

A photograph of a Montessori classroom. The room features light-colored wooden shelves filled with various educational materials. A large window on the left side allows natural light to fill the space. In the foreground, there is a wooden table with four chairs. The overall atmosphere is bright and organized.

The Prepared Environment

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The Montessori Environment is one of the major pillars of the Montessori Philosophy. It is important to have a complete and deep understanding of The Child, The Teacher and the Prepared Environment.

The Teacher and the Environment must be prepared in order for the child's needs to be met. To educate a child adequately you the teacher must prepare yourself and you must then prepare the environment.

The child has an inner teacher, controlled by sensitive periods that inform the child about what he needs to be learning at a time. We must observe and look out for what best meets his needs and prepare the environment so that he can learn what he must, when he can learn it best.



The environment has different elements.

Beauty: The Montessori environment is always appealing to the eyes simple but always tastefully done. Though we tend to assume that children love colour which they do it is important to ensure that we do not go overboard. In fact Montessori environments are not loud when it comes to colour statements. We prefer settings that are calm where children are not distracted by a very busy environment. The walls should be void of lots of pictures and posters.

Child-sized furniture and materials: Maria Montessori was the first person to really draw attention to the fact that children needed to be seriously considered as persons with needs. They should be given consideration rather than be treated as appendages to the adults. Children in the past had to fit into the adults lives instead of us to realise that the child needed their own space, furniture made for their own size instead of having to struggle into the adult space. Now child sized furniture is the norm but it wasn't a long time ago. This all feeds into respecting the child and helping the child be, belong and become.

Whatever decorations, instructional materials and pictures you may decide to put on the wall they should be at the eye level of the child. They should be very few and tastefully chosen.

The Prepared Environment

Also it is important that we make sure that the appropriate materials are in the classroom and are at the reach of the child. Your shelves must therefore not be too high that your children would not be able to independently get the materials on and off them.



Orderly: There are 5 major subject areas in the 3 to 6 classroom, you need to arrange the classroom setting into these subject areas. Do not mix up the materials. Order is very important for children in this age group. Arrange your materials from top to bottom, left to right as best as you possibly can. Remember that the more we work from top to bottom left to right the child would automatically learn to do all things this way and ultimately read and write this way.

Orderliness also includes ensuring that the children complete the work cycle and return materials back to where they got them from.

Cleanliness: It is important to keep the classroom and the shelves clean and neatly in order. No dust, rodents or insects taking over the children's space. As the children learn how to keep their surroundings clean through the Practical life exercises they should learn how to keep their shelves tidy and clean too.

Nature: It is important that the environment includes a touch of nature, plants and animals. It may take some schools a while to get there but this is the goal. An outdoor play area is useful for daily physical activity, and if you can provide a garden please do so. If not plant pots will do to start with.

Ensure that if the above is not feasible for any reason in your surroundings you include a regular school excursion that has an element of learning from nature part of the activities your school engages in.



The Prepared Environment

Reality: Children in this age group are interested in finding out and learning about their environment. It is therefore necessary to ensure that all things are rooted in reality. Toys are not really what our young ones need to ground them into the reality they are so interested in exploring. It is important to use real life objects and make sure that children can handle these objects. It's not just for them to see, there is a relationship between the hand and the brain, the development of intelligence. In fact there is a Montessori quote which is so well known...

...Never introduce to the mind of the child what you have not first introduced to the hands...

Movement: One important aspect of the environment in the Montessori setting is the ability of the children to be able to move around. Children love to walk, they are not really interested in the destination though, they are more interested in being able to stop and explore along the way. Taking a walk facilitates the innate desire to understand and explore their world. Offering different sets of activities on the shelves help facilitate the exploration and then stopping to ponder and making a decision to explore further something that catches their attention. We enable the inner teacher take control.

At the end of the day, the prepared environment must take into consideration the needs of the individual children in the classroom. So today's class would be different from what you would find in the following year. It should be a fluid environment constantly changing to meet the changing and developmental needs of the children in the classroom.



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Also the language we use is important as we converse with the children, this is part of the environment, civility helps the children know that they are supported and that the adults will help them along to continue learning on a daily basis. We do not shout at the children we do not use the cane, we show them what we expect and are great models for them. The children simply pick up on this and learn good and right behaviour.

The environment is also full of life, moving children, speaking children, not quiet children! Conversation among themselves and with adults is the norm. The beauty of what can be achieved in this kind of environment is incredible. This is true Montessori.

The Prepared Teacher must prepare the Montessori Environment to be beautiful, neat, clean, simple full of activities and child focused.