



Self-Regulation and the Development of the Intellect

One of the primary goals of a Montessori education is the development of self-regulation. Maria Montessori said that “the teacher...must have a kind of faith that the child will reveal himself through work.” The Montessori approach differs from traditional education in that it places an emphasis on the development of the whole child. This means that instead of trying to find a one-size-fits-all approach to meet the needs of a whole classroom, a Montessori guide sees each child as a unique individual and helps them develop to their own full potential.

In our approach, we believe that feeding the intellect is just as important as feeding the body. As parents and educators we put great effort into helping children learn to self-regulate their physical nourishment. As early as infancy the child can begin developing their own tastes and regulating their nourishment based on their own feelings of hunger and fullness. So also must we help the child self-regulate their intellectual nourishment by providing an optimal environment and freedom of choice.

Nutritionists agree that it is critical to avoid setting up a hierarchy of food (e.g. chocolate tastes better than broccoli; you *have* to eat your vegetables before you get to eat dessert). Instead, children should be offered appropriately sized portions of a variety of food as they learn to self-regulate their own tastes. Similarly we offer a variety of intellectually stimulating works in an environment that is conducive to a child developing their own unique intellect. It is important to remember that every interest your child may display has value to their own development. No two children have the same interests, abilities, or needs, so we must remember to allow the child to explore their own passions. True learning happens best when children are actively engaged in a activity they have chosen for themselves. When the adult takes control of the child's activity and schedule this can only result in a power struggle or missed opportunity to fulfill their intellectual needs.

The development of self-regulation requires a great deal of trust from the adult. We all know how important it is for a child to learn to eat fruits and vegetables, yet we cannot force them to eat. Instead, we keep offering those foods in a variety of ways until we find the fit that is most palatable for the child (maybe they prefer parsnips to carrots or would rather have vegetable soup than stir-fried vegetables). With patience and consistency children will eventually find their own path to healthy eating. Similarly, the path to intellectual self-regulation looks different for each child. While one child may show a natural interest in rote memorization of letters, another may show much more interest in self-expression, preferring to paint or draw the letters. In Montessori we follow each child's interests while also using their passions to draw them into all areas of the classroom. Most importantly, we trust in the child's own inner drive to choose work which is appealing to their own interests and needs.

As parents and educators, our job is not to make choices for the child. Rather, we strive to help children build the necessary skills to regulate themselves. We must set up an environment that allows for freedom of choice while trusting the child's own inner drive to grow and develop. The end goal is to raise children who know themselves and can take care of their mental well-being just as they can care for their physical well-being.