

MONTESSORI ALL DAY, ALL YEAR

by Connie Black and Liza Davis

Introducing real community into the Children's House goes back to the roots of Montessori education through all-day Montessori. The all-day environment is a house where children live with a "developmental room" of Montessori materials including a living room, kitchen, dining area, bedroom, bathroom, greeting rooms, and outdoor spaces. Practical life becomes the continuous core function of all-day Montessori. Preparing food, setting tables, doing laundry, gardening, and many other tasks become integrated into the willing self-construction of the child in this community.

We are gathered once again to discuss a topic that those of us here in the United States have wrestled with since the 1960s: How to offer Montessori all day. Over the past fifty some odd years, the needs of families and attitudes of caregivers in the United States have changed. But when we try to meet the developmental needs of the first-plane child, we still find ourselves occasionally entrenched in the "way it has always been done" as we try to figure out the "way it can best be done." Our goal today is to examine this topic from the lens of Montessori theory and history and to reflect on that to guide our practice. We will ask a lot of questions, and hope that those questions spark more questions and conversations around this important topic.

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This talk was presented at the NAMTA conference titled The Social Relevance of the Montessori First Plane: Engaging Families, Building Partnerships, and Finding Common Ground with the Wider Early Childhood Community in Dallas, TX, January 15-18, 2015.

Montessori all day: just what is that? What exactly is the difference between a child being allowed to stay on site for long hours of care and a child being fully engaged in a Montessori prepared environment for her entire day? Historically, we know that the cradle of this approach was the tenement housing of San Lorenzo where children were being left alone while their parents went off to scrape together a meager living. Dr. Montessori responded, not only providing care for these young children but also observing them with the eyes of a scientist and discovering their tremendous developmental powers. She then no longer merely provided supervision and day-care but rather carefully prepared the conditions in which these delicate flowers could grow and bloom into whole and healthy human beings. Today we see parents of all socio-economic strata in search of high-quality experiences for their young children as they go off to work in the morning not to return until early evening. Aren't those the same circumstances Dr. Montessori observed over one hundred years ago? Shouldn't we take a reflective look at our biases and shift some of our thinking to be more in line with Dr. Montessori's original intent in creating the conditions of the Children's House?

If we get stuck in thinking of a typical school day and of ourselves as teachers, we may be contributing to aberrations to the authentic Montessori experience we wish to provide. Are we offering multiple transitions throughout the day for the child between different environments and different staff based more on our own conveniences or prejudices of "schooling?"

Our experience and expertise is in the work of the first plane of development, so what we will offer you today is specific to those years, especially three to six. As we look at our work in supporting the self-construction of the first-plane child, we have to reflect on our practice. Have we become entrenched in the language of schooling? Do we think of our environments as *classrooms*, the children whose development we serve as *students*, of ourselves in our role of guiding and supporting development as *teachers*? Has this language shaped our paradigm into one of *school* rather than one of *human development*? If we are enmeshed in a paradigm of *school*, it is easy for us to begin to think in terms of a traditional school day and apply

that to our Montessori practice rather than applying our Montessori principles to the design of an optimal day for the child.

Think back to your Montessori primary level training. What comes to mind when we mention “the prepared environment?” Of course we think of terms like *beautiful, clean, rich, simple* and *developmentally responsive*. But we must never forget words like *oasis, a place for living, and community*. We must remember Dr. Montessori’s own words:

We do not say that we want to prepare a school for the [child]; we wish to prepare an environment for life, where the child can develop a life. That is why we call this institution a House of Children. The idea is to give the children a house of their own, a house in which they are the masters of themselves. (*Creative Development of the Child* 52)

So our purpose here is not to teach nor to provide a classroom with a school day but to *prepare an environment for optimal child development*. We have been highly trained to understand and recognize the powerful principles of a child’s development and their own self-construction. We know about the power of the absorbent mind, we know the importance of those transient sensitive periods, and we understand the concept of life-long human tendencies. We fully appreciate that none of these developmental powers, these gifts with which the child is endowed for self-construction, “switch off” for any periods of the day. And neither does the child need a “break” from the joyous task of self-construction.

Let’s assume these principles are understood and that we are merely wrestling with how to implement Montessori all day. Let’s first reflect on what that term means. Remember, Dr. Montessori advised us to “prepare an environment for life, where the child can develop a life.” She also tells us in *Discovery of the Child*:

We Italians have elevated our word ‘casa’ to the almost sacred significance of the English word ‘home,’ the enclosed temple of domestic affection, accessible only to dear ones. (37)

A day in the life of the young child who comes to us for this prepared environment, this home away from home, often includes

breakfast, lunch, a nap, and goes late into the afternoon beyond the hours of a typical school day before parents or caregivers return to retrieve the child. If we get stuck in thinking of a typical school day and of ourselves as teachers, we may be contributing to aberrations to the authentic Montessori experience we wish to provide. Are we offering multiple transitions throughout the day for the child between different environments and different staff based more on our own conveniences or prejudices of “schooling?” Do we fall into the perilous pit of thinking that children “need a break from Montessori” and limit the child’s access to the Montessori materials and opportunities for authentic, purposeful work during whole portions of the day, especially for the youngest in our community? It was Dr. Montessori’s observation that “the child can work from morning til night without ever feeling tired” (*Education and Peace* 96). We must reflect on what we believe about the child, as prepared adults who are trained in the theories of human development so eloquently put forth for us by Dr. Montessori. Every action we take and every decision we make must be firmly rooted in those beliefs.

If we express profound gratitude to Dr. Montessori for showing us the way, for enlightening us as to the great secret of childhood, why aren’t more of our Montessori programs Montessori all-day and Montessori all-year programs? Here are some basic facts about childcare in the United States:

Every week in the United States, nearly 11 million children younger than age 5 whose mothers are working are in some type of childcare arrangement. On average, these children spend 36 hours a week in childcare. A quarter of children, nearly 3 million are in multiple childcare arrangements because of the traditional and nontraditional working hours of their parents. (Child Care Aware of America)

How are we going to respond to this? We are all familiar with the perceived obstacles: children need a break from Montessori; guides don’t want to work hours beyond a traditional school day or school year; it creates burnout and good staff won’t stay; it’s too expensive to provide trained staff to be with children all day, all year; parents like the way things are and don’t want to see a change; children won’t possibly nap in the same room where they work; *it just won’t work*. These are all mental constructs based on

our perception of reality, but we hold faith in the possibility that these constructs can be changed, just as we hold faith in the universal child. Our vision, Dr. Montessori's vision, is that of creating an environment that is a dynamic, living community for the child. That vision must be the driving force behind every decision made in the creation of a Montessori all-day community.

Our own fixed mindset, biases, or attitudes can become obstacles to implementation of an all-day program. To have an honest discussion about Montessori all day in your community, it is essential to approach the conversation with an open mindset. We must dwell in possibility and get beyond the limitations of our own attitudes to put ourselves into the service of the development of the child. What is in the child's best interest does not always align with the many "reasons" we can come up with to justify why we just can't do Montessori all day. We simply need a paradigm shift, a revision to the way we approach the concept of the prepared environment. How can we see spaces and schedules differently to support the successful implementation of a consistent, developmentally supportive environment for the child from three to six years? When thinking through the creation of an all-day environment, it is helpful to bring to the table what you have and also to focus not on those limits but rather on the possibilities.

Our vision, Dr. Montessori's vision, is that of creating an environment that is a dynamic, living community for the child. That vision must be the driving force behind every decision made in the creation of a Montessori all-day community. Each community, each program will self-reflect and apply this vision as they identify the assets and needs of their particular community. When starting from scratch to create a non-existing program, it is easier to quickly make sure that all the necessary components (physical space, schedule, and staffing) needed to implement a successful all-day environment are in place. However, when transitioning an existing program to become an all-day environment, more time, creativity, and flexibility may be needed.

One of the first considerations when creating an all-day community is the prepared environment. Dr. Montessori tells us that the prepared environment for the child should not be a classroom

but rather “it ought to be a real house ... a set of rooms with a garden” (*Dr. Montessori’s Own Handbook*). The environment is a house for living, a place for developmental work, not just academic work. These young children are literally constructing themselves and their building blocks consist in part of the environment we provide. To have 24–35 children living well and in community, an all-day environment requires ample and purposeful space beyond the “developmental room” that houses all the Montessori materials. We need to think of this as a house for living—including a living room, kitchen, dining area, bedroom, bathroom, transition areas or greeting rooms, and, ideally, patio or garden space. To have a space that includes all these components, 45-50 square feet is recommended to allow for more mobility and a full range of materials and developmental exercises.

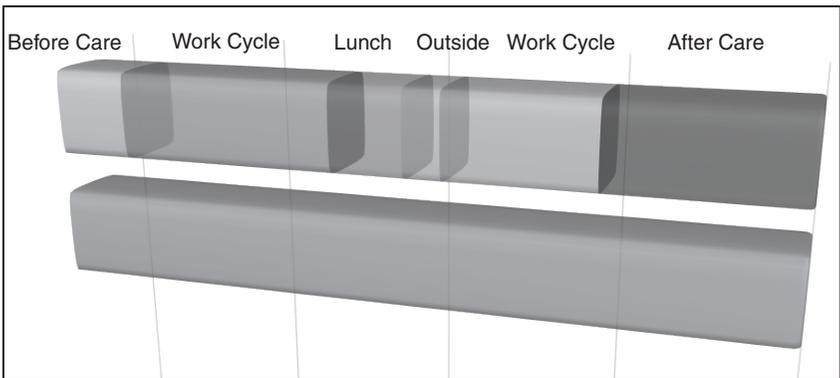
In some environments, it is easiest to do this by connecting several individual rooms. Just as we always maintain the vision of the child who is not yet there, but has the potential to be, it is effective when shifting paradigms to also imagine what isn’t there yet in this physical space. Can a wall be removed to provide more space and offer such amenities as a bedroom or sleeping room that is adjacent to the room? Each community, when designing a space, will need to take their own assets and needs into consideration. Many programs around the world have figured out different ways to provide for all of these living opportunities for the children they serve. For example, at Siembra Montessori, an urban setting in Minneapolis, an outdoor environment directly accessible to the indoor environment was not a possibility. The program was committed to having a community garden for the children, and systems were put in place to make it work best for their community. A lovely fenced area with space for large motor play and raised garden beds is just a short walk around the perimeter of their city parking lot. At Cornerstone Montessori in St. Paul, children nap and dine in one room. At the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community Montessori in Prior Lake, and Jonathan Montessori in Chaska, children have a set dining area or bedroom, respectfully, that is always set as a prepared space for the children for these activities.

It is a helpful process for a community to spend time together talking about needs and existing spaces, and how dynamic living

spaces might be created. We encourage you to sit with graph paper and actually map out existing spaces and then to consider how they might look in order to successfully meet the needs of children in care for long hours. If your mindset is, “We could never do this, we don’t have the money, we don’t have the space, and we don’t have the staffing,” you will not be able to envision what is possible. Remember, we dwell in possibility.

As we envision a space that allows for a day of dynamic living, we want to be cognizant of developmental obstacles. Our goal is to remove as many of the challenges to optimal development as we possibly can. Transitions are an obstacle to the child, so we are working to develop a space that meets all the child’s needs rather than having to transition from a “classroom” to somewhere else for living activities.

If we create a space that supports the life of the child and the life of the community, we must also think differently about the components of the day that make up the schedule. Rather than thinking about before care, after care, lunch, outside time, nap, and then designated morning and afternoon work cycles, we instead want to think about the Montessori environment as being a place for the child’s work at this age and her self-construction and adaptation. When the daily schedule becomes one that supports the developmental work of the child, then the daily schedule goes from being compartmentalized with lots of transitions to a seamless day of living together in community.



Daily work cycle for children

In the all-day model, children arrive in the morning and enter the Children's House. Some may help prepare the environment for the day—taking lids off boxes, preparing tasting bottles, turning on lamps. Some children start right away with work, and others may have breakfast and ease into their day. Remembering that our Montessori environments are spaces designed to live in as a community, we all take care of community. We prepare the environment together, we eat and dine together, we laugh, cry, work, play, and share the day's journey together. The structure and schedule of the day can support or thwart this kind of community living. We have all the exercises of practical life, which include preparing food, setting tables for meals, doing laundry, and preparing sleeping spaces, all as part of the daily life of the environment. When all these exercises are presented to the child based on our Montessori principles, she becomes independent and transitions through her day, her life at this moment, with ease. This is always the goal within the prepared environment, but having an all-day environment requires thinking about how exercises of daily living, which might have previously been considered necessary to be done outside of the Children's House and outside of the child's day, can become the work of the children's community.

Practical life, in many ways, becomes more extensive in the all-day community due to the nature of the environment. Children often start their day with the practical daily living of removing chairs from tables, replenishing supplies, folding laundry, or preparing snack as they ready the room for the day. This is done joyfully by children, who are not enlisted to do this work as a job but are offered the opportunity alongside other developmentally appropriate work found in the materials. This is the *Casa dei Bambini*, the Children's House, and the children feel authentic ownership of the community when allowed to really live in the environment. Additional exercises of practical life, particularly care of the outdoor environment, can support increased variety in purposeful work. Children may shovel the walk, scrub the picnic table, or use pruners to "mow" the lawn.

Transitions, such as nap and lunch, become a natural part of the day. Often these transitions are challenging because we don't budget adequate time, space, or staffing to support a smooth transi-

tion. Systems can be put in place that allow for a natural flow from one activity to another. One easy way to support ease in transitions is, again, to make sure there is space for all the activities that the child needs and in close proximity so that the child doesn't have to ask permission to walk down a hallway or move to a completely separate space. Environments that are much more home-like—with a dining room and bedroom (or nap room) that is always accessible—are ideal and they allow the child to freely transition to dining and resting as needed.

In other environments, space is a precious commodity, but systems are put into place so that the child can rest at any point in the day and dine in community with the least disruption. At Cornerstone Montessori, the guide moves the dressing frame rack that sits in the middle of the room at the same time each day. This visual cue signals to children that they may begin putting their work away and begin to set the room for lunch. Some children quickly put their work away and begin helping to move other furniture into place for communal lunch. Other children choose to finish their morning work more slowly and then join the process of setting the tables. Rather than ring a bell and abruptly transition twenty-eight or more children to lunch, the community eases into the lunch experience and it is the children who work with adults, in community, to set the space and return it to order after lunch. This process takes time and there is about an hour and a half given to this process to allow the children ownership of the set up and clean up as well as the opportunity to dine in a civilized manner. Margot Waltuch is quoted as saying, "The dining and conversation alone took an hour" (50).

To get to this place, the children are slowly introduced to the various components of setting up and cleaning up. Older children are paired with younger children and adults slowly fade into supporting roles as the independence of the children unfolds. In the beginning, this process may take close to two hours. Two hours for lunch? "No!" you might say. But we are discussing a paradigm shift here, away from the frenetic routine of shuffling children through lunch. We provide two hours for the child to be independent and for the community to be interdependent as they care for and converse with one another.

To maintain a schedule that is developmentally constructive for all of the hours that the child is in care, we need to think about how to have a Montessori-trained adult in the environment at all hours. This model allows the child to live in a consistent, psychological environment composed of adults who can support each child with presentations and language in a reliable manner. Each region, state, or country has a unique set of guidelines or licensing requirements supplied by the government, and these have to be considered when setting up the environment. Both of us have worked in environments that require a 1:10 adult to child ratio, so we are most familiar with environments that have three adults working when the room is at maximum capacity. In such situations, often there is one trained adult who serves as the lead guide. In all-day programs, this adult typically begins in the early hours, as an opener. This adult would work as the lead guide for the children and typically work an 8.5-hour day with a half hour break. An aide would support this guide in the early morning hours. Once the environment would be operating at maximum capacity (typically 25-35 children) the other fully trained adult would also be on-site. A physical example of this schedule can be found here:

Time	Guide	Trained Assistant	Aide	Float	Max # of Children
7:30-8	CH Prep		CH		20
8-8:30	CH		CH		20
8:30-8:45	CH		CH		20
8:45-9:00	CH	CH	CH		30
9-9:30	CH	CH	CH		30
9:30-10	CH	CH	CH		30
10-10:30	CH	CH	CH		30
10:30-11	CH	CH	CH		30
11-11:30	CH	CH	CH		30
11:30-12:00	CH	CH	CH		30
12:00-12:30	CH	CH	CH		30
12:30-1:00	Break	CH	CH	Float Break	25
1:00-1:30	CH	CH	Break	Float Break	25
1:30-2:00	CH	Break	CH	Float Break	25
2:00-2:30	CH	Break	CH	Float Break	25
2:30-3:00	CH	CH	CH		25
3:00-3:30	CH	CH	CH		25
3:30-4:00	CH	CH	CH		25
4:00-4:30		CH			10
4:30-5:00		CH			10
5:00-5:30		CH			10

It is important to note that in the example given, about half the children arrive at the school around 8:45 a.m., not needing to be at school any earlier than this. The schedule for staff, including the addition of support staff, would fluctuate based on the number of children in the program. A float person is hired at an aide rate to provide breaks to all staff, ensuring maintenance of state-mandated adult to child ratios. If there were a need to add additional staffing to serve more children either in the early hours or the later hours, additional part-time aides would be hired. A schedule to serve more children all day with a 1:10 adult to child ratio might look something like this:

Time	Guide	Trained Assistant	Aide	Aide	Max # of Children
7:30-8	CH Prep		CH		20
8-8:30	CH		CH		20
8:30-8:45	CH		CH		20
8:45-9:00	CH	CH	CH		30
9-9:30	CH	CH	CH		30
9:30-10	CH	CH	CH		30
10-10:30	CH	CH	CH		30
10:30-11	CH	CH	CH		30
11-11:30	CH	CH	CH		30
11:30-12:00	CH	CH	CH		30
12:00-12:30	CH	CH	CH		30
12:30-1:00	Break	CH	CH	CH	30
1:00-1:30	CH	CH	Break	CH	30
1:30-2:00	CH	Break	CH	CH	30
2:00-2:30	CH	Break	CH	CH	30
2:30-3:00	CH	CH	CH	CH	30
3:00-3:30	CH	CH	CH	CH	30
3:30-4:00	CH	CH	CH	CH	30
4:00-4:30		CH		CH	20
4:30-5:00		CH		CH	20
5:00-5:30		CH		CH	20
5:30-6:00				Care of Environment	

We have seen many different ways to staff programs. In some programs, staff agrees to work 9 hours a day and is paid a proportionate increase in salary. Staffing is a challenge, but it is important to see it as a priority and creatively explore staffing to allow for a seamless experience for the child.

To work well as a team, the lead, trained assistant (diploma holder), and aide need to have clearly defined roles and effective communication. This starts from the point of creating positions, advertising

for those positions, and defining roles and responsibilities. In particular, the role of trained assistant is one that needs to be clearly defined from the beginning. The model has one person as the lead guide and the other person as a

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support. In this supporting role, the trained assistant will step in to give presentations when the guide is absent.

Administrative support is necessary for communication to happen within this team of professionals, providing time to support team meetings. All members of the team are essential and at least 30-45 minutes of bi-weekly formal meetings are needed to allow for effective listening and problem solving. Administratively, this can be exceptionally hard to budget for, both in time and in money. The cost of leaving meetings to happenstance is also exceptionally high as this can often be when challenges build and successes fail to be celebrated. In some programs, float staff steps in to support weekly meetings. In other programs, it works well to have bi-weekly meetings where children in two all-day environments are placed together so the adults in the room can meet in that space for a short while. To support this financially, it is helpful to budget this time administratively. If staff is hourly, this can be expensive if they go into overtime, but again, it is invaluable to have everyone operating from the same level of understanding and united in full support of the child's development.

Vision and mission—the *what* and *why* of your program, your organization, and your community—is pursuing Montessori all day as the foundation of all that you do. Vision and mission begin with recruitment and are articulated in all aspects of an organization's operations, including how contracts are written and how days are structured. Everyone needs to be consistently contributing to the vision and to the children and families that the organization serves. With all decisions carefully driven by vision and mission,

it is important to clearly communicate both to all audiences, internal and external. Is all-day Montessori included in your mission, vision, and values? If so, it needs to be articulated not only in a printed statement, but also in the way the program is created and lived out.

From your marketing to community (including current and prospective families, current and prospective staff) to how you interact with children and families, the work to serve the child in an all-day environment needs to be clear. Whatever a school's mission, questions to ask are:

- What does this look like in our work with children?
- What does this look like in our work with parents?
- What does this look like in our work with each other?
- If we are successful in this work, how will we know?

Internally, it is essential that everyone on staff believes in and pursues the mission of Montessori all day. This starts with staff recruitment. Even in start-up-programs, where the *how* of achieving an all-day model may not yet be clear, it is important to articulate your vision. Finding the right staff to rally around this work is essential. Finding a team of individuals to share the vision and to work towards a common goal can be the most difficult. We are looking for a tribe to serve the mission. Each member of the team will contribute in an important way, but differently and in various specific roles.

We need to acknowledge this right away—in the hiring process, in orientation, in staff training—and it requires time to develop relationships and functioning as a team. As we look at staff schedules for a team in a Children's House, it is also important for us to be able to make time for team meetings in individual environments and as a whole community.

To successfully support the developmental needs of the children, the team needs to share the belief that we can do Montessori all day and that it is in the best interest of the community and, specifically,

the children. There are expectations for how each member of the team will support the vision and mission. These need to be articulated frequently, and when expectations are not being met, we need to address it. More questions arise. If we have not successfully assembled a team who can embrace the vision and mission and the concomitant work of implementation, we ask:

- Why?
- Is it because they aren't fully aware of the mission (it hasn't been clearly communicated nor has their role)?
- Or is it perhaps that they don't believe an all-day program is in the best interest of the child/environment/themselves?

It is important to have extensive discussions around these questions and be always self-reflective as the Montessori all-day program is developed and grows.

At times, you may encounter families who have bought into the myths and believe things such as that children need a "break" from Montessori. The first thing to do is to listen to the families and share with them our knowledge of Montessori, not as a curriculum of academic subjects and materials, but rather as an environment supporting development. Paradigm shifts can occur for parents when they can see this in action for themselves. Invite parents in to observe, at all times of the day. Sharing video, including time-lapse videos of "a day in the life" allows parents to see the flow of the environment. Discussion after such observations often helps guide parents into seeing what the environment provides for the child and allows beliefs to be dispelled.

Our goal in discussing all-day Montessori is to provide a framework from which people can construct and create a developmentally supportive program that serves their community. It is not our belief that one approach works for all communities, but principles, when applied well, will serve the vision and mission. For if you build it, it will support the children, and the environment created will inspire others. When we are successful in the creation and implementation

of an environment that fully supports the child's development, we provide the child with that oasis, that place for living that is imbued with a strong sense of community. The child is provided the opportunity to experience social cohesion and begin to truly build her character.

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