

- **Doane Academy's Primary Program is said to be Montessori-based. What exactly does that mean?**

- First of all, let's explain where the term "Montessori" originated. Montessori education was founded in 1907 by Dr. Maria Montessori, the first woman in Italy to become a physician. She based her educational methods on scientific observation of children's learning processes. Guided by her discovery that children teach themselves, Dr. Montessori designed a "prepared environment" in which children could freely choose from a number of developmentally appropriate activities. Now, more than a century after Maria Montessori's first *casa dei bambini* ("children's house") in Rome, Montessori education is found all over the world.\*
- Next, how does Doane Academy's Primary Program compare to and differ from a traditional Montessori program? Doane Academy's Primary Program is a program for 3-6 year olds, one of the main groupings used within a Montessori education. Much like a Montessori classroom, Doane's Primary classroom emphasizes learning through all five senses, not just through listening, watching, or reading. Children in both the Doane Primary Program and in Montessori classrooms learn at their own, individual pace and according to their own choice of activities from many possibilities. This learning is an exciting process of discovery, leading to concentration, motivation, self-discipline, and a love of learning. A community of learners is established in which the older children spontaneously share their knowledge with the younger ones. In addition to these similarities, the Doane Academy Primary Program sets itself apart from most Montessori classes by having special subject teachers sharing their expertise in music, Spanish, art, and Discovery (Science).

- **How old does my child need to be in order to be in the Primary Program? How do I know if my child is ready?**

Your child must be 3 years old by September 1<sup>st</sup> of the year they will commence the program, but that does not mean that every child is ready to benefit from the rigors of the program. To help determine if your child is ready, several factors should be considered. The physical independence of the child could be observed through your child's toilet use and ability to manipulate clothing. Their emotional independence could be manifested through your child's ability to leave parents without fear, their desire to care for him/herself, their lack of dependence on a pacifier or other security items, and their ability to verbalize his/her needs. Finally, their social readiness means that your child has some ability to understand limits, can usually wait for a lesson, and generally can control impulses.

- **How does the program assimilate students new to the program?**

- At the outset of each year, time is spent providing an orientation to both the parents and the students new to the program. The new students' orientation, especially for the youngest ones, has them attending school for a half-day during the first few weeks of the year. These are designed to ensure that these students will make a smooth transition to the rigors of the full-day program. Some parents choose to

have their child attend for only a half-day beyond the first few weeks of orientation, recognizing that the rigors of a full-day at that age might be too demanding for their child.

- Each September, a new class starts the year-long journey. The makeup of the class includes those who have been part of the program in the previous year or years and will become the role models for those new to the program. A good deal of the learning that takes place at this age is through observation, so observing the more experienced students carrying out their daily functions is a strong component in moving the class forward. With the help of these returning students, the necessary daily routines are carefully introduced. As the group gains confidence in each routine, new ones are introduced, including a systematic roll-out of meeting with the special subject teachers in art, music, Spanish, library and Discovery (science). There is no timetable for how quickly this occurs. The teacher, through keen observation of the interaction and reaction of all of the students to each new activity, will determine which new activity should be presented and when it should be introduced. While these group transitions are occurring, each individual is progressing on developing their own skills at their own pace.

- **What is the length of a normal school day?**

The basic program is from 8:10 a.m. to 3:20 p.m. – the length of the school day for all other students at Doane Academy. For the youngest students, those typically 3 years old, a half-day program is available, running from 8:10 a.m. until noon.

- **How is a normal day structured?**

The day includes a morning “circle time” with activities designed to get to know each other, make the students feel safe, build community, and get ready for the day ahead of them. This time also is the beginning stage of feeling comfortable with public speaking. What generally follows is their three-hour work period. This period is typically uninterrupted time, not broken up at all by group lessons. During this time, teachers give personalized lessons, make observations, schedule individualized meetings or form study groups with older children when necessary. Adults and children respect concentration and do not interrupt someone who is busy at a task. Collaborative groups form spontaneously or are arranged ahead of time. They almost never take precedence over self-selected work. Time outside of this work period allows for recess – outdoors when weather permitting – lunch, rest time for the youngest students, and education times with special subject teachers for music, art, Spanish, library, and Discovery (Science). The day concludes with another “circle time” aimed at reviewing our day, saying goodbye, and previewing the next day.

- **Is the class ever split into multiple groups?**

Though much of the learning for both the older and younger students is through their interaction with one another, there very often are times as routines need to be established when the younger and older students will work separately. This might be when meetings with special subject teachers begin, attending our weekly chapel service, or when the younger ones need to have “rest time.”

- **How can children learn if it is their choice as to which activity they would like to complete?**

Dr. Montessori knew that all children possess an innate desire to learn. She also observed that children are more motivated to learn when working on something of their own choosing. Likewise, a child in the Doane Academy Primary Program may independently choose their focus of learning on any given day, but their decision is guided by the materials and activities – in each area of the curriculum – that the teacher has prepared and presented to the child.

- **If children work at their own pace, don't they fall behind?**

Although students are free to work at their own pace, they are not going it alone. The teacher closely observes each child and provides materials and activities that advance the child's learning by building skills and knowledge already gained. This gentle guidance helps the student master the challenge at hand and protects him from moving on before he is ready, which is what actually causes children to "fall behind." Allowing a child to build their thirst of knowledge while having their learning styles evolve is more important than rushing a student to reach a certain "stage" by a certain timeframe.

- **How are students assessed?**

Our teachers, through extensive observation and record-keeping, plan individual projects to enable each child to learn what he/she needs in order to advance. There are no grades or other forms of reward or punishment, subtle or overt. The test of whether or not the system is working lies in the accomplishment and behavior of the children, their happiness, maturity, kindness, and love of learning and level of work. In the Montessori environment, formative assessments are ongoing. Many of the Montessori materials have built-in control of error, which give students immediate feedback on their progress. The control of error allows the student to self-correct their mistakes, thus enabling them to continue practicing without adult intervention.

- **When will my child be reading and starting math?**

Children develop at their own pace and will arrive at reading and mathematics in their own time. What is important is that we set them up for success in these areas by presenting materials and activities at the right time through careful observation of their readiness in each area. Very often the older students show a readiness to read and these students are encouraged to do so.

- **How does the transition from the Montessori based Primary Program to Doane's traditional 1st Grade program work?**

The transition from the Montessori based Primary Program to First Grade Level at Doane begins during the capstone year of the Primary/Kindergarten aged students as they are introduced to written activities and work in math and language arts. The children in these grade levels are provided opportunities to work collaboratively in a number of school events, allowing the younger students to have a preview of the next years' activities and expectations. In our experience, the transition from the Doane Primary Program to our more traditional First Grade is seamless as the teacher understands not only the tenets of the Montessori method but also works to introduce and enrich new learning when the children are developmentally ready for new adventures in learning.

