

# Mary's School Parent Handbook 2005-6

*The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind. Maria Montessori*

## *Philosophy and Purpose*

*Education is a natural process carried out by the child and is not acquired by listening to words but by experiences in the environment. Maria Montessori*

Dr. Montessori wrote: *"The child becomes a person through work."*, "work" being defined as "purposeful movement." What engages a child in a constructive way is seen as filling a need in the child. She also wrote that *"the hands are the instruments of man's intelligence"*. In a Montessori classroom, the child is able to move, generally, from activity to activity, and "teacher talking" is limited. The "work" that you will see children doing in the classroom include: making and serving snack, washing dishes and napkins, caring for the animals, helping each other. These activities give real pleasure. Montessori wrote that the teacher's job is to set up the "prepared environment" to be consistent but enticing, safe but varied, and to demonstrate ways to explore materials use language and solve problems.

*"To assist the child we must provide him with an environment which will enable him to develop freely."* Maria Montessori Montessori environments are meant to appeal to the "whole child". *"...it is true that we cannot make a genius. We can only give to the individual the chance to fulfill his potential possibilities."* Maria Montessori Montessori classrooms do not create "academically gifted" children, early readers, or prodigies of any kind; although studies have shown that parents of gifted and learning disabled children are both attracted to Montessori education in larger than average numbers. My own children fell into both categories! The Montessori materials and the teacher's training can allow many levels of study, if the child is interested. But children have innate abilities and challenges unique to them, some genetic, some developmental and/or environmental, some temperamental, and the Montessori classroom is designed to invite "stretching" for *each* child. The verbal child might be challenged to enjoy more large motor play, the active child might be challenged to focus on a task with a series of steps, the shy child might be challenged to "use his words", the cautious child invited to be bold with paint, or movement; to take a risk! The goal is a fully confident child. The beauty of the Montessori environment is that there are no limits within the possibility of materials (until you get to quantum physics, perhaps), and no limits in the philosophy as to the abilities of the child. I strive to provide materials and experiences that expose children between 2 and 5 years to academic, creative, musical, large and small motor, spontaneous and structured "work". Our goal for all children is confidence and independence.

It is fun to expose a group of young adults, those who work for me for a semester or longer, to Montessori philosophy; this way of working with children. There are always interesting conversations about what they are studying, and what they observe at school.

I wish to make less of a footprint on the earth through my school, by modeling composting; reusable, not disposable; and to be a responsible user and buyer, as much as possible, of sustainable supplies. This grows out of the Montessori respect for the natural world and fascination with the interplay there that is ecology.

The purpose of Mary's School is to provide a safe place for children to explore and observe the world and other people, feel success and confidence, and continue in their innate love of learning, on their way to becoming, as Montessori said: "*a generation of triumphant adults.*"!

### *Curriculum*

I began teaching in 1978, when I taught French in the third grade in the local elementary school. I have been teaching in Montessori programs since 1992, and received my Early Childhood Certificate from the North Carolina School for Montessori Teacher Education near Raleigh in 1995. I did my internship year at Mountain Pathways School, where I taught for an additional 2 years. I started Mary's School in 2002. I continue to read about early childhood education in Montessori and other professional journals; the children are still my biggest inspiration.

In the classroom there are a variety of building materials, some costumes, an art area with open-ended art activities, books and the introductory Montessori Math and Language materials. Science is explored inside and out, in as "hands-on" a way as possible. Social studies is often described in Montessori materials as "sense of self", and includes learning about the world from the child's point of reference (families, pets, our bodies, our senses, emotions) and "sensorial" work, which is exploration through the senses, rough and smooth, comparison of weight, isolation of sound and color, and other work that includes hammering and sanding wood, sand and water play, ice, snow.

We have only one real "group" time, and none that is required, as the children learn more through choosing and moving. (*"We must support as much as possible the child's desire for activity; not wait on him, but educate him to be independent."* Maria Montessori) I have a goal of a 2 hour work-period in the morning. This is a time when the children choose work, and make their own transitions. New lessons are presented at this time. After this, we have Morning Meeting, snack, wash dishes, go outside. The time is dependent on the weather. Some of the materials can be used outside as well. Back inside, there is another work time until pick-up.

*“Our schools show that children of different ages help one another. There are many things which no teacher can convey to a child of three, but a child of five can do it with ease.” Maria Montessori* A Montessori classroom has a variety of ages. The older children provide physical and emotional help and support to the younger ones, and the younger children allow the older ones to teach and nurture. This is the most beautiful part of the classroom experience for me! Many of the lessons the children see are those given to other children, providing a lot of levels of learning each day.

### *Regulation*

Because my program is half-day, I am not required by the State of North Carolina to be Licensed, although I am regulated by the Fire Marshall and the North Carolina Building Code for Educational Use. There are a minimum of two caregivers each day. I have had wonderful assistants from ASU and Caldwell Community College

I maintain current First Aid and CPR training through the Red Cross, as do most of my assistants. Most Montessori programs far exceed average curriculum requirements from the State. The Children’s Council has given guidance and ongoing training and support, including help in writing these procedures.

### *Inclusion Policy*

Montessori environments are flexible and developmentally appropriate, and are therefore suitable for many children. However, they are not therapeutic environments, nor am I trained in special education. Children and families in need of special help will need to get that from professionals, and may not have their needs met in my classroom without some supplemental help. That said, I believe that there is a range of typical and acceptable abilities, behaviors and needs of children, and I will attempt to accommodate as broad a range of these as I feel is positive to the group.

We will take several weeks’ attendance during which we will observe the adjustment made by your child. If we do not feel that your child is adjusting satisfactorily, you and I will discuss options, which may include recommending that you increase the number of days your child attends or, in an extreme case, that you seek a different placement. If, at the end of two weeks we cannot serve you, your deposit will be returned. In order to protect the group, I reserve the right to end without notice the contract of any family which repeatedly hampers the safety or well-being of the group, which does not respect the guidelines of outlined in this Handbook, or which has misrepresented themselves or the child.

Because young children adjust best to consistency, a child may do better with more days at school than fewer. Many parents feel that less time away from them is less stressful, but the inconsistency of 2 days a week, for example, means that school seems to occur randomly. Most Montessori programs, for this reason, require 5 days a week attendance. It is more work for me to accommodate more children and families, but I do it to try to accommodate financial and other considerations by offering part-time care.

However, if a child is having trouble with separation, **more** days will often help. This may be an option I suggest.

This is often the first “school” experience for children. As such, some concerns (areas outside the norm) are apparent to us, in the group, that are not apparent at home, with family. I will take the opportunity to point these out, as I observe them, and to, perhaps, recommend evaluation. It is very hard to hear concerns about your child, but the sooner a real need is addressed, the better for all.

### *Enrollment Agreements*

I will accept an application fee of \$25 at any time during the year. At the time of enrollment, I will need an extra month’s tuition as a deposit. This will be credited towards your last month’s tuition unless you leave school before the end of a school year or semester.

**Enrollment for the “school year” (August-May) is separate from enrollment for the summer. Enrollment in one does not guarantee enrollment in the other. Enrollment for the summer will be given preferentially to Mary’s School current and former students and siblings. The schedules and fees are also different than those for the school year.**

Our options for enrollment for the school year are five days (\$320/month), Monday/Wednesday/Friday (\$200/month), or Tuesday/Thursday (\$140/month). Other options are only available at Mary’s discretion. Tuition is due by the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the month. One household must be responsible for the full semester/year’s tuition. After the first week of attendance there will be no adjustment to the tuition for the full term, unless agreed upon by Mary in special circumstances. Tuition for the entire term (a semester) will continue to be due, whether the child is in school or not. If there is flexibility in overall enrollment, your child may “make-up” missing school, but it is a question of numbers per day, determined by Mary.

It is disruptive for a child to attend sporadically. I will discourage this, for the sake of the child’s adjustment.

Drop-ins are an option, usually for an older sibling on a snow day. I expect a phone call to check this out for the day (963-8906/297-5045). There is a \$10 drop-in fee per child per day. This is a special favor for Mary's School children, and not a way to have increased regular attendance at a discount.

### *Discipline*

Children feel most secure when they know where the limits are. The limits at school are: you may not hurt other living things, yourself or the materials. Children are expected to get things "ready for the next person". They will not be allowed to interrupt other children who are concentrating. Children may be moved from a situation, but strict "time out" is not very successful in a group. We give the child choices, and focus on the consequences of their actions: "See how sad she looks?" We do not dwell on events once they are over, and try not to "over talk", as children do not learn much from this, or may find it reinforcing! One phrase I learned in training was, "Water the flowers, not the weeds.", so we tend to ignore behavior we want to discourage. Continued issues will be called to the attention of the parents, with a focus on serving the child together. Most other rules are related to safety .

Along with physical independence, Montessori had a goal of emotional independence. To this end, we expect children to begin to learn to "self-regulate": if a child is angry, or sad or tired, they generally know what they need to do recover. This is true for the very youngest children, and is a wonderful skill to perfect. When children are allowed to do this on their own, with adult empathy but not direction, they seem to move through big waves of emotion sooner. We do not try to distract children from their feelings, or minimize them, but neither do we let them control the group. We (teachers and other children) are nearby and available for a lap or conversation when it is wanted, but it is often not! A child may choose to be mad; that is a choice; eventually I expect that they will choose something else. Another phrase we use a lot at school is: "No is also an answer."

In order to allow this much freedom to children, I must be able to trust them to function within these limits. There are some children (very few, in my experience) who, because of background, maturity or temperament, do not handle this much freedom well, and persist in attempting to hurt others, or disrupt the group. **I will not allow** children to do either of these things, or to stay in the environment if either of these groups of behaviors persists.

## *Arrival and Departure*

School begins at 8:30 and ends at 12 noon. Children are to be brought to the porch, at least, and released to a teacher. Children do better when they walk in and are not carried, and carry at least some of their belongings. Separation is a continuing issue, cycling through different developmental levels. I have observed that briefer drop-offs are easier on children; an adult who stays, once information has been given to a teacher and goodbyes have been exchanged, seems to erode confidence. Mary's School is a school for children, not adults. I am not supportive of lingering separations, because they do not serve children's independence. It is the adult's responsibility to acquire enough information about your choice of placement to feel comfortable before your child starts school. If you are confident, your child will know this, and separation will be easier. If you have not done your work and do not feel comfortable, you will be asked to take your child with you when you leave, and try again another day.

Seeing a parent linger in a parking lot can be painful, too. Please do not stay and chat if your child is having trouble separating. If you are concerned about your child, feel free to call and check in (297-5045); if we are on the playground, we will call you back. Children are able to put their things in their cubby, and we are there to help with that.

A fee of \$5 will be charged for every five minutes a caregiver arrives after 12:10. Parents, not baby-sitters, will be responsible for this fee.

Please tell Mary when another adult will pick up your child.

## *Health Policy*

We are only prepared to care for well children. Please keep your child at home if he/she has symptoms of untreated illness. Any child who is not feeling well, has diarrhea, fever, vomiting or *cannot go outside*, should stay at home. A child's temperature should be normal for 24 hours before returning to school. We reserve the right to send a child home because of symptoms of illness. Please report any communicable or contagious illnesses so that other parents may be informed.

Bumps and scrapes sustained and observed at school will be treated with soap, water, Band-aids and ice. The caregiver who picks up your child will be told about severe bumps, stings, cuts, falls, or suspected illness. Mary cannot be held responsible for information not passed on to a parent! Injuries that seem more serious (falls from heights, injuries that involve long crying) are documented, for my protection and yours.

In case of real emergency, we will notify the Boone Rescue Squad which is less than a mile away.

Please note doctor-documented allergies on the application form.

No medication may be given orally by any teacher to any child. We have an Epi-pen in case of severe (life-threatening) allergic reactions.

### *Clothing/Things from Home*

We have paint out, and go outside every day. In our goal to foster exploration and independence, we will not discourage your child from getting wet, muddy and paint-spattered. Shoes without slippery soles (cowboy boots do not work well!) are encouraged. Clothing, including shoes, that children can easily put on themselves (especially for those who are toilet training- no onesies, overalls or tights, please!) allow success. **We have not found pull-ups to be helpful in toilet training;** When you and the child are ready to take on toilet training, please make sure to communicate clearly to Mary, and send in extra clothing..

“Accidents” do not bother us; my floors are impervious! Children who are becoming toilet trained will be expected to be able and willing toilet independently and/or to change independently. Please give them a lot of opportunity and time to practice this at home, from before aged 2 on. We will not “take children to the potty”, or “put them” on it; it is always accessible, inside or out. They learn this with little trouble at school. There is a small window of “accidents”. If a child has several accidents in a morning, we may ask them if they would prefer to wear diapers for the rest of the morning, and try again another day.

Re diapers: we only make a point of changing soiled diapers(as detected), not wet ones, during our morning.

Every child needs at least one change of clothing every day, including socks. For children still experiencing “accidents”, extra shoes are also a good idea. As we go outside every day, hats and mittens are a must in winter, although I have extras available. Raingear is a necessity, in Boone. I have found that children do not like hoods, so a ball cap or hat is better in rainy weather.

I have also found that toys brought from home are either ignored or cause a problem. If children love playing with them at home, they are often not willing to share, and are best

left for entertainment there. I will send them home with whoever brings the child. We are always happy to share books or photographs.

We do not refrigerate juice or milk in sippy cups, so they are better left at home. Water is always available, and the children ask for help when getting it from the child-sized sink. In warm weather we have water outside as well. Food brought from home will be shared with the whole group.

### *Special Events*

It is always fine to send snack, although it is not required. It is fine for birthdays, as well. I suggest you ask your child what they would like for their birthday snack; it is often something very simple, something perhaps that we can make. It is good to check for allergies ahead of time. Occasional cookies are alright, but candy is really never welcome; it creates lots of concerns for children and parents, even when “left in a cubbie for later.” *Please do not send candy*, even for holidays like Halloween and Valentine’s Day. You may think you are sending a small amount, but if three people do it... Children like to give things, but a card is preferred. Costumes do not serve children well, either, and are distracting. Feel free to tell children that “they are not allowed at school”. After years of trying them, they are best left at home for Halloween as well.

### *Weather*

If weather conditions are iffy, call Mary’s home number at **(963-8906)** and she or the answering machine will tell you whether we are having school. After 8:10, someone is usually at school (297-5045). We generally *are* open, except in cases of ice.

### *Snacks*

At least one snack is provided each morning, including a non-meat protein and some fruit or bread. It is often made/prepared by the children. Water is always available. I will not limit your child’s snack choices, except in cases of documented (medical emergency) allergies (as opposed to food preferences).

## *Tax ID Number*

**My federal tax ID number is #52-2368303.** From *Bottom Line Magazine*, “be sure to claim child tax credits when preparing your taxes. You may be eligible for thousands of dollars of tax credits and/or refunds. The federal Child and Dependent Care Credit can be worth \$1000 per child per year. Families earning less than \$35,458 annually also may be eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit. This credit is worth up to \$4,300 this year (2005). For more information and to find free tax preparation assistance, call 800-TAX-1040.” (From the National Women’s Law Center)