

# THE MONTESSORI METHOD

In the second part of her series on Human Tendencies, **Barbara Isaacs** explores orientation and exactitude, demonstrated by children's need for order...



with puzzles, and others will make sure the snack is ready or the door into the garden is open. For some, this is an opportunity to settle with something familiar as a transition between home and the setting. Others will go to the activity they were working with the day before or wait for a friend to decide what to do together. These plans and decisions are possible because the classroom is ready for the children and is consistent in its layout and all the activities are self-contained, complete and accessible to the children.

This kind of approach has significant implications for the practitioners - the organisation and maintenance of the indoor and outdoor environment is an essential aspect of the role of the Montessori teacher, who is seen as the custodian of the environment. The careful and diligent daily preparation of the classroom reflects the teachers' respect for the children and demonstrates an understanding of the child's natural need for spontaneous engagement with the learning environment.

The predictability and availability of the activities and organisation of the classroom aid children's need for independence, and we see their autonomy, decision making and initiative blossom. These qualities of the enabling environment also nurture concentration because children engage in activities that are meaningful to them and contribute to the harmonious and calm atmosphere in the classroom typical of a well-run Montessori setting. We also see significant benefits that the order offers to children from chaotic backgrounds, for whom this type of classroom provides an opportunity to have some level of control over their lives.

## findoutmore

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trust developing between the child and the prime carer in the first year of life as the foundation of the child's emotional and social development. Early years practitioners have also acknowledged this need by ensuring the consistency in the relationships between the carers and young children and their families, particularly in baby units and toddler groups. The Early Years Foundation Stage framework requires settings to appoint a key person for each child under the age of five. One of the important roles of this person is to get to know each child in their care well enough to ensure that there is a consistency between routines at home and in the setting. This becomes particularly important as young children come to be weaned and potty trained, and as they develop a need to do things for themselves such as dressing and washing their hands.

### The inner order

Montessori called this early need for routines the 'inner order', meaning that the external routine provides the child with security. However, she also recognised that order is an important element as the child reaches more independence, and a well-organised, orderly learning environment is one of the cornerstones of her pedagogy. It provides children with opportunities to make choices and select activities that are of interest and that correspond with their developmental needs. It enables them to plan for what they may want to do in the nursery and be confident that they will find it in a certain place.

If children have the opportunity to engage with the activities on offer as soon as they arrive in a Montessori setting, practitioners often observe repetitive behaviours: some children make a beeline for the book corner, whilst others go straight to the easel or shelf

In her observations of babies, Montessori noticed that some children in their first year of life begin to recognise routines and respond to them. The regular habits of adults provide them with a sense of security and predictability, and contribute to the strong bond they form with the prime carer, often the mother. For example, even very young babies enjoy being cradled in a certain way, or put down to sleep by the same person. They may also protest when a new person with a different approach and unfamiliar pattern of movements starts changing, bathing or feeding them. As they get older they recognise the sound of food preparation and begin to make excited noises, or will pass a book to a parent at bedtime to be read a story. As they start to toddle they will know where to find their favourite teddy or the cream necessary for nappy changing, and will enjoy helping adults in these tasks. Our daughter would rush to the coat-rack every time I mentioned going for a walk.

This need for predictability in young children's lives has been acknowledged by others. Bowlby, Winnicott and Ainsworth all identified the need for consistent, predictable and available behaviours in the prime carer as significant contributors to secure attachment patterns, and to each child's internal working model. Erickson highlights the importance of