by the adult in a way that reflects an understanding of the young child's need for external order to further internal development. The physical presence and layout of these four areas will support the human tendencies for activity, self-development, orientation, exploration, order, communication, abstraction and imagination, concentration, repetition, self-perfection, exactness and precision. They will achieve this task by the way they exist in the larger ordered environment, and how each area is arranged individually. The environment and each area are presented to the child in a neat and ordered way so that orientation is an accomplishable task; everything has its place and is returned to its position ready for use which also allows for a nonverbal social communication about expectations, values and empathy. The areas are to the scale of the child, which invites the safe and accessible exploration of the environment. The tendencies are also met by the individual activities that exist in each area. The activities illustrate a developmental purpose, a satisfaction of the cravings of the sensitive periods as well as ultimate utilitarian goals. The materials provided are durable and can therefore undergo the activity of many repetitious uses necessary on the road to exactness and precision that the child will use in a concentrative manner in order to construct the internal self. Working in this way will create self-perfection and independence.

This environment, which can also be called normalized, must be constructed by an adult to meet the needs of the child who will, in turn, normalize to the environment and construct himself. The adult is the caretaker of the initial preparation of the environment through certain provisions; a mixed age group of 20-30 children in the same stage of development (first plane for the Casa), beautiful real materials that have a self-correcting nature (eg: light colored to show dirt, breakable) for the hands to work with, physical and psychological nurturing, consistency from the adult and the environment (eg: use of positive phrasing and a place for everything), liberty of movement and an ability to practice functional independence. The adult must understand the principles behind the preparation of the environment, as well as knowing the goals of the activities and how to use them, and be astute in observation of the child and the community, in this way the guide becomes a living part of the prepared environment. Once initial preparations have been made, the guide transfers care of the environment over to the children in an overarching umbrella of transference and independence that is mirrored from the first interactions with the child that echo, "Now you can too."

Within this properly normalized prepared environment there is only the need for three main rules to guide the actions of the child: you can take it from the shelf, you can work on it as long as you like, and you can return it to the shelf, these further the independence gained through the actions

undertaken to satiate the cravings of the human tendencies and the needs of the sensitive periods. For the trained adult within the prepared environment there needs to be only three rules guiding a decision to intercede: is there a potential of harm to the child, is there a potential that the child will harm someone else, and is the child damaging the materials? When the child emulates his rules and the guide's intervention is unwarranted, self-discipline and social-discipline are being achieved, normalization of the child to his environment has occurred.

The ongoing interplay and interdependence of the human tendencies, the planes of development, the sensitive periods and the absorbent mind all within the tiny package of the child is what inevitably (with the guidance of the adult and her observations) creates the multi-faceted approach that is the Montessori Method. This method, which is carried out in a prepared environment can surely be seen as its own living entity.