

MODEL

Another role for the Montessori teacher is acting as a model for the behavior she/he expects of the children. As earlier sections have described, this means that the teacher strives to set a good example for the children at all times. For example, the classroom rules for safety, order, and courtesy apply to the teachers as well as to the children in the classroom. Teachers also have other special responsibilities in modeling the behavior they want the children to emulate:

- showing exactness and completeness
- recognizing readiness
- acknowledging positive behavior
- making reasonable requests
- facilitating cooperative games
- teaching peace

Showing exactness and completeness

In many non-Montessori programs, only the teachers are responsible for keeping the materials in the classroom organized. In a Montessori program, exactness and completeness are goals worthy of attention and respect from everyone in the class, both children and teachers. **Exactness** means that each material has its proper place in the classroom. For example, Minna models exactness by making sure not only that she return materials to their proper places, but also that she keeps her own belongings tidy. For example, she hangs her coat on a hook under her name and

places her outdoor shoes on the shelf below, just the way she expects the children to do. **Completeness** means that each activity is complete in itself. Minna models completeness by placing all the materials needed for a certain activity on a tray in the order in which the materials will be used for the activity.



Recognizing readiness

In a Montessori program, teachers are responsible for making sure that materials are ready for each child's sensitive periods, when the child is especially ready to learn something new. Teachers also act as models by showing that they are attentive to the children and responsive to their individual needs. Recognizing each child's readiness to learn involves teachers observing, recording, and preparing. A child learns to trust that the teacher will almost always be ready to present a new material or activity when the child is ready for it. For example, yesterday Tony told Minna that he was interested in working with the puzzle map of Europe. Minna recorded the information on an index card in her pocket and has the map and an appropriate presentation ready for him today.

Acknowledging positive behavior

In a Montessori program, the teacher models Montessori's belief that giving children rewards and punishments for behavior does not help them learn to choose appropriate behavior for themselves. A reward might, in fact, stop a child from choosing according to his/her needs at the time. A punishment often teaches a child that being bigger and stronger means that one person can control another person's behavior.

Whenever possible, the Montessori teacher models an internal reward system. For example, Minna neither enthuses over a child who finishes an activity nor scolds a child who does not. Rather, she aims for acknowledging positive behavior in a way that allows the child to have his/her own

feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment and increases the chance that the child will want to experience these feelings again. In this way, Minna guides the child to look within and not depend only on others to control the child's behavior. The only external reward Minna gives comes in the form of an occasional quiet verbal acknowledgment given in a pleasant, moderate, courteous tone and using the child's name. Whenever possible, Minna points out the benefits of the child's work. Here are some examples:

- Thank you, Tamiko. Now that you've wiped up that water, we won't worry about anyone slipping in it.
- Now you have it, Bonita.
- Exactly right, Daria.



- I've noticed how hard you've been working, Elizabeth.
- Jorge, I've noticed how patiently you're waiting. Thank you.
- Thank you for sitting down so quickly, Morris.
- You must feel proud of the table you've set, Suki. Those yellow flowers make it especially beautiful.

Simple, non-verbal actions can also give acknowledgment about positive behavior. For example, as Alberto puts away the puzzle on which he has been working, Joaquin, who happens to be passing by, gives him a smile and a gentle pat on the back. When Ginny dresses quickly and quietly to go home, Minna nods and smiles at her. And when Tran, without being asked, picks up and neatly stacks a pile of papers that have slid off a shelf, Joaquin smiles and winks at him.

Making reasonable requests

A Montessori teacher cannot reasonably request that a child do something that the teacher is not willing to do. A teacher cannot speak in a loud voice and reasonably expect the children to speak in quiet voices. A teacher cannot sip coffee during a class and reasonably expect children to eat only at the snack table. And if these hierarchical actions do occur, even very young children will be discouraged by their unfairness.

In an early childhood program, making reasonable requests often means giving the children time to respond. Sometimes children are enjoying their activities so

much that they do not want to stop even though they know that it is time. The teacher can acknowledge the child's dilemma and at the same time give a face-saving option by making a reasonable request in terms of taking one last turn. For example, Rolene is still swinging in the playground as all the other children are going inside for closing. Joaquin says quietly, "Rolene, you have time for two more big pumps, then your turn is over and it's time to go home." This allows Rolene time for one final push before she knows that she will have to stop. For this last-turn strategy to be effective, however, it must be applied with consistency. If Rolene asks for yet another turn and Joaquin agrees, the strategy becomes meaningless. It is Joaquin's responsibility in this instance to say firmly, "No, Rolene, that was your last turn. Time to go home now."

A special circumstance is when a child is completely engaged in a complicated piece of work, such as counting through to one thousand with the number cards, but the time for clean-up has come. Rather than have the child experience the dissatisfaction of putting work away before it is completed, there is an alternative. The teacher can invite the child to write his/her name on a small piece of paper and place it over the materials. This indicates to the other children and the teachers that the child plans to return to this work the next day. It may still be difficult for the child to leave the work unfinished, but at least he/she will know that it will be there when he/she comes back. As for the teacher, this strategy models respect for the child's work and shows there are times when it is best to be flexible.

Over-praise

A situation that has developed recently in some families and classrooms has a strong effect on children. The situation could be described as **over-praise**, which refers to a way of rewarding a child by giving effusive, disproportionate praise for every effort the child makes, whatever the result and whatever the amount of effort expended. Over-praise resembles the permissive parenting style, which does not relate praise to actual achievement, and can be very confusing to a child.

For example, when four-year-old Josh does his assigned household chores (making his bed, setting the table for dinner), his parents are effusive in their praise every time: “Great, Josh! Way to go! What a good help you are!” They even enthusiastically draw the attention of family and friends to the fact that Josh does these chores. However, Josh rarely completes either of these tasks in the way that his parents first showed him. He usually reverses the order of the forks and knives on the table or dumps them in a messy clump. He usually just throws stuffed animals under his bed, then draws the quilt up to cover the ruffled sheets. Over time, as his parents’ effusive praise continues, Josh might well become confused about what connection his efforts have with results.

In the classroom, an example of over-praise would be that Josh puts his math materials away quickly and carelessly, tossing them onto the tray and making no effort to put them in the order in which they were when he began the activity. A visiting (and very new to Montessori) parent passing by says, “Outstanding, Josh! You put your materials away! That’s terrific!” Both Josh and the other children know that there are other expectations for the task. In the Montessori classroom, it is likely that Josh’s teacher will approach Josh, reminding him gently about how interesting he found it to work with the material in its proper order and, if needed, guiding Josh to complete the task.

There are several possible explanations for over-praise. One is that contemporary adults are more aware of psychology than previous generations were and know that children who feel good about themselves and their achievements tend to succeed. Another explanation is that many adults were raised more with punishment than with reward and do not want other children to have similar experiences. Josh’s parents probably have good intentions and want Josh to feel good about what he does. However, as Montessori pointed out, external forms of reward like over-praise get in the way of Josh developing his own sense of satisfaction in the work he does.



Facilitating cooperative games

Another part of guiding the children involves discouraging competition. The teacher never asks questions like “Who can be first in line?” and gently but firmly discourages children who take a competitive approach. For example, all of the children are outside on a warm fall day. Minna has just rung her tiny bell, waited for silence, and told the children that it is time to finish their outdoor play and go inside. Valerie races from the other side of the playground to be first to go back inside. She says to William behind her: “I’m first! You lost!” Minna quietly points out to Valerie that it was not a race, that William did not lose, and that William walked quickly and carefully.

If Valerie has tried to be first before, Minna might invite the children behind Valerie to go in first. In a matter-of-fact, casual tone,

Minna says, “I see that Jack and Patty and Ruth and William are all waiting to go in. I have an idea. Today, the people at the end of the line will go in first. Jack, Patty, Ruth, and William, please go ahead. Valerie, you and Richard please wait until the others go in.” In her tone and in her manner, Minna appears unconcerned about who goes into the classroom first. Minna’s goal is not to reinforce Valerie’s behavior and allow her to continue attaching importance to being first.

In addition to not rewarding competition, the teacher takes the lead in modeling cooperation. One way of doing this is by teaching the children constructive, cooperative games. These games do not involve winning and losing, but focus on giving all the children a chance to learn and practice cooperation along with physical, cognitive, and social skills. Introducing constructive, cooperative games is one way



of encouraging the children to get to know one another in the first weeks of school. For example, Minna calls three of the new, younger children near her on the playground and invites them to join her in a game of “Ring Around the Rosie.” This is a simple game that almost all young children enjoy and that children can do together. Minna and the children hold hands and begin moving slowly in a circle, singing. Once the game has begun, a few older children become interested and approach, and Minna invites them to join in.

When all the children in the circle are playing the game enthusiastically, Minna quietly leaves the circle. For a minute or so, she observes in silence. She smiles and nods at Tony, acknowledging and encouraging his participation in the game. Tony is in his second year of the program and is usually very shy about participating

in group activities. Then Minna calmly moves to another part of the playground and starts a rhyming skipping game with a group of older children. She repeats this approach until most of the children are playing with each other. In this way, Minna shows the children what fun they can have playing together and displays her confidence that they can play these games by themselves. Minna’s goal is to guide the children so that they do not depend on her participation to play cooperatively.

Teaching peace

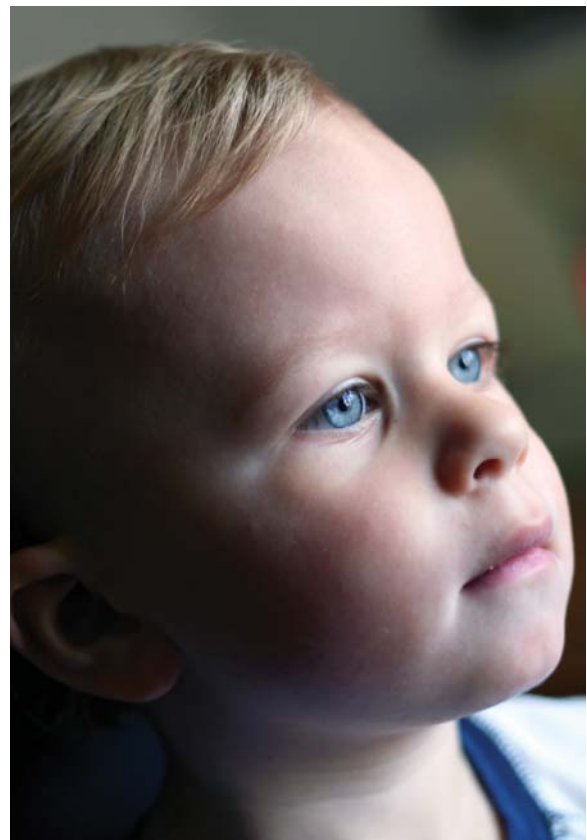
At its most basic, teaching peace means guiding children to express their feelings in words instead of in physical ways such as grabbing, hitting, shoving, biting, or kicking. As described earlier in this guide, teaching peace evolves from cosmic education, the Montessori approach to education that involves helping children develop an awareness that everything in the universe is connected and interdependent and forms a harmonious whole and that they themselves are part of and contribute to that whole.

As in all of cosmic education, teachers play an important role in inspiring students and modeling peaceful behaviors students need to learn. To model these behaviors consistently, teachers themselves need to be peacemakers, not only teaching peace as a subject, but also modeling peace as a way of being. Modeling peace for the children involves displaying peaceful attitudes and acting in peaceful ways. The goal is for the children to see that peace involves more than just talking and that everyone needs to practice peace in order for it to actually happen in the classroom as well as in the world.

Teaching peace begins with some classroom rules for safety, order, and courtesy (as described earlier in this guide) and continues every time a teacher gently guides a child toward behavior that is respectful of others. This includes modeling manners and courtesy and providing ample opportunity for the children to practice manners and courtesy. For example, the children at Minna's program do not stay for lunch and choose their own snack times, but Minna regularly presents an activity that

allows a small group of children to make a simple snack and share it together. This activity gives the children a chance to practice manners and courtesy, such as chewing with the mouth closed and asking for items to be passed.

Minna teaches peace in other ways. For example, she and the children have created a **Peace Place**, a small, but beautiful place set aside in a quiet part of the classroom for silent meditation or reflection. Usually at the early childhood level the Peace Place is occupied by just one child at a time. In circle time, Minna and the children have talked about peace coming from within, and Minna has introduced a simple meditation technique. Minna often sees one of the children going to the Peace Place and spending a few minutes sitting quietly before returning to work. Sometimes, when all the children are working and Joaquin can



supervise, Minna herself sits in the Peace Place and meditates for a few minutes, in this way modeling that peaceful practices are important.

Minna has also introduced the **Silence Game**, an exercise designed by Montessori initially to help children develop motor skills. In the Game, which takes place when Minna and the children are sitting on the ellipse, Minna invites the children to join her in sitting still and silent for a short period of time. The children love this game and work hard to stay as still and silent as Minna. Like Montessori before her, Minna observes how awed the children feel when they collectively accomplish the goal of stillness and silence. In this way, Minna models the skills involved in developing inner peace.

Setting an example

As Montessori observed, and as many researchers of child growth and development have shown, children learn much about behavior by observing the adults around them. In all levels of Montessori programs, teachers need to model the behavior they want the children to imitate. Here are some ways every teacher or other adults working with the children can set an example:

- speaking in a calm, quiet voice
- moving in a calm, quiet fashion
- giving the students ample time to carry out tasks
- using words and actions that show respect for the student and the student's experience, and in turn expecting to be treated respectfully
- asking for and receiving a student's permission before assisting in any work the student is doing
- saying "please" when asking a student for something
- thanking a student who brings something asked for