

The Montessori Foundation

Building a Collaborative Learning Community

Getting Everyone On the Same Page

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Premise I

Many Montessori programs look like archipelagos of classrooms,
instead of seamless landmasses of
inter-connected learning experiences.

Why?

Because teachers in these schools happily close the doors of their
classrooms and present
the Montessori curriculum,
through the prepared environment,
according to how they were trained by their trainers, guided by
their mentors,
directed by their administrators,
and at times, pressured by parents.

Premise II

The natural tendency of a group of Montessori teachers
working in a school community
is to drift apart over time,
in their instructional practices,
prepared environments,
and observable learning outcomes –

as opposed to converging and merging
toward greater and greater program cohesion,
practice consistency,
and optimum learning outcomes.

Premise III

A Montessori school leader
can slow down and reverse “*continental drift*”
among teachers,
with regard to their instructional practices,
curriculum/environment,
and resulting learning outcomes
by:

1. Hiring, nurturing, and retaining teachers who are committed to continuous self-improvement, professional development, research, experimentation, and innovation.
2. Creating a collaborative faculty culture, one in which all ideas are considered, successes are shared, challenges are supported, people mentor and are mentored, where an atmosphere of collegiality is tangible.
3. Defining your vision of human potential. What do you mean by a “normalized” person? What qualities of character and life skills are you cultivating?
4. Agreeing upon the essential elements of Montessori programming and practice – those pedagogical principles that will never be compromised.
5. Devising a research-based process for resolving Montessori practice differences.
6. Identifying proven Montessori mentors before attempting to resolve divisive Montessori practice issues – individuals who have demonstrated expertise on the issue in question.
7. Creating a team of skilled instructional leaders (internal and/or external) who know how to guide teachers toward ever-evolving Montessori “*best practice*.”

6 Essential Elements for Creating a Collaborative and Innovative Faculty Culture

1. **We are committed to life-long learning and self-improvement** – just as we ask our students to be.
2. **We are committed to practicing and improving our adult Grace and Courtesy behaviors**, to the development of our social intelligence.
3. **We agree on the kind of human beings we are cultivating through our program**, on our educational outcomes, on the definition of what it means to be *“normalized.”*
4. **We have connected our curriculum vertically with agreed upon transition benchmarks of learning**, so students are successful and comfortable in their next and new classroom communities.
5. **We have identified and agree upon the “essential elements” of authentic Montessori practice** and are committed to continuously working toward these instructional ideals.
6. **We have developed and utilize a collaborative, inclusive, and scientific method for resolving our differences of opinion** and approach to Montessori learning and teaching.

**Samples of Collaboratively-Generated
Montessori “*Best Practice*” Documents**

The 10 Habits of the CARE-ing Organization

Johns Hopkins Hospital

Habit 1 Mind Your Manners

Use courtesy words and phrases like please, thank you, and may I help you?

Habit 2 Be Present

Give your customer 100 percent of your attention with your eyes, words and body language.

Habit 3 Be Positive

Think the best of people in all situations.

Habit 4 Teamwork Works

Support your co-workers. Make each other look good.

Habit 5 Do Sweat the Small Stuff

Make a big impact with a small gesture of kindness.

Habit 6 Make a Promise, Keep a Promise

Follow through with all commitments.

If you say you're going to do something, do it.

Habit 7 Rediscover Silence

Practice active listening skills. Remember that listening is not just waiting for your turn to speak.

Habit 8 Be Thankful

Take time to thank someone every day.

Habit 9 Think Ahead

Anticipate your patients' and other customers' needs.

Habit 10 Just Do It

Put yourself in your patients' and other customers' shoes. How would you expect to be treated?

Rising Sun Montessori Charter School

Rise to the Occasion!
10 Ways We Learn and Grow Together

1. ***Manage yourself.***
Get calm and cool before communicating your needs, feelings, or ideas.
2. ***Be the change you want in others.***
Take responsibility for your own attitude and actions.
3. ***“The sun also rises.”***
Assume best intentions. Appreciate others’ efforts and contributions.
4. ***Stop, look, and question.***
Is this the time and place to discuss this? Is the other person ready to engage?
5. ***The “I”s are the windows of the soul.***
Share your experience, feelings, needs, and wants through “I” messages.
6. ***Receptive, but not oversensitive.***
Let go of the experience. Remember the lesson.
7. ***Enjoy generous helpings.***
Don’t hesitate to offer or ask for support.
8. ***Amends justify the ends.***
Apologizing can be more important than results.
9. ***A smile can brighten the landscape of the heart.***
Lighten the load of someone having a rough day.
10. ***Add your ray to the Rising Sun.***
Be a trustworthy team player. Do what you can to make others shine.

Colegio Montessori Sierra Madre

In working together to manifest our vision for the children and families we serve, for our professional staff and organizational leaders, and for the school community as a whole, we are committed to cultivating relationships that are rooted in the following values:

RESPECT	We conduct ourselves and communicate with kindness and respect for all – students, staff, parents, school leadership, and the community-at-large
RESPONSIBILITY	We assume responsibility for our choice of thoughts, emotions, attitudes, actions, educational and organizational decisions.
HONESTY	We are honest with ourselves and others throughout the school community – in seeking greater understanding of the needs of the others.
HUMILITY	We think and act with humility so that we may be open to continuous learning in service to students, their families, and our professional associates.
EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS	We treat others as we wish to be treated – fairly and equitably - regardless of their past mistakes, or their ethnic, economic, racial, or religious origins.
HARMONY	We strive to live in peace and harmony with ourselves and others - through the practice of acceptance, empathy, and forgiveness
OPEN COMMUNICATIONS	We address our feelings, needs, and ideas directly with those empowered to improve our lives, the lives and learning of students, and the well-being of others throughout the school community. We avoid the temptation of gossip and hurtful innuendo.
ENTHUSIASM AND POSITIVE ATTITUDE	We focus joyfully on what is positive in others and in our school community. We dream about our potential for doing more good. We look beyond the pain of the past and our current problems Toward new ideas for improving the quality of life for all.

Jewish Education Alliance

1. We are aware of each other's strengths and needs, and know who to go to for support and coaching when addressing an issue or challenge.
2. We think through our communications with others before we approach them and speak our minds.
3. We strive to present our thoughts calmly, clearly, and rationally, with minimal emotional baggage.
4. We approach our personal and community challenges from a solution-oriented perspective, offering ideas and suggestions to improve the situation.
5. We make time and space to communicate.
6. Before engaging another person in conversation we assess their state of mind, readiness, and the current setting to determine the appropriateness of the environment for effective communications.
7. We view good communications as a collaborative "dialogue" – a gathering of ideas that create a whole greater than the parts.
8. We judge favorably, accept differences gracefully, and speak in the positive about others in the school community.
9. We listen for the gold in others thoughts and words.
10. We invite and include all parties who need to be part of, and could be affected by, our conversations and decisions.
11. We actively listen to one another, posing questions for clarification, to be sure we understand what the other person is saying.
12. In speaking our minds and stating our cases, we strive to create an environment that invites the listener to participate, inquire, and share their thoughts and feelings.
13. We strive to read non-verbal messages in each other's faces and body language, so we may better understand one another and respond supportively.
14. We take our issues and ideas first and directly to the person(s) empowered to make the change we desire.
15. We strive to understand and empathize with the other person's feelings, needs, and ideas.
16. We make time to review and evaluate proposed solutions and our progress toward achieving them with all involved parties.

17. We begin difficult conversations and conflict resolution processes by stating first our “good and highest” intentions.
18. When resolving conflicts and differences we take responsibility for our own feelings, needs, and desires by communicating in the “I” Message format:
 - “I feel . . .” (communication of our emotions)
 - “When I have the experience of . . .” (communication of our perception of our experience)
 - “Because I need, or my principles dictate . . .” (communication of our needs and/or personal principles)
 - “My request is . . .” (communication of our desires or aspirations)

6 Practices of Collaborative Staff Cultures

Perspectives That Enhance Work Relationships,
Work Performance, and Program Quality

- PRACTICE I HONOR PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES**
FEELINGS, NEEDS, AND DREAMS.
- PRACTICE II APPRECIATE OTHERS** FOR THEIR UNIQUE
GIFTS, THEIR EFFORTS, PROGRESS, AND
ACCOMPLISHMENTS.
- PRACTICE III ASSUME PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.**
*“HOW HAVE I CONTRIBUTED TO THE CURRENT
SITUATION? WHAT I CAN DO TO BE PART OF THE
SOLUTION?”*
- PRACTICE IV COMMIT TO LEARNING AND
SELF-IMPROVEMENT – PERSONAL GROWTH,
RELATIONSHIP BUILDING, MONTESSORI PRACTICE
IMPROVEMENT**
- PRACTICE V FOCUS ON VISION AND OUTCOMES -**
*“WHAT AND WHO ARE WE HERE FOR? WHAT ARE WE TRYING
TO ACHIEVE?”*
- PRACTICE VI MENTOR AND BE MENTORED.**
LINKING SKILLED PEOPLE WITH PEOPLE
DESIRING SKILL DEVELOPMENT

5 Ways

To Appreciate and Celebrate People

1. Appreciate and celebrate their **accomplishments**.
2. Acknowledge and celebrate their **progress**.
3. Appreciate and encourage their **efforts**.
4. Appreciate and encourage the development and expression of their **unique gifts, personality and character traits, and their contributions to your life, your work, and the community**.
5. Emphasize and affirm their value as **an important member of the community**.

4 Aspects of a Balanced Montessori Program

1. **Ideals for Higher Order Human Beings for a More Equitable and Sustainable Planet:** A program that fosters ethical decision-making, emotional/social intelligence, social responsibility, higher order thinking, non-violent conflict resolution, executive functions, collaborative learning and teamwork, and ecological awareness
2. **Developmentally Attuned Educational Environments and Instructional Practices:** A program that is responsive to the learning needs and characteristics of the age/grade levels served
3. **Adaptation and Accommodation to the Needs, Tendencies, Interests, Abilities and Aspirations of the Individual Learner:** A program that offers differentiated instruction for a broad spectrum of learners
4. **Preparation for the Demands of Subsequent Scholastic Settings and Development of the Skills Required for Success in Family, Community, and Organizational Life:** A program that focuses on fitness and health, time management, study skills and test taking, consumer awareness, entrepreneurial abilities, learning and working in demographically diverse milieus, leadership, and parenting

Montessori Essential Elements

Indicators – Contra-indicators Exercise

“What would you see, hear, and feel?”

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT

OBSERVABLE INDICATORS

CONTRA-INDICATORS

Essential Elements of Montessori Philosophy

Stepping Stones Montessori School

- The Stepping Stones Montessori School community is committed to the Montessori philosophy
 - ... by having a// lead guides Montessori trained through a MACTE accredited program.
 - ... by having all assistants complete an Assistants Training program.
 - ... by participating in ongoing parent education programs.
- All levels play an equally important role in a child's development.
- The Stepping Stones Montessori School staff shows their awareness of the Nature of Learning
 - ... by providing the environment and time for a child to complete a long work cycle.
 - ... by offering some free choice time.
- The Stepping Stones Montessori School staff fosters learning as its own reward
 - ... by helping each child feel good about what they have learned.
- The Stepping Stones Montessori School community promotes constructive relationships
 - ... by modeling grace and courtesy at all levels.
- Stepping Stones Montessori School advocates a Three-Year cycle
 - ... by explaining the importance of students as teachers and models.
 - ... by placing children in a classroom for the full three years.
- Stepping Stones Montessori School follows the child
 - ... by bringing the child's interests into the Prepared Environment.
- Stepping Stones Montessori School promotes respect for child, environment, parents and staff
 - ... by modeling and representing lessons.
- Stepping Stones Montessori School guides create a positive climate for classroom behavior
 - ... by modeling respect of others and offering redirection if necessary.
- Stepping Stones Montessori School guides provide a Prepared Environment and the inclusive curriculum materials
 - ... by having a full set of age appropriate Montessori materials in every room.
 - ... by supplementing other materials as needed to engage the child.
 - ... by having the materials ordered and easily accessible.
 - ... by providing an environment that is peaceful, safe and aesthetically pleasing.
- Stepping Stones Montessori School promotes Cosmic Education
 - ... by fostering the "Sense of Wonder" at all times.
 - ... by promoting a sense of interconnectedness between all things.
- Stepping Stones Montessori School staff is flexible in the teaching methods that are used
 - ... by providing both format and informal lessons.
 - ... by giving lessons individually, in a small group or in a large group,
 - ... by adapting lessons to nurture an individual's learning style.

Program Consistency & Continuity Scan

Using the following rubric, determine where there is consistency or lack of consistency in program and practices at your Program Level, and where there needs to be consistency and continuity.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Prepared Environment | 2. Curriculum (what we teach) |
| 3. Instruction (how we teach) | 4. Student Community |
| 5. Teacher as Role model | 6. Observation and Record Keeping |
| 7. Schedule/Work Cycle | 8. Classroom Leadership |

Consistent Practices

Inconsistent Practices

Requires Consistency

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AUTHENTIC MONTESSORI PROGRAMS AND PRACTICE

INDIVIDUALITY *"I am a unique learner – with my own passions and perspectives, process and pace of learning."*

INDEPENDENCE *"Help me to do it myself."*

INTERDEPENDENCE *"I am my brother's (and sister's) keeper. I share what I have learned with others."*

COLLABORATION *"25 heads are better than 1."*

**HANDS-ON
LEARNING** *"If I can touch it, manipulate it, and explore it - I can understand it and apply it for life."*

SELF-DIRECTION *"I have the freedom to determine my destiny in proportion to my demonstrated self-discipline."*

**INTRINSIC
MOTIVATION** *"The rewards of my efforts are my accomplishments and contributions. I am motivated by my desires and dreams."*

**LONG,
UNINTERRUPTED
ENGAGEMENT** *"I can dig deeply, explore freely, and soar boldly into the vast worlds of knowledge – until am saturated and satisfied."*

THE ENVIRONMENT: *"My learning environment calms me, focuses me, and helps me to master one thing at a time."*
**SIMPLE, SERENE,
SINGULAR-FOCUS**

THE TEACHER: *"When I am ripe and ready, you open a door in the halls of learning, present a sneak preview, then turn me loose . . . under your watchful and caring eye. You see me succeeding before I venture my first step."*
**OBSERVER
MODELER
SUPPORTER
VISIONARY**

**HEALTHY
WHOLE
AND
DEVELOPMENT** *"I can take care of myself. I can feel, think, initiate, concentrate, communicate, collaborate, persevere, problem-solve, and play."*

**DIVERSITY ENRICHES
PEOPLE AND
LEARNING** *"I am learning to live and learn with people are unlike me, yet very much like me, whose differences make no difference, yet make a big difference."*

**THE PLANE OF
DEVELOPMENT
DETERMINES
THE CLASS,
THE CURRICULUM,
THE INSTRUCTION** *"I learn in a classroom created for my brain and body, which makes learning fun and fulfilling, meaningful and memorable."*

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AUTHENTIC MONTESSORI PROGRAMS AND PRACTICE

CONTRA-INDICATORS – ***TRENDS TO THE CONTRARY IN SOME SCHOOLS***

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| INDIVIDUALITY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Everyone must do the exercises in the same the way the teacher learned them in training > One type of work plan or behavior management strategy fits all. |
| INDEPENDENCE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Too much freedom and choice > Too little freedom and choice > Teachers stepping in too quickly to help a students resolve their social, emotional, intellectual, or physical challenges. |
| INTERDEPENDENCE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Too few students offering to help, coach, mentor a peer in need > Too few students in need reaching out to request help from peer “mentors”. |
| COLLABORATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Imbalance in the culture or ratio of collaborative learning > Everyone working every day on their own > Inappropriate and ineffective collaborative grouping of students |

HANDS-ON LEARNING	>	Too much paper work or technology (worksheet, textbooks, computers) at too young an age, before the child has had sufficient experience with and mastery of the Montessori manipulatives
SELF-DIRECTION	>	Capable/normalized students who are too dependent on teachers for self-regulation, too micro-managed
	>	Immature/not-yet-normalized students without sufficient teacher-directed support and structure, who have too much freedom to responsibly handle it
	>	Teacher-generated work plans for every student forever.
INTRINSIC MOTIVATION	>	Praise ("Good job!")
	>	Hard work first, then art, fun work, practical life, outdoor time, snack etc.
	>	Writing/recording work to make a booklet to take home to show parents
	>	Any type of material reward
LONG, UNINTERRUPTED ENGAGEMENT	>	Too much line time/community meeting time for all students for the whole school year
	>	Too many enrichment class pull-outs every day of the week
	>	Too many whole class lessons
	>	Bringing the children to the line when "false fatigue" hits or every time the children are having an off-morning

**THE ENVIRONMENT:
SIMPLE, SERENE,
SINGULAR-FOCUS**

- > Too many materials on display, but not needed for current or upcoming learning
- > Too many stored materials visible
- > Materials not organized, orderly, or clean on shelves
- > Too many things on display on the walls
- > Too many non-Montessori, open-ended activities on display
- > Too much garish color in the environment.

**THE TEACHER:
OBSERVER
MODELER
SUPPORTER
VISIONARY**

- > Little regular teacher observation (formal or informal)
- > Teachers using too much unnecessary language in lessons
- > Teachers not providing students with sufficient 2nd Period practice time (moving too fast to next lesson in series)
- > Teachers verbally reminding or correcting students about work details, instead of physically re-presenting the lesson
- > Teachers not offering students the time and means to process their emotions and resolve social conflicts
- > Teachers labeling or pigeonholing individual students who exhibit certain needs, tendencies, or behaviors

**HEALTHY
AND WHOLE
DEVELOPMENT**

- > Insufficient focus and emphasis on the development of the character
- > Insufficient focus and emphasis on emotional and social intelligences
- > Insufficient focus and emphasis on creative or artistic expression
- > Insufficient focus and emphasis on physical fitness

**DIVERSITY ENRICHES
PEOPLE AND
LEARNING**

- > Classroom community demographic imbalance (too few or too many)
- > Age mix imbalance
- > Gender mix imbalance
- > Cultural mix imbalance
- > Learning styles/exceptionalities mix imbalance
- > Single age-grade grouping or two age-grade grouping

**THE PLANE OF
DEVELOPMENT
DETERMINES
THE CLASS
THE CURRICULUM
THE INSTRUCTION**

- > Combining children who are in different Planes in a classroom community, as in K-1 3rd, 4th, 5th; Upper Elementary with Middle School
- > Presenting lessons and materials in a manner that is not developmentally attuned or appropriate for the students in that classroom, such as technology and excessive paper work for First Plane children, too much individual work (non-collaborative) with Upper Elementary or Middle School students

- > Too much freedom or too many choices for less developed children,
- > Too little autonomy for mature, capable, self-regulating students

The Montessori “*Best Practice*” Matrix

1. What did Dr. Montessori have to say about this?
2. What does current research have to say about this?
3. In light of the life skills we want our students to learn, how will these outcomes effect this decision?
4. How will the observable needs and tendencies the students we currently serve effect this decision?
5. What have benchmark Montessori schools done in this area and how did they initiate and implement this?
6. What have benchmark non-Montessori schools done in this area and what was their process?

Employing the “*Appreciative Inquiry*” Model to Debrief the School Year

DISCOVER . . .

What gives us life?

What is our Montessori learning community
at our very best?

DREAM . . .

How can we build upon our vision, our mission, our
strengths, and successes?

DETERMINE . . .

Which dreams of growth and improvement shall we focus
on first?

DESIGN . . .

How shall we bring into being the goals we have set for the
growth and improvement of our people, program, and
learning community?

Exercise

DISCOVER!

Recall the events, program-related activities, and human interactions that occurred in your school this past year that represent the essence and mission of your Montessori community at its best, its greatest, and its noblest.

DREAM...

Of ways you and your school community can build on the greatness and goodness of this past year to create events, learning experiences, and relationships next year that carry the school's mission, vision, and values forward to new heights!

10 Characteristics of Successful and Sustainable Teaching Teams

1. **Define roles and responsibilities:** in the daily schedule; lesson presentation and re-presentation; classroom leadership/behavior management; upkeep of the environment; communication with parents, fellow staff, and administration; observation and record keeping
2. **Get to know the whole person** – beyond roles and responsibilities: background experience (personal/professional/cultural; interests and talents; learning styles; aspirations (personal and professional); and default modes when under stress, fatigued, or overwhelmed
3. **Engage early and often in “pre-nuptial agreement” conversations:** “What’s your view on . . .” What’s your assessment of . . .” What are your ideas about . . .?
4. **Value ideas over experience, training, and seniority.** No one has all the answers. Sometimes the newest and least experienced teacher sees things the clearest, finds solutions we never thought of
5. **In training a new teaching partner follow the Three Period Lesson Model we employ with students:**

Period I	Present/model/demonstrate the desired activity/action
Period II	Facilitate guided observation, practice, and experimentation
Period III.	Encourage independent practice and refinement with constructive feedback, encourage, and re-presentations

6. **Make time to meet on a daily and weekly (longer meeting) basis** to review progress, needs, goals, and plans
7. **Establish a standing agenda for your weekly team meetings that includes:**
 - Appreciations, acknowledgments, encouragements, progress, and successes
 - Relationship check-in: communication and coordination of the team, including goals for greater effectiveness
 - Lesson/event/project/environment planning
 - Children of concern or challenge
 - Communication with parents
 - Training for individual and team improvement
8. **Be immediate, direct, and transparent with your partner.** Don't bury hurts, disappointments or frustration or act them out passive-aggressively.
9. **Seek first to understand your partner before seeking to be understood,** Practice active listening and "I" message speaking.
10. **Help your partner express their talents and manifest their dreams.** Create an environment where they can glow and grow.