Welcome Friends

Building Community within Infant and Toddler Programs

With Elizabeth Campbell and Melanie Binder

Special thanks to Barbara Bisceglia

American Montessori Society
Montessori: Inside & Out
Denver, CO
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Now ask yourself...

Who did you connect with?

Whose classroom would you want your child to be in?

Who would you feel more comfortable sharing personal information with?

Who would you want to receive information from?
What we are going to accomplish today?

What is the role of an infant toddler teacher?

Why is there a need to connect to parents?

Share ideas we have found to be successful for connecting to parents.
Do Over

Melanie Binder
1st Day of Day Care
10.27.15
9 weeks old
The way to start building a community is to make connections with the parents.

So let’s use Montessori’s Human Tendencies, which we use to build relationships to the children in our care and how we build community within our classroom, to build relationships with the parents and a larger community.
Montessori believed that if the human tendencies are addressed and allowed to be operative and flourish, proper human development and successful education will take place.

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In the infant/toddler environment, the first three Human Tendencies are the most important to the design, experience, and the benefits of the environment.
Orientation

Determining one's place in relation to something or someone.
Orientation for Parents

Adults need to have orientation in their life just as much as children.

They need a point of reference to the classroom. They need a person to turn to, a person to trust, a person to lean on, a person to listen, a person who supports them.

They need a person to help them feel safe as they are taking their first steps as parents into the Montessori community.
How to provide ORIENTATION for parents

Introducing yourself and sharing information about yourself.

Establishing communication with the parents before the child even joins the classroom.

Reaching out and being available.

Going on a home visit.

Being a friendly and welcoming person every day by greeting not only the children, but the parents.
Order

External organization and structure within an environment which can provide an element of security that leads to an internal organization of information and thoughts.
Order for Parents

Adults need to have order in their life just as much as children.

Parents need reliability and predictability because not only may Montessori be new, but the whole idea of their child going to school is new. They need to know what to expect from the school, program, classroom, and teacher. They need to be able to refer to information and they need to know how to get more information. They need to know what coincides with philosophy and what does not. They need to how how to support their child on his/her journey.

Once order is established, the parents will feel secure and the trusting bond with the teacher can be built upon.
How to provide ORDER for parents

The sharing of information along with a consistent schedule of communication with parents (ex. a daily report that goes home every day, photos that are sent home every Friday, newsletters that are sent once a month):

Reaching out to families
Schedule
Encouragement of a consistent routine between child/parent, parent/teacher.
Exploration

The acquisition of new information about world, environment, community, family, and self.
Exploration for Parents

Adults need to have exploration in their life just as much as children.

Once a sense of orientation and order are established between parents and teacher, the parents become more open to and willing to explore. They ask questions about how they can Montessori at home, they share personal and vulnerable information, they volunteer their time to help the program, they listen when you have feedback, they use their own talents to better the program, they encourage others to look into joining the Montessori community.
How to provide EXPLORATION for parents

The sharing of Montessori education through newsletters, flyers, and emails.

Sharing photographs and videos of things that are happening in the classroom.

Encouraging parents to come to parent education nights and ask questions.
What is the job of an infant/toddler teacher?

To use the Human Tendencies and Sensitive Periods:

To prepare the environment.

To guide the children.

To share factual information about the world.

To provide comfort and safety.

To be open, honest, and understanding.
But shouldn’t the definition also include “something” about the parents?

Sensitive Period for Parenting

During this period of time in a parent’s journey, they are highly interested in the hows and whys of parenting.

It becomes essential for infant and toddler guides to use this sensitive period to reach out to, educate, connect with, and support parents in the program. Not only does it help the parent, it helps the child when all caregivers are on same page, and it leads to families continuing their educational path in the Montessori community.
Add to Job Requirements

To use the Human Tendencies and Sensitive Period for Parenting:

- To prepare the environment for the parents.
  
  To guide the parents.

- To share information with the parents about the Montessori method and their child’s experience.

- To provide comfort and safety for the parents.

- To be open, honest, and understanding with the parents.
“Security occurs before curiosity.”
How do we start making connections?

Use SIMPLE and EFFECTIVE ways to connect to parents to create a community of trust and support.

Before School Starts  
Welcome Letter  
Home Visit  
Introductory Postcard

During the Year  
Postcards  
Daily Reports  
Photographs  
Montessori Moments

Each idea has multiple purposes that lead back to orientation, order, and exploration.
Welcome Letters
Toddler Program  
Montessori Children’s School

WELCOME

What to Bring:
*Please clearly label each personal item that belongs to your child with your child’s name so that it can always be return to you if misplaced or lost.
1. Two sets of extra clothes to include shirts, pants, and socks to be left at school.
2. If your child is in diapers: one package of diapers and one package of wipes.
3. If your child is in underwear: at least three pairs of underwear and a third set of clothing. If your child wears underwear while awake and diapers or pull-ups while he/she sleeps, please also provide one package of what you use and one package of wipes.

Arrival and Drop Off:
Parents should walk their child to the classroom. We have found that morning good-byes are easier for both the child and the parent if the break is made quickly with a big hug and kiss and the parent leaving with a smile. We know how special your child is, and we will take loving care of your child. It may be hard the first few days, but it is important to show your child how secure you feel about the teachers and the classroom environment. The feelings of fear and the possible crying your child may experience will end more quickly this way. Think about establishing a special good-bye routine with your child.

Daily Rhythm:
- 7:00-8:30  Morning Supervision
- 8:30-9:00  Morning Drop-off
- 8:30-11:30  Work time/ In Class Specialists/ Snack/
  Bathroom Time/ Pony Rides/ Outdoor Play/
  Circle Time
- 11:30  Pick Up

Important Dates:
- Sept 1st: First Day of School
- November 24-27th: Thanksgiving Break
- December 20th-January 6th: Winter Break
- March 20th- 27th: Spring Break
- June 6th: Last Day of School

Let us know if you have any questions.
Ms. Liz and Ms. Melanie
Dear Families,

I am so excited to welcome your family into our toddler community at The Montessori Children’s School. I am eager to learn about your family and your toddler, but let me start by introducing myself.

My name is Elizabeth Campbell, but you can call me Liz. I have big hair, a joyful laugh, and I adore toddlers. I have a B.S. in Early Childhood Education from Boston University and an Infant/Toddler Montessori Certification from the American Montessori Society. I was raised in New Jersey and spent most of my adult life and teaching career in Key West, Florida. I am a mom of a four year old and an infant, so I know all about the joys and frustrations of raising a toddler. I love painting, crafting, and dancing like no one is watching.

The first day of school is quickly approaching and I wanted to touch base about a few chances to get to know each other better before school begins.

Home Visits

Starting school is a BIG deal and I know that it might be the first time your child will be separated from you, which can be difficult for the whole family. Home visits are great way for both your family and myself to get to know more about each other before the first day of school. A home visit is designed to help support your family transition into the school community while being in a safe and comfortable environment. The visit is very casual, lasts about an hour, and is an opportunity to ask questions, chat, and settle any nerves that you or your child might be experiencing regarding the starting of school. At the simplest of levels, yet perhaps the most important; the act of welcoming me into your home indicates to your child that I can be trusted and that he/she will be safe in my care. If you are interested in scheduling a home visit, I am available on July 30th (afternoon) and 31st (morning and afternoon), August 15th or 16th. If those dates don’t work, let me know when you are available and we can try and make it work. Either way, please email me a date and time that works for family and I will do my best to accommodate.

Get to Know You Questionnaire

I have created a document that is designed to help me get to know your family and your child. The questions were chosen to give me more information about the important aspects of your child’s life and will assist me in the process of successfully transitioning your child into school life. The more information I have, the more successful the transition will be for your child. I have attached the document and you can either hand write the answers or send it back via email. It will take a little time to fill out, but it is truly important and I thank you in advance.

Save the Dates

Please mark your calendars for two important events.

August 19th @5:30

Toddler Parent Orientation – a mandatory meeting for parents to go over the daily schedule, routines, materials needed; basically the meat and potatoes of the Toddler Program and the Mangrove Classroom.

August 21st @9-11:00

Open House - a time for your child and family to explore the new classroom environment together.

Please do not hesitate to email me with any questions you have regarding just about anything. I’m here to support your family during this exciting time of introducing your child to school and to the Montessori method.

Thanks so much and look forward to hearing from all of you.

Ms. Liz
liz@montessorikeywest.com
Topics you may want to include in a Welcome Letter:

- Teacher bio
- Teacher photo
- Teacher contact information
- Important dates
- Program information
- List of items to bring on the first day of school
- Example of Daily Rhythm
- Invitation to a Home Visit
- Questionnaire
Home Visits
Elements of a Home Visit

- establish a personal intention for the visit—is it to connect to the child, or to connect to the family?

- scheduling—choose days and times that work for your schedule, and allot 30 minutes-1 hour per home visit

- extending an invitation—explain the purpose and value of a home visit

- visiting the home—arrive on time, willing to be open and answer questions regarding the program, the philosophy, and parent trepidations regarding the first day of school
Postcards
"Thank you so much for sending the lovely postcard! You are really thoughtful and always go the extra mile!! I had to send you this picture. Liv won't let the postcard go since we got it ... She obviously loves it. Thanks again."
Meet the Teacher Postcard

Sent a week before school begins.

Addressed to the child.

For the child:
It familiarizes them with the adults in their classroom.

For the parents:
It emphasizes their child as their own entity.
Ways to Use Postcards

Invitation

Holidays

Thank You
How to Write a Postcard

- print 4 x 6 photos
- attach shipping labels (3.5 inches x 5 inches)
- place postcard stamp in upper right corner
- draw a line down the middle
- write address on the right
- write message on the left
Why do all of this before school even starts?

It is important to build an initial connection to not only the child, but also the parents.

That foundation of orientation and order will allow for the exploration of the Montessori environment and the Montessori philosophy.

The acquisition of knowledge begins with the safety to explore.
Daily Reports
Things to include on a Daily Report

- Child’s name
- Date
- Highlight of the Day/Personal Message
- Nap times
- Items needed
- Toileting/Diapering
- Snack
Cosson worked very hard to make muffins and fill the muffin trays today. She pressed and pressed the batter into the pan and when she had filled two muffin cups with all of the batter, she declared: “done.”

We Needed:
- [ ] Diapers & wipes
- [ ] Shirt
- [ ] Bottoms
- [ ] Other:
- [ ] Wet bag
- [ ] Underwear

Nora went straight to painting. She wanted to print with her palm then her arm. Then she painted her mouth and face. She loved it all except washing her face, NOT INTERESTED!
Photographs
As a parent you hear or read:

"Your child completed the Hand Washing Lesson today."

As a parent you think:
But a picture can take a simple sentence and turn it into a story...
A Week in Photographs
What a Friday email may look like:
Montessori Moments
The Unexpected

Reason #73
Why I LOVE Montessori!

Today, a friend was working with a lesson made of mahogany pods that started to open and the seeds began to cover the floor. A friend noticed and wanted to help clean. As a group we tried to decide how best to clean the carpet...mop...no, that soaks up water...a vacuum! And the process continued, vacuuming, watching the dirt enter the canister, feeling the air enter and exit the vacuum, turning it on and off and on and off with the switch, listening to how loud it can be, watching, emptying the canister, wrapping the cord, and tucking in the plug. 40 minutes later the carpet was cleaned and the class had all worked together to accomplish something from nothing. #followthechild
MANGROVE

Practical Life in the Toddler Classroom

Most of a toddler's day is "practical life"- experiencing, exploring, learning, processing, and performing purposeful activities. This is because everything a toddler is doing is giving them more information about the world around them. While your toddlers are in the Mangrove classroom, they are constantly engaging in purposeful activities. For example, we are learning to wipe our own noses by acknowledging that dust is running down our face, looking in the mirror to validate the spot on our face, choosing a tissue, wiping our nose until the spot is no longer on our face, and throwing away our tissue. It is a process. Now think about using the toilet and all the steps it takes to complete that purposeful process. Don't forget the added steps of washing hands and all that math!

We have decided to add MORE purposeful practical life activities to the Mangrove repertoire, so get excited.

During snack, we have now incorporated pouring our own water using small glass pitchers. That's right, we said GLASS. Montessori believe that it is important to introduce fragile objects into a toddler's life. During this sensitive period in a toddler's life exposure to delicate and fragile objects makes it more likely for them to learn the proper way to handle breakable materials. Of course, you do not want to give them Grandma's precious china, but providing them with opportunities to learn how to take care of important materials is essential. If it breaks, that is okay... WE ARE LEARNING!

We are also learning how to serve ourselves during snack using scoops and tongs to transport food from a community bowl to our personal bowls. We are practicing not only our transfer skills, and our hand eye coordination, but also our patience and manners as we wait our turn and ask friends to pass items down the table. We have also created an area in the classroom for food preparation and clean up. Some lessons will include peeling tangerines, spreading jam on crackers, peeling and slicing hard boiled eggs, crossing crackers, and juicing citrus. Your child will be able to prepare the food and then have the opportunity to either eat the food or share the food with friends, and finally finishing the lesson by washing the dishes be/hr used at our dish washing station.

On top of all of this, we are asking more from our toddlers during the scooping and drizzling processes. They are being asked to try and pull down their pants and diapers as well as pulling their pants back up on their own. We are doing our best to prepare them for the task of dressing independently when they will need to be able to pull their pants off and on quickly in order to be successful.

It is all pretty awesome to watch our toddlers are they progress! Keep giving those opportunities to TRY, you never know what they are capable of if you don’t give them the chance to try.

*When your snack week arrives, we would appreciate it if you threw in extra food for our food preparation lesson. Extra food could include one of the following: a bag of tangerines, a bag of oranges, a bag of apples, or a dozen hard boiled eggs. Thanks in advance!
School Traditions

Happy Thanksgiving 2015

What a busy week we have had! The Pigeons have been busy baking and cooking for their friends in their class and the Mangrove class to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday.

We wanted to show everyone how thankful we are for their friendship and what better way than food! The children had fun mixing, scooping, measuring, cutting, packing, juicing, and mashing, all while making delicious treats.

We made cranberry corn muffins to share at home with our families and applesauce to share with the Mangroves—both simple and child-friendly recipes that we encourage you to cook at home with your child. These are great ways to spend time with your child as the busy holiday season approaches and:

We hope you all have a very Happy Thanksgiving! We are thankful for the opportunity to teach all of your children everyday!

~Ms. Melanie & Ms. Ashley

Cranberry Corn Muffin
Yield 6-8 muffins
1 box Jiffy Corn Muffin mix & ingredients
1/2 cup dried cranberries

Preheat oven 400 degrees.
Prepare mix according to box instructions.
Add cranberries. Mix.
Scoop into greased muffin pan.
Bake 15-20 minutes.

Crockpot Applesauce
4lbs medium apples of choice
1/2 lemon, juiced
1 cup water
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 Tbsp cinnamon
Wash, peel, and cut apples. Place in crockpot.
Add other ingredients on top.
Cook on high 3-4 hours, periodically stirring or mashing the apples.
Cool before eating.
In this season of giving, we wanted to give the toddlers an opportunity to make something beautiful and special for their families. The toddlers each created a piece of art that resembles the ocean using colors of their own choosing that honors and respects his or her own abilities, skills, interest, and perspective. The quote is a gentle reminder to all of us about acknowledging the amazing potential and limitless possibilities that we already have within ourselves. - The Toddler Community
What moments are worth sharing?
School Traditions
Group Lessons
Class Projects
The Unexpected
Classroom Visitors

How do you share these moments?
Newsletters/Flyers
Emails
Photographs
Videos

When do you share these moments?
Monthly
Weekly
Randomly
Why do all of these things?

We want to continue to build upon the initial trust so that:

- the parents feel comfortable sharing difficult things and will listen when we need to share difficult things.
- a lasting, lifelong connection to the Montessori method is established.
- there is a willingness to continue to explore and learn along with their child.
"I had no idea what I was doing when I signed up my daughter at MCS when she was just 20 months old. I trusted what my friends had told me - that the experience had set their child on the path to being self-assured, independent and compassionate human beings - and hoped I could get even a dose of that for my child. I can say now, 6 years later, that the experience of connection, warmth, and education I received from Ms. Liz and the teachers that followed her, gave my child more than I ever would have asked for. She teaches us every day through examples she learned from being a toddler how to listen, communicate her feelings and most importantly live with a genuine appreciation of others, their differences and the natural world around her. All this came not only from what she received in the classroom, but from how we were educated and nurtured by the teachers to support the mission of educating her. I could not have asked for more.

-- EL

Our daughter Sadie spent a year in Ms Melanie’s Pigeon Plum class in Key West, FL. It was the first time we’d had Sadie in a school or daycare setting, but from the minute I observed the classroom, I knew this was going to be a very special experience for her and us as parents. The teachers in her classroom were so connected with each child, and they were able to translate that connection to parents, as well. Communication was never lacking and the teachers also provided advice to us about how to address anything from potty training, to conflict resolution - tips that I still use and rely on. Most importantly, every time I was in touch with the teachers I felt like they knew and cared about our family. This connection we felt to Sadie’s school and teachers allowed us to connect with her and continue what she was learning at home. We are most grateful for that experience because it set a benchmark for how teachers and parents can connect with one another for the benefit of the child and we hold all of Sadie’s teachers to the same standard. (We love you, Ms Melanie!)

-- L.H.

These guides documented our son’s days and weeks through a series of photographs, daily notes, and monthly newsletters which in turn offered us opportunities to share highlights each night as a family— even if that mostly meant talking about which ingredients went into that day’s batch of scuffins! Reading home notes and looking through “Friday Photos” became an exciting addition to our week; we often found ourselves checking our email over and over on Friday morning, even though we knew they wouldn’t come until the afternoon! These women offered us an opportunity to feel as connected to our son’s school day as he was, and to embrace his newfound independence at school by encouraging the same at home. These daily and weekly exchanges built a relationship that ultimately transformed two ‘strangers’ into important members of our family.

-- NS

Our family felt so safe leaving our two-year-old with Miss Liz, knowing that she cares for her as if she were her own child. Every day we received notes telling us funny little things she had done and the progress she was making. Receiving photos via email every Friday was a great way to involve the whole family in the montessori experience and made us feel like we were inside the classroom with her. Miss Liz’s love and constant communication turned my husband into a firm believer in the montessori philosophy and we are still dreaming of the day we can return to a montessori school.

-- C.F.

“From the Home Visit that our daughter’s teacher paid us before she began school, to the daily reports on her activities and weekly photos of her engaging in work and play, we really felt so much a part of the experience. The events at the school also helped to foster and maintain the sense of community for the Toddler Families. The Toddler Prom was the best time ever! “ - H.E.
Use what makes sense for your program, but we hope to leave you with these two thoughts:

If you connect to parents...

they will have walked into your program feeling like an individual and leave feeling part of something bigger.

If you connect to parents...

they will see their children as a capable human beings and their children’s lives will be forever changed.
Thank you for spending time with us.