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WMI Montessori Approach and Methodologies

To achieve WMI's mission and vision, the following aspects of the Montessori approach and methodology are also implemented in the classrooms.

Children and their Work

Children are free to work at their own pace with materials they have chosen, either alone or with others. The aim is to encourage active, self-directed learning and to strike a balance of individual mastery with small group collaboration within the whole group community. The teacher relies on his or her observations of the children to determine which new activities and materials may be introduced to an individual child or to a small or large group.

Creativity thrives in an atmosphere of acceptance and trust. Montessorians recognize that children, from toddlers to teenagers, learn and express themselves in a very individual way. Making choices, taking risks, self-correction of mistakes, openness to different perspectives, and the growth of self-confidence all encourage creativity to flourish.

Music, art, storytelling, movement, and drama are part of every Montessori program, as well as an emphasis on the sensory aspect of experience; and the opportunity for both verbal and nonverbal modes of learning.

Having said all these Westside Montessori will have the following basic characteristics at all levels:

- A classroom atmosphere which manifests respect to any person, material and its environment.
- A classroom that encourages social interaction for cooperative learning, peer teaching, and emotional development
- Will offer uninterrupted times or schedule which allows large blocks of time to work, problem-solve, to see connections in knowledge and to create new ideas

- Will offer a full range, a diverse set of Montessori materials, activities, and experiences which are designed to foster physical, intellectual, creative, social, personal independence and spiritual growth
- Recognizing that the families is an integral part of the child's development. A partnership and close relationship shall be established with the family
- Teachers educated in the Montessori philosophy and the methodology for the age level they are teaching, who have the ability and dedication to put the key concepts into practice
- A multi-aged, multi-graded heterogeneous grouping of students and preferably highly diverse community of children shall a consistent goal

The "Whole Child" Approach

The primary goal of a Montessori program is to help each child reach full potential in all areas of life. Beyond the concrete experiences and materials that self-instruct reading, writing, arithmetic, science and geography, the school will offer activities such as value & Christian formation, grace and courtesy lesson (e.g. Please and thank you, resolving conflict through conversation), value formation, practical life (e.g. sweeping, washing dishes), self-help skills (e.g. buttoning, zipping), music and movement (e.g. exposure to rhythm, composers, types of music), art appreciation (e.g. paintings, sculptures, greatest artist), history (e.g. historical events, people), sports (e.g. game history, rules, equipment, etc.) are just a few of the many subjects which will be part of the interrelated curriculum.

All of these will be provided in order to promote and ensure the development of physical coordination, social skills, emotional growth, cognitive skills as well as value and character building. Under the direction of a specially trained teacher, the holistic curriculum allows the child to experience the joy of learning, gives the child time to enjoy the process, ensures the development of self-esteem, and provides the experiences from which children create their knowledge.

The Mixed Age Group

Children develop their milestones by cycles and stages. The multi-age grouping in each class provides a family-like setting where learning can take place naturally. More experienced children share what they have learned while reinforcing their own knowledge and skills. The multi-age community interaction is intrinsic to Montessori. This encourages rich

language experiences, and opportunities for the development of empathy and social learning.

For this reason, having a mixed age grouping allows the children to experience being the youngest (the observer) towards being the oldest (leader) in the classroom. The complimenting needs of younger children needing a role model while the older child having opportunities to teach and lead which then leads to mastery of knowledge and builds strong self-confidence becomes a great venue to experience and develop their executive functions, leadership, patience, tolerance, respect, responsibility, accountability, development of inner discipline and many more.

The "Prepared Environment"

In order for self-directed learning to take place, the environment needs to be critically and purposefully prepared. The whole learning environment - facilities, room, materials, social climate, and experiences - must be supportive of the learner. Materials should be self-directed, child sized, beautiful & interesting, and complete in its entirety. The teacher provides necessary lesson, modeling and providing other supportive resources, including opportunities for children to function in a safe and positive climate. An atmosphere of support and trust enables the children to explore and discover confidently knowing that they could do things on their own successfully with a person of trust being there to support and help if need be.

The Montessori Materials

The beauty of the Montessori materials facilitates learning which builds from the concrete to the abstract in constructing their knowledge. Dr. Montessori's scientific observations of the children led her to design a number of multisensory, sequential, and self-correcting materials. The initial materials were developed by Seguin who works with mentally retarded children which then were adapted, modified by Montessori in the early 1900's.

But what makes it really distinct, separate and effective to children's learning? Here are some key points and characteristic that the Montessori materials carry:

- Materials are not randomly shaped but rather were carefully calculated as an instrument to educate the senses (haptically & barically) and the motor system which is interrelated to an implicit fact of knowledge. Ex pink tower, the blocks are increasing in size,

each block is one centimeter longer on all sides than the one that came before and there are ten blocks. Showing a tactile experience and explanation about the decimal system and the notion of cubing

- Though each material has one exact purpose, the materials fulfill and satisfy one or more needs of the children. Based on observation, several materials that offer multiple facets keeps the children engaged, therefore learn concentration, and enhances exploration, imagination and creativity.
- The sequence of materials from being simple to complex shows little redundancy across materials giving the children the time to master before moving on to the next material.
- All materials are interrelated; each material was developed in the context of all other materials, in consideration of all other areas of the Montessori curriculum (e.g. Math, social science, etc.) and also across classroom levels (the youngest to the oldest).

The Teacher

Originally called a "Directress", the Montessori teacher functions as designer of the environment, resource person, role model, demonstrator, record keeper, and meticulous observer of each child's behavior and growth.

The teacher is not the primary source of knowledge but rather acts only as a guide, acts as a facilitator of learning. With the complexity and the multifaceted materials, it will be critical to ensure the presence of a highly trained and experienced, certified teacher. The teachers, both the lead and the assistant's extensive training includes supervised classroom practice teaching and is specialized for the age group with which a teacher will work, i.e., infant & toddler, 3 to 6 year olds, 6 to 9 year olds, and 9 to 12 year olds.

The Use of Uniform

In addition to this education concept, WMI believes that discipline and a sense of identity are instilled in children early on. To promote this, the school offers something unique to the community that is not demonstrated in other existing schools: the wearing of a school uniform. Wearing of uniforms is practiced in other countries but very rarely in the United States. It keeps kids in line/focused and safe. When they are off school grounds they are easily recognized because of their uniform.

Accountability for students and for all team members of the school is something that we want to advocate. The school's reputation is often based on the behavior of its students both on and off school grounds, therefore creating a huge sense of awareness and consciousness in setting a good example at all times.

It also gives the students and parents the responsibility of taking care of their clothing/uniform. They are not cheap to replace and are required to wear to school so you learn to value what you have, keep it neat and clean and make sure it lasts as long as it can.

Moving away from commercial characters in clothing is another critical aspect. It keeps students from bickering and fighting over individual fashion, and preferences. It also eliminates socio-economic stereotyping based on the type of clothing & commercial brand names worn by students. Moreover, it keeps the school atmosphere focused on exploratory education and away from distraction. As studies have shown, uniformed students then will tend to do better in school through the areas of attendance, behavior, academic performance and command more respect.

The Multi-Lingual Environment

Capitalizing on "Absorbent Mind", part of the curriculum of WMI, is to be able to foster the learning of a second language for children: from simple conversational words towards spoken and written second language. Children's mind from 0-6 absorbs, not capable of discriminating any information presented clearly the best moment to introduce a second language, if not multiple languages.

WMI continues to invest in giving the children a huge amount of exposure to multiple languages. To date, the language that has been spoken are as follows: Hindi, Tamil, French, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Tagalog, and others. Immersions into these languages are being looked into being offered in the future.