

STUDY GUIDE

Understanding Montessori: A Guide For Parents

By Maren Schmidt

Chapter 1: So You Keep Hearing About Montessori

1. Did you have any of the Montessori myths discussed in Chapter 1?
2. What strong ideas or opinions do you have about Montessori education?
3. What do you think of the idea of “work as play”? Is this what children truly need in terms of learning?
4. The three-hour work cycle in a Montessori classroom is a vital factor in children’s learning success. How have you experienced the “learn-commit-do” process of a success cycle?
5. Daniel Pink in his book, *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*, writes that autonomy, mastery and purpose are at the crux of creating intrinsic or personal motivation. How does this compare with the “secret of childhood” on page 9? What differences do you see between a traditional preschool and a Montessori early childhood setting? See pages 17 and 18.



Exploring the Knobless Cylinders

Chapter 2: Why Does the Montessori Method Work?

1. Why does the Montessori method work?
2. Independence and concentration are the main objectives for the children’s activity in a Montessori learning environment. In what ways does the development of independence and concentration help a child or adult learn?
3. Have you observed marked changes every six years in children? In yourself? Think about what you enjoyed doing at the ages of 6 years, 12 years, 18 years and 24 years. Do you remember things that worried you at those ages? How did those concerns differ at each age?
4. Human tendencies are those activities that make us human. (page 32) Explore the idea of what happens to an individual and a group when one or more of these tendencies are thwarted. For example, if we try to keep people from communicating what happens to the individual and to the group? Short term? Long term?

5. Why would we want to create an environment that supported human tendencies? How would that kind of place look and feel? Jot down about 20 things that come to mind. Discuss these items with your group.
6. Pick a pedagogical term from page 35 and discuss how it interrelates to the development of independence and concentration in the learning skills of children and adults.
7. The work of the hand and the mind is an important concept in Montessori education. How does this idea mesh with Piaget’s quote, “The child only deeply understand that which he has created.”?

Chapter 3: Montessori Principles: More than Teaching

1. What are sensitive periods of development? (Glossary, page 242) Have you seen your child exhibit these five behaviors of a sensitive period? What was one of the activities?
2. A four-year-old’s self-directed learning focuses on developing a skill by repeating the activity until a level of internal satisfaction is reached. This may be hundreds of times. A six or seven-year-old is more focused on the why of an activity. Compare a four-year-old and a seven-year-old in regards to learning a skill such as tying shoes, washing dishes, taking out garbage, or making a bed.
3. What is the difference between learning and teaching?
4. If a child is failing it is never the child’s fault. How do Montessori teaching principles address this idea?
5. After reading Emerson’s quote on page 63 do you think parents should be more concerned with principles or methods? How can you tell the difference between a principle and a method? A method and a technique?



Washing a table

Chapter 4: How Does a Montessori Environment Work?

1. Dr. Steven Hughes says Montessori students are “good at doing things.” How does this differ from making good grades? Which do you think is more important? Why?
2. The term “authentic Montessori” has been defined in this book as having three major components:
 - a. Specially prepared learning environments based on three-year-age groupings

- b. Children’s free choice of activity within a three-hour work cycle
- c. Adults professionally trained in Montessori principles, methods and techniques for the group of children they are teaching.

How might you ascertain that these major components are being utilized in a school?

3. “Help me help myself” is the request of children everywhere. In what ways do we help or ignore this request? What are the results of our aiding or ignoring this request?
4. How might we see a three-year-old get a glass of water or snack in a Montessori classroom? Would the child need to ask permission to do these tasks? How would the child know how to do these activities?
5. Autonomy, or independence, is developed by using free choice to determine “the task, the time, the technique, and the team.” How might you envision a seven-year-old in a Montessori elementary classroom working on learning to do double-digit multiplication?
6. Do you think the needs of the young teen (page 100) reflect your own needs as a teenager? How were these needs met or not met in your own life? What did that mean in terms of your personal overall development?

Chapter 5: What? No Grades?

1. What do you think are the most important things for your children to learn in life?
2. “If you want people to do a good job, give them a good job to do.” Herzberg, page 105. Think of a job you were given at a young age where you rose to the challenge. Think of a job you were given that offered no challenge. How did you react?
3. How might the idea of “work is the test” be used at home? When do you as a parent “know” when your child is ready for a new challenge or a new level of responsibility?
4. “I guess the essence of life for me is finding something you enjoy doing that gives meaning to life, and then being in a situation where you can do it.” Isaac Asimov. What do you enjoy doing that gives meaning to life? How do you create the situation so you can do it?
5. The main sign of normal human development is joyful work. Do you agree? If so give some examples of joyful work. Disagree? Why?
6. Obstacles to development are common and their effects inevitable. How can observing behavior help us remove these obstacles for our children?



Multiplying with the Checkerboard

7. Observing behavior and emotions for unmet needs is key to assisting the child in overcoming obstacles to natural and normal development. What behavior/needs/obstacles have you observed in your own child? In yourself?
8. Negative feelings signal unmet needs. How does observation without judging, evaluating, criticizing or psychoanalyzing help us assist our children?
9. Analysis of movement is part of the observation process. On what problem or skill is your child now working? How might your observation and analysis of movement assist in natural development?
10. What is your opinion of “no homework”? What would you have done as a child with no assigned homework?

Chapter 6: Finding a Quality Montessori School

1. Finding a good match of family and school will help create long term learning development success for your children. What kind of things were not a good match for you when you were in high school or college? Elementary school? Junior high? Could these still be valid concerns as you think about your child’s school?
2. How does a good learning environment look and feel? Jot down 20 qualities that come to mind. Share your ideas with the group.
3. How can we maximize our home environments to assist our child’s development?
4. How can we maximize the school environment for optimum positive development?
5. Take the Family Needs Questionnaire available at MarenSchmidt.com.
6. What family needs can you change? Which ones must you accommodate?



Playing the Bells

Chapter 7: Visiting a Montessori School

1. What might you expect if you visited a Montessori school? What qualities do you think should be physically present? Consider pedagogical principles (page 35) and human tendencies (page 32) in your thinking process.
2. Were there any questions on the School Visit Questionnaire that you wished had been included?
3. How did your expectation of a Montessori school meet with reality?

Chapter 8: Assuring Success

1. What is the importance of free choice? What is the danger of free choice?

2. “Freedom within limits” is a key Montessori concept. What limits does Dr. Montessori suggest? Do you agree with these limits? Why or why not? Should there be more limits on a child’s freedom? Less?
3. What does “seeing the big picture” mean to you?
4. What might “the big picture” mean to your child’s development?
5. Define a problem and role-play through the five-step process, or use one of these examples.

Problem 1: Your four-year old has had two bathroom accidents at school this week. School policy states that students must be toilet trained to attend school. What do you do?

Problem 2: Your three-year-old daughter complains about being hit by another girl in her classroom. What do you do?



Preparing snack

Chapter 9: Seeing from a Child’s Point of View

1. What did you do out of pure love for your parents? for siblings? Grandparents? Did you want thanks or acknowledgement? How did it make you feel?
2. Being at grandma’s feels a lot like being with grandma. Explain how an environment communicates. A home environment. A school. A playground. A restaurant. A museum.
3. A child’s actions are developmentally driven. How would you expect a three-year-old to act at a restaurant? A six-year old? A 12-year old? An 18-year-old?
4. Why is giving a child accurate information important? Do we need to give the child all information? Are there times that some information should be withheld?
5. A misbehaving child (page 210) is a discouraged child who does not feel joined to the ones he or she loves. Give some examples of “misbehavior” and how that vital link of trust might have been damaged. How might trust be restored?
6. What three principles should we follow to respect the spirit of the child? (page 218) Think of some times that you have stopped a child from doing an activity. Would you act differently now?