

Parent Teacher Conferences



This year I have an over flow of three year olds. Needless to say, it's been a challenging year. First there was the transition separation anxiety - temper tantrum phase, then there was the having lessons and using the materials correctly phase, and finally we arrived at the phase where the children were able to choose appropriate work and interact within the social setting of the classroom.

Yesterday was the final formal conference of the year. I sat and talked to the parents of my three year olds about the social-emotional growth of their child. I told them how responsible the child had become and how proud I was that they could be more independent. The parents listened and nodded they too were pleased with this developmental growth. And then came THAT question I knew was coming.

“What I want to know is how are they doing on their letters? Are they working on reading?”

This was followed by the proud declaration, *“We have been working on letters at home and they are really interested in reading”*. Often followed by, *“So I am just wondering why they aren't working on reading here at school”*.

I knew it was coming. All year while I am looking for skills like following directions, cooperation, and the ability to use the materials in a beneficial way the parents are looking for academic proficiency.

Explaining to parents that developmental milestones need to be in place before I begin to introduce the child to letters is a balancing act. I don't want to damage my relationship with the parents on one side and on the other I do want them to understand how Montessori works.

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Telling a parent that in Montessori schools we don't introduce reading lessons until we are fairly sure the child is ready may sound like an insult to some parents. After all "they are learning their letters at home".

That's when the conferences became my opportunity to educate the parents on the Montessori Method.

Carefully I began to explain to each of these parents that...

In Montessori I am trained to observe the child for indications of both needs and readiness. I watch to see if the developmental achievements that lead to academics are present.

First I am looking to see if the child is being respectful of the classroom environment, and if they are responsible for the care of the classroom and their own personal needs. (By respect and responsible I mean that the child demonstrates good manners towards peers and adults, cleans up spills, pushes in chairs, rolls rugs, walks around the work space of others, and returns the work to it's proper place.)

As Montessori teacher what matters most is that the child becomes "Normalized". (In Montessori philosophy normalization means the child is able to perform everyday tasks stress free, as well as concentrate and remain focused for a length of time.)

Once this "Normalization" is seen then I observe further. I am watching and waiting for the child to show an interest in letters, and if they do I observe further to see if the child's hands and fingers are prepared for this work.

Through observation I can "Follow the Child". "Follow the Child" is a Montessori concept that means observing the child's interests and developmental abilities and then preparing lessons accordingly. (After all you don't teach a child to walk when they need to learn to crawl.)

I am glad that parents want to introduce their children to the world of reading. It is important to provide children with books. Books give the child an opportunity to gain vocabulary and language comprehension which is essential to their overall development.

As a Montessori teacher I believe that when the adult has expectations that lead to introducing academic materials too soon the child may miss out on the lessons the child's development is demanding.

In Montessori we are not directed by our opinions of current academic opinion but by the child's developmental path. Montessori education means that we act as a support to the child's unique developmental needs.

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Before I introduce the child to letter sounds I first ask myself; is this child normalized? Can they follow directions and stay focused through a lesson? Does the child need more time to develop focus and concentration?

Does the child grasp a pencil or crayon in a position that will allow them to be guided toward writing? Does the child need further work on their finger grip?

Is the child able to organize their work? Can they track with their eye from left to right?

I assure you your child will learn to read. First we must prepare the path.



Getting there is a process, and it is in that process that we find Montessori. The product is merely what occurs when we follow the child.