

Tuskawilla Upper Elementary and Middle School

The Structure of the

Day:

Maintaining a Balance of Structure and Flexibility

Secondary Montessori programs normally do not look very much like elementary Montessori classrooms because of the very different personality of the adolescent. Where the elementary child often works alone, adolescents need to constantly interact with their friends. When they were ten, Montessori students may have enjoyed working with the Montessori materials, but at twelve they don't want to be reminded of the years when they were "just kids", and they may reject the Montessori materials as "baby-ish."

On the other hand, learning in a Montessori program rarely involves passively sitting back and listening to a teacher talk. Students learn through participating in seminars, meeting with guest speakers, individual research, dramatic "re-creation" experiences, hands-on projects, building models and dioramas, field trips, and internships. This kind of learning asks students to get involved, and ask questions, and think! Above all, it is rarely boring

Secondary programs strive to maintain a balance of structure and flexibility. Teacher initiated group lessons are usually brief; rarely lasting more than 30 minutes. They are intended to get students interested and give them just enough information to get them started on independent study, projects, or discussion.

Seminars and specialist classes are scheduled in such a way as to allow students large blocks of time

to work without interruption. Scheduling for these group activities is flexible and allows the teachers to set aside the amount of time most appropriate for given activities.

The World is Their Classroom...

Montessori secondary programs will normally go out into the community to give their students a wide-range of projects and experiences that would never be possible in a traditional schedule. Some schools go out as opportunities arise; others schedule one day a week for academic extensions, breaking off into small groups to visit museums, galleries, the theater, university libraries, the courts, governments offices, and scientific laboratories.

Students also use Extension Days to work on special projects or to study issues in-depth. They contact and visit government agencies, public interest groups, and relevant industries, pour through the public record, or interview key public figures. Gradually, they try to pull information together and attempt to interpret the "big picture." Students form their own opinions and defend them in class, often with very spirited debates!

Secondary Montessori programs commonly arrange for their students to participate in community service and internship experiences. At certain points of the year, students will engage in internships in the business, professional, or public interest communities. Students develop their own resumes and are expected to find their own intercept positions. They can be found interning in government offices; working for Greenpeace; studying at the zoo; assisting in doctor's offices, architectural firms, veterinary clinics, radio stations, newspapers, hospitals, retail businesses; or volunteering in shelters for the homeless. Many internships develop into long-term relationships as students prove

their worth. Students begin to think about their career interests, and as they discover their ability to make a difference in the world, they become more-self-confident and independent.

Study Guides

Many secondary Montessori programs give students Study Guides to help them organize their work. Ideally these guides are not prepared by the teachers alone, but by the teachers and students working together to set goals and suggest a learning path defined in accordance with the student's individual learning style.

Study Guides typically break the week's work into three elements:

- Skills and knowledge that the student will hopefully absorb
- Experiences in which the student is invited to engage, such as attending seminars or talks, books to read, movies viewed, field trips taken, presentations given, lab experiments completed, tests taken, etc.
- Essays, reports, and other assignments or projects which are to be turned in.

Many programs expect students to demonstrate a given level of mastery before they are allowed to move on to the next level. Unacceptable work or performance on tests of skills and knowledge must be resubmitted after additional lessons or coaching.

It is common for secondary Montessori programs to allow students to select from among several optional learning strategies and assignments or to propose another option.

Using this approach, secondary Montessori students continue to learn how to pace themselves and take responsibility for their work-skills that are critical to success in college.