Resources

There are many resources on playgrounds. Here are a few examples:

- Galindo, Michelle. *Playground Design*. Salenstein, Switzerland: Braun Publishing, 2012.
- Hendricks, Barbara E. *Designing for Play*, 2nd ed. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011.
- Laumann, Silken. *Child's Play: Rediscovering the Joy of Play in Our Families and Communities*. Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada, 2007.
- Sunset Magazine. *Sunset Outdoor Design & Build Guide: Backyards for Kids: Fresh Ideas for Outdoor Living*. Birmingham, AL: Oxmoor House, 2012.
- Tai, Lolly, Mary Haque, Gina McLellan, and Erin Knight. *Designing Outdoor Environments for Children: Landscaping School Yards, Gardens and Playgrounds*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Professional, 2006.
- Accessible Play Spaces. Rick Hansen Foundation: www.rickhansen.com/language/en-CA/What-We-Do/School-Program/Accessible-Play-Spaces.aspx
- Peaceful Playgrounds: www.peacefulplaygrounds.com

Activities and Presentations

> "The instructions of the teacher consist then merely in a hint, a touch — enough to give a start to the child." — Maria Montessori. *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1965 (first published 1914), p. 58.

NAMC early childhood curriculum manuals contain activities designed to help children develop skills in a number of areas, from practical life, to math, to science. Activities are the tasks that the child works on to further his learning and development. Presentations are the step-by-step demonstrations of the activities that the teacher gives the child.

Activities

An **activity** can be defined as the work a child completes using specific materials for the purpose of furthering his learning and development. Sometimes, the purpose of the activity is apparent to the child, such as learning to add with the Golden Bead Material or understanding what a noun is by working with the Miniature Environment, but often the activity has a purpose of which the child is unaware. For instance, when the child works with the Cylinder Blocks, he perceives that the activity's purpose is to place cylinders in their matching holes. While his understanding is correct, the activity also has greater aims related to the child's overall learning and development. The direct aim of the Cylinder Blocks is to help the child develop visual discrimination of diameter and/or height and its indirect

aims are to develop the child's fine motor movements and to lay the foundation for his understanding of mathematical concepts. It is unnecessary for the child to understand these direct and indirect aims; it is enough that he is engaged in the activity and finds it enjoyable. The Montessori teacher, however, needs to be aware of each activity's aims so she knows which skills the child is developing and what activities will benefit him most.

NAMC Activities

Some Montessori programs use the term "lesson plans," but in NAMC publications they are called activities in order to emphasize two important goals:

- The activity focuses on the child and the materials.
- The teacher takes on the role of someone who inspires, demonstrates, and facilitates.

In the Montessori environment, each activity encompasses a **full cycle of work**. A work cycle is the time that the child concentrates on a single task from start to finish. This involves selecting and readying a work space, either on the floor with a work mat or at a table, often with a vinyl mat; taking the material from the shelf and carrying it to the work space; working on the activity through specified steps; and returning the material to the shelf, cleaning the work space if necessary. Experiencing a full work cycle is important to the child's developmental process and builds her ability to concentrate for an extended period of time. Once the child has completed a full work cycle, she feels an immense level of satisfaction.

Carrying the material to the table or mat is part of the work cycle

Children work on Montessori activities in an appropriate order of difficulty, gradually building on previously learned skills with each new activity. For example, children learn to pour with dry materials before they are introduced to pouring liquids, and they work with the sensorial Binomial Cube before working with the Trinomial Cube. As much as possible, the child also works with the "whole" before the "parts." For instance, in geography, the child works on the Sandpaper Globe activity before activities involving the continents, such as the Puzzle Map activities, or countries, such as the geography folders activity.

It may take several repetitions for the child to master every part of an activity. However, because the child is interested in the task and is repeatedly choosing to work with it,

she will eventually master the skills involved. The materials remain easily accessible on the shelf so the children who are working with that activity may continue to do so independently and as often as they like. Materials for a particular activity may remain on the shelf for 2–3 months or longer.

Extensions

Once a child has acquired experience and practice working with an activity, the teacher may make changes to the work to maintain the child's interest and add some challenge. In the Montessori environment, modifying the activity in this way is called an extension. **Extensions** refer to related activities that increase the complexity, range, or application of an activity that has been presented. For example, after Talli has worked with the sensorial Mystery Bag repeatedly, identifying objects using her stereognostic sense, the teacher may replace the objects with pairs of identical objects. She then invites Talli to work with the Mystery Bag again, this time to identify the new objects and find their pairs. In math, Dalvir has been working with the Number Rods and is ready for more challenging work. As an extension, the teacher invites Dalvir to play the "bring me" game, asking Dalvir to find specific Number Rods and carry them to her. This extension gives Dalvir additional practice with the material and adds more movement to the work. It also allows the teacher to assess Dalvir's knowledge of the quantities 1–10. After the teacher presents the botany activity introducing the parts of the plant to a group of children, the children will work with the plant and build their knowledge of its parts. To extend this activity, the teacher may invite the children to create their own booklets, illustrating and labeling the parts of the plant, and work with the Botany Puzzle for the plant. When the children have worked on the concept for some time, the teacher will also present the Nomenclature Cards for the parts of the plant to each child individually, as they are ready to receive the presentation.

The Montessori teacher provides the child with a step-by-step demonstration of the activity

Presentations

In the Montessori environment, the child is invited to work with an activity only after he has received a presentation from the teacher. A **presentation** is a step-by-step demonstration of the activity that the teacher gives to the child. The presentation is given to ensure that the child learns how to work with the material and sees the steps required to successfully complete the activity. The teacher presents activities to the child when she feels that he is ready to receive them, which she determines through careful observation. She makes note of

things such as the level of stimulation the child needs, his ability to concentrate, and his particular interests. Often, the teacher will recognize when a child is ready to work on an activity because he is focused on watching other children using the material, or he may express interest directly and ask the teacher to show him the material. When a child asks about working on a new activity, the teacher acknowledges his enthusiasm with encouraging words and gives him a clear idea about when a presentation will be possible. If a child asks to work on an activity that is too advanced, the teacher sensitively explains that there are other presentations that he needs to receive first and offers to present one of these to him as soon as possible.

In addition to determining if the child is ready for a presentation, the teacher must consider her own preparedness. For a presentation to be effective, the teacher has to make certain that she has a full understanding of the material and is comfortable with the presentation. The best way to present confidently is through repeated practice of the activity. By preparing ahead of time and rehearsing the presentation, the teacher is able to present the activity successfully in a positive, enthusiastic manner that will spark the child's interest in the activity.

The teacher demonstrates how to carry the material to the work space

Inviting the Child

The teacher always begins a presentation by inviting the child to the activity. She issues this invitation as pleasantly and respectfully as she would invite a guest to her home and takes care to smile at the child, showing that the opportunity for a presentation is pleasant for both of them. She invites the child to join her at the shelf where the material is kept, so the child can see the material and know where it is when he is ready to work on the activity independently.

The manner in which the teacher introduces the activity differs depending on the subject of the presentation. For instance, when inviting a child to participate in a practical life presentation, the teacher names the activity, such as peeling a carrot, to make the child aware of the activity's purpose. During sensorial presentations, however, the teacher does not identify the purpose of the activity but names the material instead, allowing the child to discover the purpose as he works with the material.

After introducing the child to the material, the teacher shows him how to carry the material to the work space. She demonstrates how to hold the material, usually using both hands, and carries it with