

What Does Community Mean in a Montessori Environment?

by [Liesl](#) on October 15, 2012 <http://www.hometessori.com/2012/10/what-does-community-mean-in-a-montessori-environment/>

“We are not all the same; we pool together our many talents to create an outstanding learning environment where our education is not confined to the walls of a classroom.”

Every year I ask parents why they want to send their child to a Montessori classroom. The answers I receive are responses such as “we want our child to learn independence,” “we heard Montessori was good for academic achievement,” “we want our children to excel at their own pace,” etc. All good answers, but I have yet to receive a response that talks about the community aspect of a Montessori environment, one that is so different from any other school environment.

I always say to parents that our first task has to be to create an inclusive and accepting environment where children know and understand the inner-workings of a community. Without this key element, optimal learning cannot occur nor a respect for the environment. I do not refer to the student body as a “class” but rather as a “community.” Even the children refer to it as a community and use the word frequently.

The children know that if they are not responsible (they talk during group time, are careless with the materials, etc.) that this affects their community. We emphasize the child’s place in their community and the great responsibility it holds—to care for others, to care for their environment, and to care for themselves. If a particular child is not listening during group and disturbing their neighbor, I will remind them verbally that they need a break from the community. If the child is being aggressive with other classmates (community members), I will speak to them about needing a break from the community because their behavior is not acceptable.

I think the perfect example of a community caring for their environment in the children’s house (classroom), is when a child sees a spill on the floor and clean it up with a floor cloth, places the floor cloth in the laundry hamper, a child sees the dirty floor cloth and washes it and hangs it up to dry, and after it is dry another child comes and irons it, folds it, and puts it away. The children know that they have to rely on their community for the flow of their children’s house to work.

Here are a few ideas to get you started on fostering community in your home:

1. If your child is in school, change your language from “class” to “community.” You can ask your child questions such as, “What did you do in your community today?” “How did you behave in your community?”
2. Your family is a community body. If your child is misbehaving, remind them that (their family is a community). It is important that your child understands the immense privilege of belonging to a community and the responsibilities attached to it.
3. A community is a body of people that offer an inclusive and accepting environment, where responsibility and respect for one another is evident. Reinforce the positives your child does within their community. I love to affirm my students that they were very respectful in the community when they, on their own accord, decided to sweep the floor, roll floor mats, wash tables, help a friend wash their hands, etc. You can affirm and recognize your child’s place in their community by thanking them for how they helped a younger sibling, how they helped wash vegetables, etc. and always reiterating that those small tasks are contributing to the community so that they know they belong to something much greater in this world.
4. Have your child recognize all of the different communities to which they may belong- school, family, church, sports, etc. Ask your child what they do within these communities to build stronger bonds and contribute, such as, “what do you do at school to help your friends?” “What can we do at home to make sure our environment is tidy?”
5. Help your child to recognize the differences within communities. At the end of every day, I love to point out to my students what each of them did to contribute to their community in a different way. It is crucial that children know that each individual can make a special contribution to a collective group. We are not all the same; we pool together our many talents to create an outstanding learning environment where our education is not confined to the walls of a classroom. If we teach our children many wonderful things, but never encourage them to share it with the world in which they live, we have failed. Their character will grow and strengthen in the children’s house (classroom environment), but we don’t want it to end there. Point out to your child the things they do to contribute to their various communities, the things you do, the things your neighbors do, etc. This helps your child to see that we work together to create good, not as lone citizens.