

# Didactic Material



# Practical Life Activity



# Multiage Classroom



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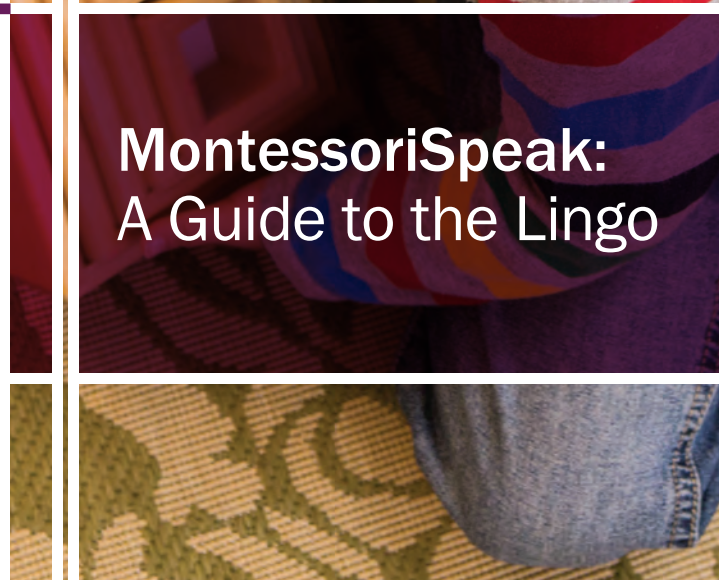
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## OUR MISSION

*Empowering humanity to build a better world  
through Montessori.*



# MontessoriSpeak: A Guide to the Lingo



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# MontessoriSpeak: A Guide to the Lingo

The Montessori classroom brings to life more than a century of continuous research and innovation in the warmth of a welcoming, respectful community. Students follow their curiosity, at their own pace, to pursue passionate inquiry with the guidance and enrichment of their teachers—and with the questions and leadership of peers in the multiage classroom. Students grow as independent, resourceful, and enthusiastic learners and citizens, accountable to both themselves and each other.

Dr. Maria Montessori, who launched her first school in Rome, Italy, in 1907, introduced many new terms and concepts to describe how children grow and learn. These terms are still widely used today in the Montessori community. You may encounter them as you learn about the Montessori Method of education.

**Absorbent mind:** From birth through approximately age 6, young children experience a period of intense cognitive activity that enables them to “absorb” learning from their environment quickly and easily, without conscious effort.

**Casa dei Bambini, in Italian, or “Children’s House”:** The name Dr. Montessori gave to her first school, in Rome. In many Montessori schools, Children’s House is the name of the classroom for children ages 2½ (or 3) – 6. Other schools call the classroom for this age group Early Childhood, *Casa*, preschool, or Primary.

**Concrete to abstract:** A logical, developmentally appropriate progression that enables the child to develop an abstract understanding of a concept by first encountering it in a concrete form—for example, learning the mathematical concept of the decimal system by working with the Montessori Golden Bead materials, grouped into units of 10s, 100s, and 1,000s.

**Control of error:** Montessori learning materials are designed so that children receive instant feedback about their progress as they work, enabling them to recognize, correct, and learn from their mistakes without adult assistance, and build self-reliance and independence. For example, if a child incorrectly buttons a Montessori Dressing Frame, the two sides of the cloth will not meet up properly—think of your own shirt when you miss a button or an opening.

**Cosmic Education:** In the Elementary years, students discover their connection to the world as they learn the stories of the people and cultures who developed the languages, mathematical concepts, and scientific discoveries that have led to the world of today.

**Didactic materials:** A hallmark of Montessori education is the use of specially designed “didactic” materials that provide a concrete, hands-on approach to learning. Didactic means “intending to teach.” For example, the Bells Set helps train the musical ear. A student taps a bell with a mallet, and concentrates to find another bell with the matching tone.

**Erdkinder:** German for “child of the earth,” this term describes a Montessori learning environment for adolescents that connects them with nature and engages them in purposeful, hands-on work in which they contribute to the community.

**Freedom within limits:** Montessori students are encouraged to move about the classroom and choose their own work from many choices, enabling them to exercise their own free will. The freedom is within reasonable limits of appropriate behavior and includes ground rules, such as, “You must be respectful of yourself and others.”

**Grace and Courtesy:** In Montessori schools, children are instructed in social skills they will use throughout their lives—for example, saying “please” and “thank you,” requesting rather than demanding assistance, and greeting guests warmly.

**Multiage classroom:** A hallmark of Montessori education is that children of different ages (a 3-year span) work together in the same class. This enables younger children to learn from older children and experience new challenges through observation. Older students reinforce their own learning by teaching younger children concepts they have already mastered, while developing leadership skills and serving as role models.

**Nido:** “Nest” in Italian, this term is sometimes used for a Montessori Infant classroom.

**Normalization:** The process whereby students work with focus, concentration, and self-discipline in the Montessori classroom. The result is well-adjusted, independent children who exhibit joy, empathy, and positive social skills.

**Planes of development:** The four distinct but interdependent periods of development, universal to all human beings, as identified by Dr. Montessori—Infancy (birth – age 6), Childhood (6 – 12), Adolescence (12 – 18), and Maturity (18 – 24). The planes provide a framework for the Montessori methodology, curriculum, and learning materials.

**Practical Life:** The activities of everyday life through which children learn care of the environment and of themselves. For example, young children (using real materials, not toys) learn to pour from a pitcher and wash dishes; older students may plant a garden or start a business.

**Prepared environment:** This describes the Montessori classroom, which is thoughtfully designed to encourage exploration, facilitate independent learning, and meet the developmental needs of all the students.

**Sensitive period:** A critical time during human development when the child is biologically ready for and receptive to acquiring a specific skill or ability, such as the use of language or a sense of order.

**Sensorial materials:** Montessori learning materials that develop and refine the five senses. As children sort, classify, order, and develop vocabulary to describe the materials, they build a foundation for speech, writing, and math.

**Three-period lesson:** An approach to teaching a new concept that moves children from basic understanding to mastery. Period 1 is Introduction; the teacher says, “This is a spoon.” Period 2, Recognition; the teacher says, “Show me the spoon.” Period 3, Recall; the teacher asks, “What is this?”

**Uninterrupted work period:** An extended period of “free choice,” during which students may select and work through various tasks and responsibilities at their own pace, without interruption.

**Work:** Maria Montessori observed that children learn best through work—that is, purposeful activities of their own choosing. She said, “At some given moment it happens that the child becomes deeply interested in a piece of work; we see it in the expression on their face, their intense concentration, the devotion to the exercise.”