



Montessori in the Woods - CURRICULUM SERIES

Before diving into our topic, it is necessary to mention a few key points on how Montessori philosophy works. First and foremost, Montessori works in 3-year cycles (0-3, 3-6, 6-9, 9-12) some children might spend even more time in Casa, 3-6 environment, depending on their DOB and start date. What does that mean? It means that to get the real benefit from Montessori education, the commitment of those 3 years is very important. There is something very special and very unique in each of those years. The real blossoming of Casa children comes in the 3rd year. The 2 years was a preparation, consolidation and in their last year it all comes together and results in a beautiful “fruit”. Montessori works with the premise of “absorbent minds”. That means that a child from 0-6 absorbs rather than memorizes, therefore we have the amazing materials, which are tactile and concrete. Another aspect is that the children are in a mixed age group to learn from each other; younger observe older, older take care of younger, and everyone works at their own pace according to ability and interest. This is just a snippet about the philosophy, but in a nutshell, it works in perfect harmony and synchronicity in those 3 years. Another point to mention, when people are debating private vs. public (free) education, is if you know that 0-6 is the most important period of life for your child, then investing in them in this age is far more important than University. From what we learned with our children who are now in University (everyone gets into university), but at that age absorbent mind is long gone and the only things left are either genuine interest, memorization, or very hard work, but what’s more important is the LOVE of learning, which brings us back to Montessori; those who develop the love for learning in the 0-6, and their brain gets developed and shaped according to their interest in an environment that supports the love for learning and allows the child to make their own decision about “education” in this extremely crucial stage of life, will have lasting impressions that will carry on for life.



Sandpaper letters (SPL)

SPL are cursive letters written on a rectangular piece of wood; the letter is made from sandpaper. The vowels are blue, and the consonants are pink. SPL are under the chapter ‘writing’ in the Montessori curriculum. The student traces the letter while saying the sound of the letter (not spelling the letter), e.g., ‘C’ is as in saying cat (not spelling “see”) etc. The children are learning the sounds letters make. We do not even mention spelling, we do not teach them to spell their name, etc. Typically, there will be a period of time in Casa when the child spends time on spoken language only and mostly, depending on their age and ability. So, when do we begin this work? When verbalizing and good oral expression is evident and when we are noticing interest in SPL by the child observing others doing this work and possibly trying to make sounds themselves and especially when hearing the first sound in words, this is when we begin this work with SPL. The child also has to be able to concentrate on this lesson, if they cannot sit thru the lesson and are fidgeting and not paying attention, it is pretty useless to be “forcing” them to learn SPL at this stage. The child might be around age 3, or it could be younger if they spent some time in the Montessori toddler program, and it can be 3.5, all depending on each individual child.

3 letters at a time are shown and we move on when they almost got those 3, if we see that we are giving lessons on the same letters daily and they cannot identify and remember them, we ask ourselves if maybe postponing this work is the best thing to do. At some point the child is shown a blank chalk board and he/she is shown how to write this cursive letter. We choose easy and straightforward letters first, such as o, c, m, so there is no undue stress for the child as it can be pretty intimidating. We, as “guides” or “directresses”, must follow the child and observe profusely to get the timing right. If it is too challenging, the child will shut down and avoid this work. We need to see joy, excitement and cooperation. We do not want the lessons to be a chore and source of stress. After all, we have 3 years to do this. We cannot be fooled with the misconception that ALL Montessori students read and write early on and that by some miracle every child is an early bloomer. We believe in enticing the child and creating such an environment where self-learning and self-creation happens. Once the child knows all vowels and at least 8-10 consonants, we start to work with another material called the Moveable alphabet.

Why sandpaper?

Children are tactile learners; tracing sandpaper texture enables them to imprint the impression of the letter into their neuro-muscular memory. It's the opposite of memorization, they trace the letter hundreds of times with their index and middle finger, the texture sends the impression into their muscles and into their brain. They are using many bodily functions while being physically present/engaged to learn this, during memorizing they rely on visual sense and memory.

Why cursive?

It's been established that cursive letters flow with their brain function and hand movements. Children tend to doodle and join doodling and scribbling in a continuous fashion rather than separate symbols and lines as in printing. It is much more natural to write cursive and later when writing their own ideas and stories in fluent cursive supports their creativity and thought process. You might think it's useless since this is not supported in the traditional education, however it is still beneficial for the young child even if they will not continue with Montessori education beyond Casa. If you yourself love cursive writing you can support and continue this “art” in your child for years to come. If your child continues to Montessori elementary (and we hope that one day we can have MITW elementary campus) a good Montessori school will be expecting cursive writing in grade 1 and beyond.

AT HOME

While reading, you can (but don't feel pressured) start emphasizing the sounds letters in words make, if you see your child is interested. We call this the sound games, you can also play this game while eating or dressing. For example: Do you hear 'j' in the word jacket? What sound does the word 'sock' make? Your child might not be able to respond, so you tell them.

Avoid spelling as at school they will never hear spelling, nor will we be asking them to spell. We will only ever ask them to sound things out.

Lastly, please do not teach them print, as we will only write in cursive here and it will be very confusing for them. Also 3-4 year old children are not writing words, if anything they do SPL, maybe chalkboard, maybe Metal insets (will talk about them next time). If you do not see strips of paper with cursive writing coming home, that means they are not writing with pencil yet.

PS: Mathematics lessons start around age 4+, do not expect that children 4 and under will be doing Math or writing numbers. Math in Montessori is amazing! Most of it happens in their 2nd and 3rd year.

Please do ask if you have questions about SPL or anything related to Montessori curriculum.
The more you know the better for us, you and your child.