

# Montessori Matters



*Concentration, essential for learning, occurs as children develop eye-hand coordination. (left) Four-digit addition. (right) Transfer with a baster.*

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## After School Studios

### March

- 15 Discovering Chinese 3:00-4:30
- 16 Discovering French 3:00-4:00
- 17 French Club 3:15-4:15
- 18 Chinese Club 3:15-4:45
- 19 Art with Tina 3:00-4:00
- Chess Club 3:30-4:30

## On the Calendar

### March

- 17 Bookmobile 1:05-1:35
- 17 Board Meeting 7:00
- 22-26 Book Fair
- 24 Parent Evening 5:30 - 7:00 pm:  
"Parenting children in an Ever-Changing Future." A light supper and child care are available.
- 26 School Closed—Conferences
- 29-31 School Closed—Spring Break

### April

- 1-2 School Closed—Spring Break
- 24 Springtime Revelry

# The Sensitive What ???

By Dr. Paul Epstein

**Q: "I've heard about the Sensitive Periods. Are they contagious?"**

**A: Yes!**

For over 100 years, Montessori educators have observed a phenomena found in young children world-wide: The Sensitive Periods. First identified by Dr. Maria Montessori, each sensitive period is a specific kind of inner compulsion. These compulsions motivate young children to seek objects and relationships in the environment. Children use these to develop themselves. A young child, however, is neither consciously aware of, nor capable of directly communicating, his or her potentials.

Nevertheless, the Montessori experience demonstrates that children will accomplish a more complete development of their unique capabilities if we present them with three conditions. The first is the adult's knowledge of child development and the sensitive periods. The second is a prepared classroom environment that satisfies each sensitive period. The third is educational observation by the trained adult.

### The Sensitive Periods

Nearly one hundred years ago, Dr. Maria Montessori discovered that children are self-motivated to learn from their environments. Borrowing ideas from biologists and philosophers of her day, Montessori proposed that each child carries within him two



## **The Sensitive Periods**

The eleven Sensitive Periods occur from birth through the age of six. While each continues throughout life, the approximate ages for the onset of each as a “sensitive period” and its conclusion are indicated after the general description:

### **Order**

This sensitive period is characterized by a desire for consistency and repetition. A passionate love for established routines, children can be deeply disturbed by disorder. The environment must be carefully organized with a place for everything and with carefully established ground-rules. (ages 2 - 4)

### **Movement**

Random movements become coordinated and controlled: grasping, touching, turning, balancing, crawling, walking. (birth - 1)

### **Small Objects**

Children experience a fixation on small objects and tiny details. (1- 4)

### **Grace and Courtesy**

Imitation of polite and considerate behavior leads to an internalization of these qualities into the personality. (2- 6)

### **Refinement of the Senses**

A fascination with sensorial experiences (taste, sound, touch, weight, smell) results in children learning to observe and make increasingly refined sensorial discriminations. (2- 6)

***The sensitive period or fascination with small objects stimulates essential cognitive development. (left) Matching objects to pictures. (right) Sequencing the Red Knobless Cylinders which differ by diameter.***

sorts of genetic designs - one physical and one psychical. The physical plan will determine the child's eventual height, hair color, and other physical characteristics. The psychical plan takes the form of the sensitive periods. Montessori identified eleven different sensitive periods occurring from birth through the age of six: order, movement, small objects, grace and courtesy, refinement of the senses, writing, reading, language, spatial relationships, music, and mathematics.

Each sensitive period is:

- A period of special sensibility and psychical attitudes.
- An overpowering force, interest, or impetus directing the child to particular qualities and elements in the environment.
- A period of time during which the child centers his or her attention on specific aspects of the environment, to the exclusion of all else.
- A passion and a commitment.
- A guide towards creative activities.
- An intense and prolonged period which does not lead to fatigue or

boredom but instead leads to persistent energy and interest.

- A transitory state; once realized, the sensitive period disappears.
- Never relived or regained.

### **The Prepared Environment**

The sensitive periods describe ways in which the child investigates the environment; each sensitive period direct a purposeful investigation through which the child seeks self-perfection. Investigations and a quest for perfection occur when everything in the child's environment is “just right.”

Remember Goldilocks and the Three Bears? How Goldilocks, despite warnings and admonishments from her parents to never ever leave home without their permission, wandered off into the forest? Then Goldilocks, now very lost, arrived at the threshold of an inviting cottage-like house and (again, without permission) walked inside? Greeted by three bowls of porridge, a hungry and tired Goldilocks tasted the first one. It was too cold. The second was too hot. But the third was “just right.” Goldilocks next walked into the living room and tried each of three chairs. The first was too hard, the second too soft, and the



## ***The Sensitive Periods***

### ***Writing***

Children become fascinated with letters and numerals. They attempt to reproduce these with pencil or pen and paper. Montessori discovered that writing precedes reading. (3- 4)

### ***Reading***

Spontaneous interest in the symbolic representations of the sounds of each letter and in the formation of words. (3- 5)

### ***Expressive Language***

Use of words to communicate: a progression from babbling to words to phrases to sentences, with a continuously expanding vocabulary and comprehension. (birth to 6)

### ***Spatial Relationships***

Forming impressions about relationships in space: the design of familiar places, able to find the way around the neighborhood, and increasingly able to work complex puzzles. (4 - 6)

### ***Music***

Spontaneous interest in, and the development of, pitch, rhythm, and melody. (2 - 6)

### ***Mathematics***

Formation of the concepts of quantity and operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) from the uses of concrete learning materials. (birth to 6)



***The sensorial materials satisfy children's sensitive periods for order, movement, and the refinement of the senses. (left) The Red Rods, a set of ten rods, increase in length by ten centimeters. (right) The Brown Prisms increase by volume.***

third was "just right." Finally, our precocious child found her way to the bedroom of three beds where the third was, of course, "just right."

And that is the connection between Goldilocks and Montessori. Montessori teachers are charged with providing learning environments in which everything is, "just right."

Everything. Food, furniture, learning activities, social relations, clothing, routines, and rituals must all be "just right" in order for each young child to develop her or his fullest potential. No one knows what motivated Goldilocks to wander off into the forest.

Eventually the Three Bears return to their home prepared environment. Baby bear makes several startling discoveries. Somebody ate all my porridge. Somebody sat in and broke my chair. Somebody is sleeping in my bed, and there she is. For the young child, life in a Montessori classroom is also about making discoveries. The classroom is filled with learning activities designed for young children to fulfill their sensitive periods and learning potentials.

Children search the classroom and discover objects and exercises which satisfy the compulsions of their sensitive

periods. The sensitive period of order, for example, compels children to sort and sequence objects into just the right places. Younger children might choose the knobbed cylinders, pink cubes, or red rods. The sensitive period for order compels children to insist that events take place in exactly the right sequence. Parents of toddlers know that their children react loudly whenever anything is out of sequence or order.

There are several principles that guide the preparation of the environment: freedom, beauty, and contact with nature.

The principle of freedom is a primary characteristic of all meaningful and lasting learning. Children freely choose their own "work" - learning activities - based on their currently active inner sensitive period. Freedom is not a free-for-all, but instead, the principle is that of freedom-within-limits. The Montessori teacher understands that for young children, freedom is an accomplishment of the development of inner self-discipline. Self-discipline is understood to be a result of succeeding independently of others. In other words, adults must never do for the child anything that the child can learn to perform for her or himself. Instead, the adult must protect each child's choice by ensuring that the child





***Fun Friday! Students, faculty, and parents enjoyed a wonderful program of songs, dances, poetry, and instrumental performances. The afternoon ended with a drumming circle.***

will be able to work with the chosen learning materials without interruption or interference from other children.

Beauty, another principle of the prepared environment, requires designing complete learning activities. Everything needed is present and in good repair. Objects placed in the classroom are attractive, elegant, and designed to attract the child's interest and attention. The classroom objects also represent reality and nature. Children use real sinks and refrigerators instead of pretend ones. Because in real life everyone does not have the same thing at the same time, there is only one piece of material instead of multiple sets.

Contact with nature and reality are a third principle. Dr. Montessori taught that a child's direct contact with nature results in understanding and appreciating order, harmony, and beauty. The Montessori classroom environment is a place of life. Children learn to take care of plants, animals, and fish. Magnifying glasses, microscopes, and simple experiments are available for children to observe and learn from nature.

If the environment does not contain what the child seeks, Montessori believed that the child would not obtain his or her full potential. The child's per-

sonality would become permanently stunted.

Recent research on optimal learning conditions verifies Dr. Montessori's insightful discoveries of the sensitive periods. When the classroom and teacher are child-centered, children will learn more, and they will learn with greater comprehension. When children are allowed to make choices, move about the classroom, and explore objects that demonstrate relationships, their academic achievements tend towards deeper understanding. Children in our Montessori classrooms enjoy optimal learning conditions which also offer opportunities to achieve self-discipline, confidence, and develop proficiencies in communication and problem solving. How you learn does influence who you will become.

room (wish lists are created by guides and assistants). Books purchased will then be given to that class.

**After all sales are completed, 50% of the proceeds come back to the school for more books.**

**Parents can create wish lists too! To create a wish list:**

- 1) go to [www.readtoachildtoday.com](http://www.readtoachildtoday.com). Browse books and create an electronic wish list. The list is saved and sent to the Usborne representative, Karman.
- 2) Email Karman at [karman4usborne@yahoo.com](mailto:karman4usborne@yahoo.com) with your requests or questions.

**Thank you for your support. We look forward to seeing you!**

## ***Usborne Book Fair***

**March 22—26**

It's time for the spring Usborne Book Fair! This is an EASY way to improve classroom and library book selection.

Please view the wish list posted at the book fair from your child's class-

## ***Lost & Found***

Is your child missing articles of clothing? Check the Lost and Found in the office before March 26. We may have what you are looking for. After spring break, we will take unclaimed items to Goodwill.

