

Resources for Webinar Participants

10/30/18 How to Prepare a Montessori Environment
Silvia C. Dubovoy, Ph.D.



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- Video: Good stress vs Toxic stress- Center for Study of the Child, Harvard University
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Recommended Reading

- *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out*, Richard Feynman
- *The Conscious Parent*, Shefali Tsabary
- *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, Louis Cozolino

- *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence-The Groundbreaking Meditation Practice*, Daniel J. Siegel. M.D.

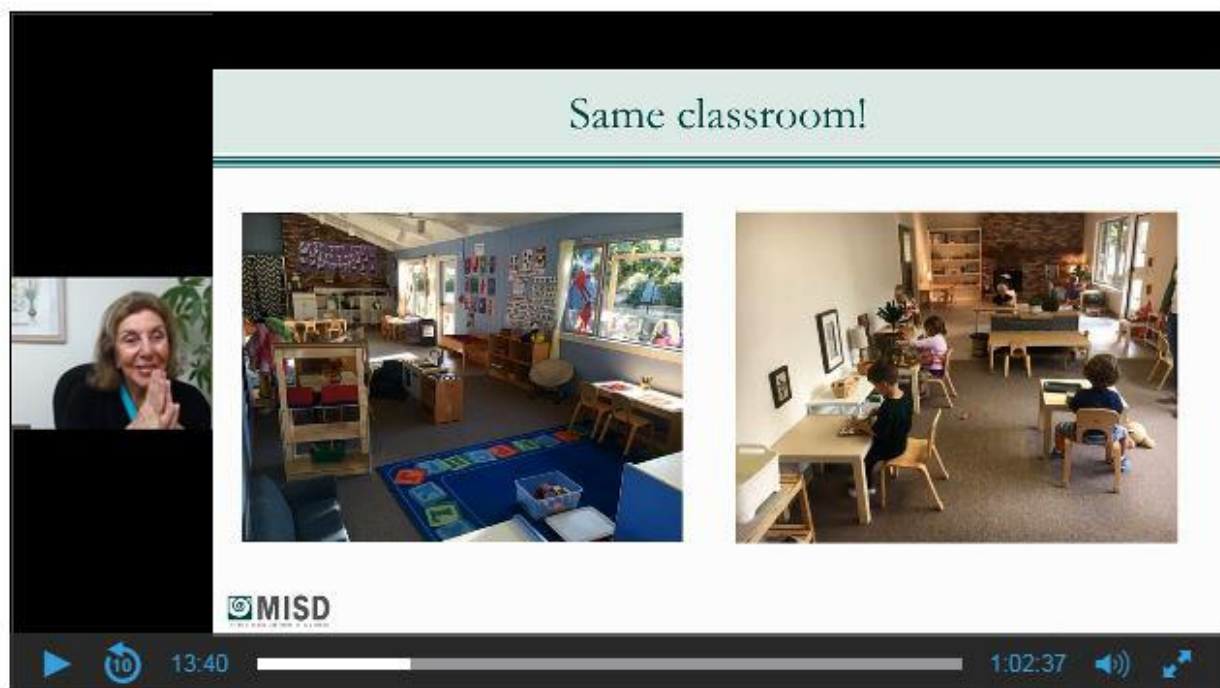
Good Stress vs. Toxic Stress

[Center on the Developing Child](http://centeronthechild.harvard.edu), Harvard University

Excellent videos and other information at developingchild.harvard.edu

Webinar Outline: “How to Prepare a Montessori Environment”

Silvia C. Dubovoy, Ph.D.



Overview

- Today's presentation will highlight some considerations that go into preparing Montessori environments for children **six years and younger**.
- Three aspects of the environment:
 - **Physical** (furniture, materials)
 - **Practical** (schedule, rules)
 - **Psychological/Emotional** (adults set the tone)

Not as simple as it seems...

- This is a topic that we spend nine months discussing in our teacher training

programs!

- One of the reasons adults without formal Montessori training sometimes get frustrated when they try to set up a Montessori environment is because the task seems much simpler than it actually is.

Model environments

- I have directed a Montessori teacher training center in La Jolla, California since 2004. Over the years, many people have requested to visit our model classrooms.
- They want to take detailed photos of
 - **Every** material
 - **All** the shelves
 - Indoor/outdoor environments

Teacher's understanding

- But the physical environment is not the “secret” to a high functioning Montessori classroom. The way the room is arranged is a **natural reflection of the teacher's understanding of Montessori philosophy**.
- Also, Montessori environments **evolve** throughout the years.
 - The way a classroom looks on the first day could be different than how it will look just one month later, or at the end of the year.

Photos

- Classroom
- Nap room
- Teacher's office
- Infant/toddler classroom
- 3-6 classroom
- Home environment

Traditional preschool environments

- **Bright colors**
- Oversized objects
- **Plastic**: replicas, toys, and other substitutes for objects found in daily life (play kitchens, baby dolls, etc.)
- **Fantasy**, cartoon characters
- Sometimes clutter, extraneous items
- The alphabet or numbers as a room decoration– on the wall, on the carpet...
- Children's work displayed in the classroom

Montessori environments

- “**Less is more**” in terms of color and size. Muted, natural, warm colors. The environment whispers rather than shouts.
- Children use **real objects**— glass, silverware, etc.
- The alphabet is explored with **hands-on materials**.
- **Nonfiction** books.
- Children’s work is kept for their own enjoyment, not for display or comparison.

A Montessori Prepared Environment

- A Montessori prepared environment responds to the needs of children going beyond the material to the intangible.
- It is not only the physical aspect with the space and materials, but also the **emotional climate**, the peaceful and joyful energy that surrounds children and adults in that environment.
- It is a **stress-free** place where children can be in contact with themselves and grow according to inner laws of development.

Aid to Life

- It is a life-giving environment without obstacles that can prevent the child from becoming an independent, happy individual with a balanced character and personality.
- It is an orderly, beautiful place in which children can **practice how it feels to be free** to develop his/her potentialities.



Three Aspects of a Montessori Environment

- Intelligent classroom design
- Role of the Montessori materials
- Characteristics of effective adults

Classroom Design

- Functional: there is a natural flow
- **Classroom management:** 3 hours uninterrupted work, lesson planning and record keeping.
- Beautiful, purposeful and meaningful
- Free **indoor/outdoor access**
- Guidelines/Limits
- Balance of duties between adults

Beauty

- Beauty allows the child to have pleasure.
- Some aspects of beauty can be **measured objectively**, like symmetry.



Furniture, Light, Floors

- Space and furniture needs to have **a sense of free flowing**, this includes the height and width of the shelves, sizes of tables and chairs. The colors used are neutral so the material can stand out.
- **Natural light** comes from windows accessible to children, that brighten the colors of the materials.
- Floors that allow the child to regulate himself while walking and at the same time helps for posture and balance.

The outdoor environment

- The outdoor environment creates a **point of contact between the children and other creatures**. Bees, butterflies, birds, frogs, lizards, and more—they add so much to the garden.
- Inviting wildlife into the outdoor environment helps to maintain a healthy, natural balance; provides interest and beauty; and offers unlimited teaching opportunities for children.

Guidelines/Limits

- Establish reasonable limits for the age and skills of the children.
- Model **grace and courtesy** all the time.
- The child has to come to terms with the environment, and can only do this through experience.
- Rules are learned through consequences and experience.
- The adult is a bridge between their inner world and the world of the child.

Balance of duties between adults

- **Believe in your partner** and share the duties of the environment
- Most difficult to work with a partner when not supported by **good communication**.
Not talking things through and not resolving differences is unhealthy for relationships and affects the dynamics of the classroom and the energy of the children.

Montessori Materials

- Real activities with real objects
- Beautiful, precise, simple
- **Purposeful**
- Child size
- Isolation of quality
- Isolation of difficulty
- Color coded
- Clean and in good quality
- **Real objects, not toys**
- Children use real objects that they encounter in daily life

Alphabet

- The alphabet is explored with hands-on materials.



Tea Ceremony in Japan

- The quality of their precise and exact movements engages the attention and the spirit of the participants. The same is true when a child receives a presentation

Effective Adults

- Supportive figure
- **Scientific observation** skills
- **Sophisticated language**
- Trusting children
- Knowing when is reasonable to break rules
- **Personal growth** (self-awareness)

Adult as a Supportive Figure

- The adult in this environment is a background supportive figure and not the “star of the show”. **Ego** is out of this place.

Let go of ego

- **It does not matter how “perfect” the materials are:** If the adult working with the children is judgmental or ego-centered, the classroom will not flow.
- Neglectful or indifferent environments may cause children to be aggressive in

response.

- **“If you do not like what you see in your classroom, look at yourself!”**

Observation

- Scientific observation is the best tool for an ongoing practice of personal reflection.
- Adults should observe and record constantly, as this helps to avoid interrupting the children and interfering with their intrinsic motivation to learn.

No substitute for planning

- Spontaneity is important, but teachers still need to plan each week's lessons.
- Individual presentations should be engaging and meaningful.

Trust the child

- The adults must have faith in the potentialities of children and trust them.

Know When it is Reasonable to Break the Rules

- A story about what I observed last week when a young child has just transitioned from the toddler to primary classroom.

Personal Growth

- Effective adults are constantly learning and looking for possibilities of personal growth and development.
- They feel inspired by their task and the belief in the constructive nature of the child.
- Adult should be committed to supporting the children in such a way that they work as if the adults in the room do not exist.
- The result of the adult's work can be seen in the level of development of their children, in terms of self-confidence, self-regulation and love of learning.

Conclusion

- Benefits of a comprehensive Montessori environment
- Good stress vs. toxic stress

Benefits of Montessori Environment

- Engages the interest to learn, which leads to children developing attention and concentration.
- Develops skills that can only come through self-discipline.

- Enriches movement, language, the senses & mathematics, the foundation for lifelong pursuits.
- Create happy, enthusiastic learners, healthy children.

Obstacles

- We know that we all need to build resilience within ourselves and in the children. Life has many challenging situations, many of which build character and are part of healthy development.
- Stress is a necessary condition for life. However, there are obstacles in the lives of many children that bring a different type of stress that their systems cannot tolerate. These experiences could develop into behavior or learning disorders.

Montessori promotes “good stress”

- Good stress
 - Holding your interests when material is not available
 - Moving from the toddler class to the primary class
 - Overcoming challenge through hard work
 - Setting the table for lunch the first time
- Toxic stress
 - Teacher's expectations are overwhelming
 - Environment is chaotic, adults are changing all the time
 - Children are embarrassed in front of others
 - Routines are unpredictable
 - Work is imposed and not freely chosen



The Absorbent Mind

- The child's brain, the absorbent mind, is taking in information from the immediate environment at a unbelievable speed.
- All experiences the child has in his environment are creating his mind. Therefore, the prepared environment is a place where he can release his human

potentialities.

The Ideal Montessori Environment

- The ideal Montessori environment is a place where the child finds a climate of acceptance, respect, interesting learning and love, that allows him to be joyful, healthy and happy.

The Montessori Environment is Humane

- “The quality of the human environment is directly tied to each individual’s ability to love, to empathize with others and to engage in complex thinking.”
 - Karr-Morse, R. Tracing the roots of violence
 - Love through **effective adults**
 - Empathy through **classroom design**
 - Complex thinking through **Montessori materials**

References

- *Center on the Developing Child*, Harvard University
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/>
- *The Conscious Parent*, Shefali Tsabary,
- *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, Louis Cozolino
- *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence-The Groundbreaking Meditation Practice*, Daniel J. Siegel. M.D.

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