



Montessori and the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale

A Crosswalk for Educators and Advocates

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This document was created through The Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI), a collaborative effort between the American Montessori Society and the Association Montessori International/USA to provide a coordinated voice and engage in advocacy on policy issues affecting the future of Montessori schools in America.

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Introduction

This document is a crosswalk between Montessori and the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Third Edition (ECERS-3) and is intended for use by Montessori schools in informing their classroom choices prior to observation by an ECERS reliable rater so that they will have an understanding of how the rating scale is structured and how the Montessori environment can be judged highly. It is also intended to assist advocacy representatives in dialogues with state officials.

Because the name Montessori is not trademarked, completeness of Montessori implementation varies widely between programs. This guide was created using the standards defined by the American Montessori Society (AMS) and the Association Montessori International/USA (AMI/USA) for a fully-implemented Montessori classroom.

For a definition of Montessori education and further description of what to look for in a Montessori environment, please see MPPI's [Montessori Essentials](#) document.

MPPI Suggestions for ECERS-3 Items

The following chart highlights the specific ECERS-3 observation items where Montessori programs may question how to meet the requirements specified. For each numbered item included from the ECERS-3, suggestions are given as to how the item requirement may be met in a Montessori environment. The observation items not listed did not appear to have any conflicts that would affect Montessori classrooms.

| Space and Furnishings | |
|---|---|
| 2. Furnishings for care, play and learning | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 7.2 | Furniture designed for specific activities includes the dishwashing stand, puzzle map stand, dressing frame stand, bell cabinet, bead cabinet, art easel, book display shelf with covers facing out, etc. |
| 3. Room arrangement for play and learning | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 3.2 | The Montessori classroom has defined areas where math, language, practical life, sensorial, and cultural materials are kept. However, children may take an activity from the shelf to use wherever in the room they are most comfortable. "Interest centers" may include areas for reading, dish- or cloth-washing, and other activities that benefit from specialized furniture. |
| 7.1 | The Montessori indoor environment is generally a quiet work space. As in a home, children learn to adjust the volume of their laughter and conversation to accommodate others' needs. Still, there are areas, such as the Peace Table and book corner, where children can find an even quieter space if desired. |
| 4. Space for privacy | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 5.1 | Children in a Montessori environment are explicitly taught to respect others' work and not to interrupt. A child's work space, defined by a small table or a mat on the floor, is considered off-limits for other children unless they have been invited to help. |
| 5. Child-related display | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 3.1 | A Montessori environment should be calm and restful to the eye, limiting distractions in order to support concentrated work. For this reason, posters, charts or graphs are seldom used. Objects of art and natural objects may be displayed as they would be in a home. Photos of children may be displayed near each child's cubby or coat hook. |
| 5.1 | |

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| 5.2 | Because the Montessori environment is decorated like a home, the connection between displays and current lessons may be subtle. Art works rotate throughout the year to expose the children to different artists, styles of art, and time periods of art. |
| 5.3 | Because Montessori classes emphasize process over product at the early childhood level, children’s work is not often displayed in the classroom unless initiated by the child. |

Personal Care Routines

8. Meals/snacks

| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
|-------------------|--|
| 3.3 | Snack in a Montessori classroom is available throughout the day to children as they are hungry. To ensure sanitary conditions during this flexible snack schedule, sanitized non-porous placemats labeled with the children’s names can be used. |

9. Toileting/diapering

| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
|-------------------|---|
| 5.2 | <p>Montessori schools allow children to take an active role in the toileting process from a young age. Children may change their diapers or wet underwear with adult assistance while standing on a very low changing surface, a thin changing pad, or a designated area of the floor.</p> <p>Often, children who are being potty trained in a Montessori environment will wear training pants instead of Pull-Ups or diapers. In the case of an accident, proper sanitary procedures are followed.</p> |

11. Safety practices

| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
|-------------------|---|
| 5.2 | Not only are the staff responsible for child safety, but the children also take action to ensure everyone’s safety and well-being. Children wipe up spills on the floor and table, close doors to the hallway, and notify adults of situations which they are not taught to resolve (broken glass, for example). A teacher may be aware of a spill, but if she sees that a child is taking care to clean it up, she will not interfere. |

Language and Literacy

13. Encouraging children to use language

| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
|-------------------|--|
| 5.1 | Staff will not interrupt a child at work to ask questions. At other times, conversations with children might include these kinds of questions: “What would you like to tell me about your picture? With whom did you work today? What new things did you learn today?” |

| 14. Staff use of books with children | |
|--|---|
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 7.1 | Current topics of study may not be immediately apparent, as the curriculum is not organized on the basis of rotating themes. Children often read books independently or with their friends or teachers that relate to their current, individualized activities within the classroom. |
| 15. Encouraging children’s use of books | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 3.2 | Fantasy books are rarely used in a Montessori early childhood classroom. However, realistic fiction stories as well as factual books are accessible to the children. |
| 5.1 | Reading is a choice for any child throughout the day. Rather than having books for all the children to read at the same time, a small selection of books is available all day. Books in the classroom are rotated frequently, piquing children’s interest and providing something new all the time to read. |
| 7.1 | |
| 16. Becoming familiar with print | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 7.1 | Montessori materials for literacy development are available on the shelves at all times. Because they are contained in boxes with lids, they may not be immediately visible to the observer. |
| 7.4 | In a Montessori classroom, picture/word instructions are not used for most classroom activities but may be found at the snack table, in the cooking area, or in the garden. |

| Learning Activities | |
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| 17. Fine motor | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 5.1 | Although Montessori classrooms have a vast array of fine motor activities, they do not typically have interconnecting materials (Legos). Schools may have large interconnecting hollow blocks or another similar activity on the playground. |
| 7.2 | In a Montessori environment, all the shelves and containers are accessible to the children at all times. Rather than being labeled, the materials in each curriculum area are arranged in sequence from left to right and top to bottom, so that children know where to find each item and where to put it away. Schools may color coordinate the trays of fine motor activities (practical life) to further encourage self-help. |
| 19. Music and movement | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 5.1 | Music materials, including the Montessori bells and the listening center, are always available as a choice in the classroom. Children may use the bells independently throughout the day for matching, grading, composing, and reading music. |
| 5.2 | Staff in a Montessori classroom set an example of quiet voice and calm body during “free play,” but frequently sing and dance with children during circle time. The teacher may quietly sing a hand washing (or similar) song to a child during free play. |
| 5.3 | Most Montessori environments have an ellipse marked on the floor for use with a variety of movement |

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| | activities. Children have lessons of increasing complexity about doing this work. |
| 7.2 | Rhyming and sound games (which may or may not include songs) explore the awareness of sounds in words. |
| 7.3 | Children participate in these activities with adults and also with other children. |
| 20. Blocks | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 1.1 | The Montessori sensorial materials include blocks such as the pink tower, broad stair, and knobbed and knobless cylinders. They are designed to teach concepts such as size, width, and length. In addition, each set indirectly introduces the base 10 system with 10 blocks in each set. After initial introduction to the concept, these materials may be combined in any number of ways by an individual or small group to create designs of their own imagination. |
| 3.1 | Due to pedagogical differences, Montessori classrooms will not typically have block centers with accessories available in the classroom. Credit may be given for blocks and accessories used outdoors, as long as gross motor time is met first. |
| 21. Dramatic play | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 1.1 | Montessori classrooms do not typically have dramatic play centers in the classroom. The Montessori classroom provides children the opportunity to prepare and serve real food and use real brooms and mops, rather than pretend to do such things. Credit may be given for dramatic play areas and accessories used outdoors. |

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| Learning Activities (cont.) | |
| 22. Nature/science | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 5.1 | Materials that meet this requirement include: Living things: plants, insects, pets Natural objects: shells, rocks, minerals, fossils Factual books/nature-science picture games: books on the current topic of study, “parts of” puzzles and booklet making, living/non-living activity, three-part cards Tools: magnifying glass, compass, thermometer, magnets Sand or water with toys: land and water forms |
| 5.2 | A Montessori teacher will respect a child who is focused and engaged in an activity by not interrupting to talk unnecessarily. Depending on the level of experience of the children, an observer may see a greater or lesser amount of adult involvement for this reason. |
| 23. Math materials and activities | |
| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
| 5.1 | Materials that meet this requirement include: Counting/comparing quantities |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spindle box ● Sandpaper numerals and objects ● Bead chains ● Golden bead material ● Teen and tens boards ● Hundred board <p>Measuring/comparing sizes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pink tower ● Brown stair ● Red rods ● Number rods ● Knobbed cylinders <p>Familiarity with shapes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Geometric cabinet ● Geometric solids ● Metal insets |
| 5.2 | Staff or an experienced child will give initial lessons. Adults may join in to model certain skills; however, the goal is for a child or a group of children to be able to do the work independently. A Montessori teacher will respect a child who is focused and engaged in an activity by not interrupting to talk unnecessarily. An observer may see a greater or lesser amount of adult involvement for this reason. |
| 5.3 | Montessori teachers do not frequently use fingers to count, as it limits the child's ability to match numbers and quantity to 10. However, a teacher may hold up fingers when singing a song with the class or reiterating a number outside of a math lesson. |

Learning Activities (cont.)

25. Understanding written numbers

| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
|-------------------|--|
| 7.1 | This need is met with the following: Number Rods and Cards, Spindle Boxes, Teen Beads and Boards, Tens Beads and Boards, Gold Beads, the Stamp Game, and other materials. |
| 7.4 | The observer will not see this practice during a lesson in math. However, a teacher may hold up fingers while reading a book or when referencing the appropriate number of scoops of snack, for example. |

26. Promoting acceptance of diversity

| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
|-------------------|--|
| 5.1 | This item may be met with dramatic play materials for outdoor use. |
| 5.2 | The Montessori curriculum is steeped in respect for diversity. Visible examples may include books, musical instruments, wall hangings, and items on the Peace Table; in addition, children take part in cultural studies, try foods from other regions, and learn about the differences and similarities of people with differing abilities. |
| 5.3 | |

27. Appropriate use of technology

| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
|--------------------------|---|
| All | Montessori classrooms support extensive development and refinement of the senses. As a result, there is very little, if any, use of technology in Montessori early childhood communities. |

Interaction

29. Individualized Teaching

| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
|--------------------------|---|
| 5.1 | Each of the materials in a Montessori environment has a clear purpose, and children are taught to use the materials in particular ways. Within this structure, there are many opportunities for children to play with items in open-ended ways. Examples are making up stories with small objects in the language area; creating unique structures with the block materials (brown stair, etc.); and painting at the easel. |

Program Structure

34. Free play

| ECERS-3 Indicator | MPPI Suggestion |
|--------------------------|--|
| 5.1 | A two- to three-hour, uninterrupted block of time for free choice is provided daily. Children may choose their own activities, ask for a lesson,, move freely between areas of the classroom, and work alone or in a group. Free play outdoors is also part of a Montessori day. |
| 5.4 | Children may work for as long as they like with a material they have chosen. If they want to use a material already in use, they choose a different activity until the material has been replaced on the shelf. Waiting for a desired material builds patience and strengthens social skills; at the same time, the presence of many engaging activities allows children to easily find a second choice. |