

# Appleton Public Montessori GLOSSARY

**Absorbent Mind:** Dr. Maria Montessori believed that children from ages 0-6 have an absorbent mind; that is, they literally absorb the sights, sounds, words, and impressions that are all around them. During this time period, they learn without any effort or exertion.

**The Acquisition of Culture:** The period from ages 6-12 is a period of development Dr. Maria Montessori called the Acquisition of Culture in which the basic standards, expectations, rules, and laws are internalized. It may be as simple as knowing, "our culture writes left to right, top to bottom," but once conscious, it opens the door to the appreciation of other cultures, "the Hebrew culture writes right to left." That's why students at this age find research so appealing.

**Control of Error:** In order to allow for work to be completed independently, most Montessori materials (especially those in Practical Life) contain a built-in control to let the child know whether or not the work is being done correctly. For example, a sorting work will have the same number of items in each category; if the items are sorted incorrectly, the number of items in each category will be uneven.

**Concrete to Abstract:** Montessori classrooms are filled with hands-on materials. Dr. Maria Montessori believed that knowledge proceeds from the hand to the brain. Students tend to be more relaxed and settled when they are placing colored pegs on a board, (square root) or scrubbing a table (Children's House practical life activity). Concrete materials make concepts real, and therefore easily internalized. The student works abstractly (paper and pencil) when he or she has internalized the pattern and no longer needs the material.

**Cosmic Education:** Cosmic education is Montessori's umbrella term for elementary education. The concept is strongly related to "Whole to Part." Stories about the universe, as well as "Great Lessons," form the basis of the curriculum. Once the students have heard the grand design, have received the big picture, they feel satisfied by an apprehension of the whole and "their minds become fixed and they can concentrate."

**Freedom Within Limits:** Students are given many freedoms and choices within the classrooms. Expectations are in place and the children realize that there are certain limits to freedoms given. Example: Students are given the *freedom* to walk about the room. The expectations (*limits*) are that he/she walks, not run; walks around rugs; walks with respect and care.

**Great Lessons:** These are five major stories dramatizing the known truths of the universe and the progression of human civilization. The "Great Lessons" include the earth's creation, the beginning of life, the coming of human beings, and language and mathematics as tools of human communication. The law and order of the universe gradually becomes clear to the children through each successive story.

**Human Tendencies:** Dr. Maria Montessori believed that all people share some basic tendencies. Among these are exploration, work, communication, repetition, mastery, and perfection. They are seen across all cultures and countries. They are the driving force behind the development of culture and civilization.

**Indirect Presentation:** Because of the absorbent nature of the young child's mind, every action or event can be seen as a lesson. It is understood that children learn by watching other children work or by overseeing a lesson given to another. In the same way, they quickly absorb the behavior patterns and the language used by the family, the neighborhood children and even TV. *(related item: Presentation)*

**Materials:** Montessori has special and specific materials for classroom use. Each material has a specific use designed to accomplish a specific goal.

**Montessori Method:** This refers to the Montessori philosophy and specific approach to teaching, learning and use of materials.

**Planes of Development:** The four planes (or phases) of development are stages that children move through from complete dependence to independence. The first plane, infancy, includes 0-6 years of age. During this time, the child's subconscious mind is absorbing everything around him. The next phase, childhood, occurs between ages 6-12. This time is one of conscious learning, as a child begins to explore the world. Adolescence, from 12-18, encompasses the next plane. During this time, there is some upheaval as the child develops rapidly. This is in contrast with childhood, which is characterized by steady and reasoned activities. After this stage, the young adult enters maturity from 18-24 and can begin to find out how they fit into the world around them.

**Prepared Environment:** Dr. Maria Montessori observed that children's learning could be facilitated by an environment that was thoughtfully prepared, rather than randomly assembled. Facets of the prepared environment include work that is organized on shelves by curricular area, in order of difficulty. The work must also be complete, attractive, and accessible to the children. Unlike traditional education, where there is primarily a two part structure (Teacher/Student), Montessori classrooms have three equal parts (Teacher/Student/Environment). A Montessori teacher has the responsibility of preparing the classroom environment with appealing hands-on materials so that the environment also becomes the child's "teacher."

**Presentation:** The adult in a Montessori environment does not teach in the traditional sense. Rather she shows the child how to use the various materials/objects and then leaves her free to explore and experiment. This act of showing is called a presentation. To be effective, it must be done slowly and exactly, step by step, and with a minimum of words.

**Purposeful Movement:** In Montessori, the child is given work to do that involves physical movement. The movement is not superfluous to the work; it is part of the work. In this way the motor skills are developed and strengthened.

**Whole to Part:** The fundamental principal for Montessori Elementary education is often referred to as "Cosmic Education." Science education starts with the "Big Bang" and moves logically to the formation of the solar system and earth's geology. Math education begins with the "Story of Math" and language education with "The Story of the Ox and the House" (the letters A, B). Montessori believed that the child's mind must first be satisfied by a vision of the whole, before it can satisfactorily deal with the parts.