

Organizing the Montessori Way

By Betty Boduch, Director of Advancement

Brickton Montessori School

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The winter holidays often bring a wave of gifts and decorations into our homes, while January traditionally offers opportunity for a fresh start, which includes decluttering and organizing for many of us.

Although we have been a Montessori family for a long time with our oldest graduating 8th grade and our youngest currently in the Elementary program, our house does not fall into the peaceful, organized format of a Montessori classroom without effort. We have to routinely edit, donate, re-arrange and make decisions about what fits into our family's current life.

When the children were younger, we were blessed with holiday gifts and a December birthday! "Stuff" came into the house very quickly, but moving things out was a much slower process. Inspiration from my children's teachers and the thoughtful set up of their classrooms has helped my family create some good habits over the years by following these guidelines.

#1 Use baskets and trays

Small open containers for each type of art look so much more inviting than mixed together in a pile. Utilizing trays for art workspaces can help contain stray crayons, markers and glue. Small rugs, just like trays, used when children work with items on the floor, help to define a work space and make clean-up a little easier. Wicker baskets can hide necessary items and create a uniform look.

#2 Open Shelves

Open shelves allow you to see what is available. Keep the display simple and uncluttered. Shelves create a wonderful opportunity to switch out seasonal activities as well as to observe what your child is drawn to most often. Putting away toys temporarily and rotating them back into use routinely keeps many items fresh.

#3 Ample Light and Natural Colors

Would you rather work in a dark space or open space with ample light? Do you find that you focus better when your environment is visually streamlined? Many of us do. Natural wood shelves, live, green plants and neutral color schemes allow the mind to concentrate. Bright colors are selectively worked into the environment in a Montessori classroom, but the goal is to not overwhelm the space with a myriad of vibrant colors at once.

#4 Your children can help!

In Montessori's practice of following the child, we can find natural helpers. Children take pride in knowing and understanding what is in their environment. They build confidence

when they take a basket of material off the shelf, and then they know where to put it back when done. Also, I have not met a young child yet who doesn't enjoy dusting or gently wiping a table or shelves. They will need guidance and repetition to master a skill, and they may even grumble a bit when they get older, but they learn to know the difference between being an active versus a passive member of the family or classroom.

Try introducing some of these concepts into your toy room or child's bedroom to create an inviting space and a sense of calm that might spread to other parts of your home.