

The Importance of the Five Day Montessori Program

There is no question that five day programs create the consistency that is so important in developing strong Montessori programs.

A three day program for children ages 18 months to 2.5 years can be beneficial for the first time student to develop self-esteem, independence and verbal skills. It is designed to help the child develop social and emotional footing.

Montessori education is not child care or a play group. The goal of a Montessori school is to achieve a normalized class which is considered the hallmark of Montessori education.

In Montessori education, the term "normalization" has a specialized meaning. "Normal" does not refer to what is considered to be "typical" or "average" or even "usual." "Normalization" does not refer to a process of being forced to conform. Instead, Maria Montessori used the terms "normal" and "normalization" to describe a unique process she observed in child development.

Montessori observed that when children are allowed freedom in an environment suited to their needs, they blossom. After a period of intense concentration, working with materials that fully engage their interest, children appear to be refreshed and contented. Through continued concentrated work of their own choice, children grow in inner discipline and peace. She called this process "normalization" and cited it as "the most important single result of our whole work" (The Absorbent Mind, 1949).

She went on to write,



Only "normalised" children, aided by their environment, show in their subsequent development those wonderful powers that we describe: spontaneous discipline, continuous and happy work, social sentiments of help and sympathy for others. . . . An interesting piece of work, freely chosen, which has the virtue of inducing concentration rather than fatigue, adds to the child's energies and mental capacities, and leads him to self-mastery. . . . One is tempted to say that the children are performing spiritual exercises, having found the path of self-perfectionment and of ascent to the inner heights of the soul. (Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 1949)

E.M. Standing (*Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*, 1957) lists these as the characteristics of normalization: love of order, love of work, spontaneous concentration, attachment to reality, love of silence and of working alone, sublimation of the possessive instinct, power to act from real choice, obedience, independence and initiative, spontaneous self-discipline, and joy. Montessori believed that these are the truly "normal" characteristics of childhood, which emerge when children's developmental needs are met.

A child who attends school for five days each week will have the greatest opportunity for consistent spontaneous learning. Consecutive attendance is extremely important. It enables the child to feel safe and relaxed in the classroom and aids the child in forming strong bonds with their teachers and friends. A child taken in and out of school frequently does not have the same opportunity and consistency to pursue his unfolding interests.

Early childhood specialists agree that young children thrive in a secure, consistent environment with a steady routine. Young children adjust very well to this schedule and bond most easily with their teachers and peers when they have at least four consecutive days in their new community — which quickly becomes a beloved and special place for them. The steady rhythm of coming to their school helps create a very positive attitude toward school and their activities there. It also gives the children a strong feeling of belonging to a community that they help create, and of which they are valued and respected members. They can count on seeing their friends and significant adults on a regular basis.