

As the time for re-enrollment fast approaches, I would like to reflect on the three-year cycle in our Montessori classrooms and why that time frame is so vitally important. The multi-age environment is a hallmark of the Montessori classroom, and is inextricably linked to the importance of the three-year cycle. The three-year cycle is the concept that children should stay in each level of their Montessori classrooms for three complete years. These three years provide the opportunity for a child to start as an observer and learner of materials, move into confident practice in their second year, and complete the cycle in their third year as a leader and teacher to the other children. This three-year cycle is crucial to the health of the Montessori classroom environment as well as each individual child's academic and social development.

The Montessori classroom thrives off multi-age groupings, with a community of support and empowerment being built from the various interactions that take place. As Dr. Maria Montessori once said, "there are many things which no teacher can convey to a child of three, but a child of five can do it with the utmost ease. Our schools show that children of different ages help one another. The younger one sees what the older ones are doing and ask for explanations". These multi-age groupings provide the social and academic environments for ultimate success.

Academically, the three-year cycle is irreplaceable. It is the culminating year where all that the children have learned and practiced the previous years comes together. Children in the third year have the opportunity to bring information from all areas, piece it together, and then teach it to the younger children. Teaching the materials and information to other children essentially "synthesizes" their learning, helping to ingrain what they've learned as they show it to others. By their third year, children can look around their classroom at the lessons on the shelves, and be confident in their ability to use the materials successfully. This confidence leads them to deep exploration and study during the third year in the environment. Our third year students have learned that mistakes are part of the learning process, and that they will not set you back so far that you can't eventually overcome these mistakes to master new skills. In the third year, students see learning as a process, and they know their intelligence is not fixed but progressive and dynamic. These lessons are invaluable to their future curiosity and learning.

While the academic benefits are surely there in the third year of a Montessori classroom, perhaps even more important are the “non-cognitive” or soft skills your child is developing as part of the classroom community. Children are gaining confidence their third year. This is the year they take on full leadership, and the skills they acquire in this position are important for their entrance into the world. Children from multi-age environments are more comfortable asking others for help, and offering help in return. It is here, in the third year, children become true collaborative learners. Throughout their three years, they gain a sense of confidence, leadership, and understanding.