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Primary Science Curriculum

Biological Science

The interest in nature is a natural thing in every human being since the beginning of time. Language can be used as a pathway to the science of biology. Children have a great, natural interest in living things and biology is the study of living organisms, plants and animals. This is an area in which it is a pure joy in following the child's natural interest. The child is naturally fascinated by "real and living things".

There are two major areas of biology. The first is zoology, which is the scientific study of animals, their structure, physiology, classification, and distribution. The second is botany, which is the study of the classification of plants, their physiology, their structure, their ecology, distribution and economic importance.

In the Elementary class, the children will delve more deeply into these different groups and sub-groups of biology but for the Montessori Primary class, the child is only taught biology as in introduction and to have the awareness of the living organisms in our world.

The young child is taught the structure of plants and the distribution on a geographic level. The child always deals with the real object first, before moving to cards or to the abstract thing. Therefore, the directress should bring in as many different living things as possible. This allows for "real things" to be explored. A garden should ideally be part of every classroom. If not, the directress must make a special effort to bring in as much of nature as possible into the classroom.

All of these experiences are given on the oral level first. The information gained can be greatly enriched once the child is at the reading level.

Biology is a learning process for the directress as well. She will be guided each year by the child's interests and must create material to follow these interests.

Botany

In Practical Life food preparation, flower arrangements, seed sowing, watering plants in the environment, cleaning the leaves, outdoor sweeping, and making compost from uneaten fruits and vegetables are all part botany lessons. You may also want to have a Nature Table where children can bring in things from the environment to share with the class.

In the Sensorial Work, the Leaf cabinet, and Progressive Exercises both relate to botany. The Progressive Exercises should contain elements from the child's home such as nuts and fruits. The smelling bottles should also contain smells from the child's home environment.

In the Language work, show the child a real weed before beginning the Nomenclature Cards to give the child a real example of the images on the cards. Classified cards are a wonderful area in which to bring in real examples. For the names of different flowers, bring in real examples of the flowers to have the child experience. You can do this orally with the younger children and with the use of labels for the older children. It is wonderful to have books and stories that refer to nature, particularly in relation to the present season. Once the child can read and write, he has unlimited access to the books and written information you can provide.

Songs are another great idea to do with children of all ages.

For Art, making collages with flowers and leaves is a nice way to incorporate botany into a lesson.

Zoology

The major divisions in zoology are: vertebrates and invertebrates. The five groups of vertebrates are: amphibians, mammals, birds, fish, and reptiles.

Begin with real things. For example, if a child brings in an insect, place it in a "bug observer" (a large magnifier) and have the children observe it. It is very important to never pass on your own personal fears or phobias, so be aware of your own reactions to things!

In Language, classified cards are also a good way to teach different animals first orally, then with the labels. You can then separate them into vertebrates and invertebrates. You can have them feel their own vertebrates and think of any pets and if they have vertebrates. As in everything around science, follow the child's interests. Nomenclature cards are a good way of teaching the parts of an animal. If possible, begin the lesson by showing them a real frog. This not only aids them in their understanding of the frog but it also sparks their interest in learning.

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Talking Respectfully to Your Children

By Jane M. Jacobs, MA

If you have observed a Montessori class, you may have wondered: *How does the teacher manage 20 or more children when I have trouble with just one or two? If only I had her skills and patience!*

Having taught for several years before I had children, I was astonished to discover that my Montessori classroom experience did not prepare me for parenthood. Though Maria Montessori believed in extensive training of the teacher, few parents receive useful preparation. Fortunately, I found a book that helped me translate Montessori theory into more effective parenting: *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish.

The following ideas from this valuable book might be helpful as part of your parenting tool kit. The bonus is that these tools will work for you in any setting—and with everyone, not just children.

Learn to look and listen

Montessori stresses the importance of carefully observing a child as he goes about his work. This is one of the ways we can show respect for the child, another major premise of the Montessori philosophy. We often jump to conclusions and step in without taking into account what our child might be doing, thinking, or feeling. Put down the phone, turn off the television, watch, and look into your child's eyes when you speak.

- Practice observing and staying quiet first.
- Listen to yourself as well as your child—if your immediate inclination is dismay or anger, write down what you would like to say, but don't say it.
- Try not to fix anything or problem-solve—just be with your child.

Name the feelings

It's easy to be anxious when your child is upset. As a result, we may minimize children's feelings or attempt to protect them from disappointment. In the long run, it is more productive to help children identify and learn from their emotions. Just as Montessori materials help children learn concepts and nomenclature, thoughts and feelings can be defined for our children. Adapt the style or phrasing to suit your child's age.

- Listen to your child as he or she talks, offering feedback such as: "Oh..."; "Mmm..."; "I see."
- Recognize and name your child's feelings: "You seem upset (or angry, or happy)...."
- Resist asking and then answering questions that are rhetorical or accusatory: "What were you thinking?" "Who drank the milk?" "How many times have I told you...?"
- Try to understand from your child's perspective and describe,

perhaps with fantasy: "Sounds like you wish you could eat cookies for every meal."

- Show respect for your child's struggle: "I see that it's hard for you to..."
- Describe the dilemma your child is facing: "Even though you know..." "The problem is..."

Engage cooperation

Keeping the family on schedule—and making certain everyone is fed, clothed, bathed, etc.—is no easy task, especially as children often have timetables, needs, and desires different from adults (and often from each other). Montessori believed that children, when given tasks appropriate to their abilities, delight in their accomplishments. Organize your home so children needn't rely on adults for everything, and give them the time and the direction they need so they can become independent and successful in contributing to the family. You may find you don't have to resort to demands or reprimands.

- Acknowledge feelings first: "You're cozy in your bed this morning."
- Offer a choice: "Do you want to wear the red shirt or the green shirt?"
- Be playful: "If you were a magician, you would already be dressed!"
- Rather than reminding, describe what you see: "This table needs to be set."
- Say it with information: Use a word or short description, rather than a nagging, repetitive demand: "Shoes, backpack..."
- Write a note: "I'm hungry" on the dog's collar or "Hang me up!" on the jacket.
- Take action without insulting: "Let's clean up, put the paints away, and go outside."

Be patient as you learn these new skills; it takes time and practice—and will pay off. As Faber and Mazlish state: "We want to demonstrate the kind of respectful communication that we hope our children will use with us—now, during their adolescent years, and ultimately as our adult friends" (1982, p. 88).

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Reference

Faber, A. & Mazlish, E. (1982.) *How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk*. New York, NY: Avon Books.