



Establishing and Maintaining a Collaborative Staff Culture

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6 Essential Elements for Creating a Collaborative Staff Culture

1. **We are committed to life-long learning and self-improvement** – just as we ask our students to be.
2. **We are committed to practicing and improving our adult Grace and Courtesy behaviors**, to the development of our social intelligence.
3. **We agree on the kind of human beings we are cultivating through our program**, on our educational outcomes, on the definition of what it means to be *“normalized.”*
4. **We have connected our curriculum vertically with agreed upon transition benchmarks of learning**, so students are successful and comfortable in their next and new classroom communities.
5. **We have identified and agree upon the “essential elements” of authentic Montessori practice** and are committed to continuously working toward these instructional ideals.
6. **We have developed and utilize a collaborative, inclusive, and scientific method** for resolving our differences of opinion and approach to Montessori learning and teaching.

The first essential is that the teacher should go through an inner, spiritual preparation - cultivate certain aptitudes of the moral order. This is the most difficult part of her training, without which, all the rest is of no avail. . . . She must study how to purify her heart and render it burning with charity towards the child. She must put on humility, and above all, learn how to serve. She must learn to appreciate and gather in all those tiny and delicate manifestations of the opening life in the child's soul. Ability to do this can only be attained through a genuine effort towards self-perfection.

- Maria Montessori

The 10 Habits of the CARE-ing Organization

Johns Hopkins Hospital

Habit #1: Mind Your Manners

Use courtesy words and phrases like please, thank you, and may I help you?

Habit #2: Be Present

Give your customer 100 percent of your attention with your eyes, words and body language.

Habit #3: Be Positive

Think the best of people in all situations.

Habit #4: Teamwork Works

Support your co-workers. Make each other look good.

Habit #5: Do Sweat the Small Stuff

Make a big impact with a small gesture of kindness.

Habit #6: Make a Promise, Keep a Promise

Follow through with all commitments. If you say you're going to do something, do it.

Habit #7: Rediscover Silence

Practice active listening skills. Remember that listening is not just waiting for your turn to speak.

Habit #8: Be Thankful

Take time to thank someone every day.

Habit #9: Think Ahead

Anticipate your patients' and other customers' needs.

Habit #10: Just Do It

Put yourself in your patients' and other customers' shoes. How would you expect to be treated?

Rise to the Occasion!

10 Ways We Learn and Grow Together

1. ***Manage yourself.***
Get calm and cool before communicating your needs, feelings, or ideas.
2. ***Be the change you want in others.***
Take responsibility for your own attitude and actions.
3. ***“The sun also rises.”***
Assume best intentions. Appreciate others’ efforts and contributions.
4. ***Stop, look, and question.***
Is this the time and place to discuss this? Is the other person ready to engage?
5. ***The “I”s are the windows of the soul.***
Share your experience, feelings, needs, and wants through “I” messages.
6. ***Receptive, but not oversensitive.***
Let go of the experience. Remember the lesson.
7. ***Enjoy generous helpings.***
Don’t hesitate to offer or ask for support.
8. ***Amends justify the ends.***
Apologizing can be more important than results.
9. ***A smile can brighten the landscape of the heart.***
Lighten the load of someone having a rough day.
10. ***Add your ray to the Rising Sun.***
Be a trustworthy team player. Do what you can to make others shine.

Colegio Montessori Sierra Madre, Monterrey, Mexico

In working together to manifest our vision for the children and families we serve, for our professional staff and organizational leaders, and for the school community as a whole, we are committed to cultivating relationships that are rooted in the following values:

RESPECT	We conduct ourselves and communicate with kindness and respect for all – students, staff, parents, school leadership, and the community-at-large
RESPONSIBILITY	We assume responsibility for our choice of thoughts, emotions, attitudes, actions, educational and organizational decisions.
HONESTY	We are honest with ourselves and others throughout the school community – in seeking greater understanding of the needs of the others.
HUMILITY	We think and act with humility so that we may be open to continuous learning in service to students, their families, and our professional associates.
EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS	We treat others as we wish to be treated – fairly and equitably - regardless of their past mistakes, or their ethnic, economic, racial, or religious origins.
HARMONY	We strive to live in peace and harmony with ourselves and others - through the practice of acceptance, empathy, and forgiveness
OPEN COMMUNICATIONS	We address our feelings, needs, and ideas directly with those empowered to improve our lives, the lives and learning of students, and the well-being of others throughout the school community. We avoid the temptation of gossip and hurtful innuendo.
ENTHUSIASM AND POSITIVE ATTITUDE	We focus joyfully on what is positive in others and in our school community. We dream about our potential for doing more good. We look beyond the pain of the past and our current problems Toward new ideas for improving the quality of life for all.

6 Practices of Vibrant Montessori Communities

Perspectives That Enhance Work Relationships,
Work Performance, and Program Quality

- PRACTICE I HONORING PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES,
FEELINGS, NEEDS, AND DREAMS**
- PRACTICE II APPRECIATING OTHERS FOR THEIR UNIQUE GIFTS, THEIR
EFFORTS, PROGRESS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**
- PRACTICE III ASSUMING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**
*“HOW HAVE I CONTRIBUTED TO THE CURRENT
SITUATION? WHAT I CAN DO TO BE PART OF THE
SOLUTION?”*
- PRACTICE IV A COMMITMENT TO LEARNING AND
SELF-IMPROVEMENT – “SPIRITUAL
PREPARATION”, COMMUNITY RELATIONS,
AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**
- PRACTICE V A FOCUS ON VISION AND OUTCOMES -**
*“WHAT AND WHO ARE WE HERE FOR? WHAT
ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?”*
- PRACTICE VI A MIND TO MENTOR AND BE MENTORED –
LINKING SKILLED PEOPLE WITH PEOPLE
REQUIRING SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

Sample Exercise

Creating Social Norms (Grace and Courtesy) For the Professional Staff

Keep in mind:

- How we build trustworthy relationships
- Honest and direct communications
- Resolving differences
- Making amends
- Sharing information
- Inclusion of all staff members
- Loyalty, having each other backs
- How we speak and listen to one another
- Acceptance of different styles, cultures, experiences

Creating a *Faculty Mentors Archive*

MENTORS ARCHIVE “*Brain Drain*” Exercise

1. As in any authentic Montessori learning community, **you may work by yourself, with a partner, or in a small group to complete this exercise.**
2. **Keeping in mind the following MENTORING DOMAINS, generate a list of people you know** – in the school community, in the worldwide Montessori community, and in the worldwide community of educators and educational leaders – who could serve as MENTORS for those who require support and guidance.

DESIGN OF CLASSROOM	SPECIAL EDUCATION ISSUES	TEACHING TEAM
PARENT RELATIONS	OBSERVATION/ASSESSMENT	RECORDKEEPING
LESSON DELIVERY	CLASS MEETINGS/LINE TIME	PEACE MAKING
BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT	EMOTIONAL/SOCIAL ISSUES	CHARACTER ED.
TEACHER HEALTH/RENEWAL	STAYING ORGANIZED	PRACTICAL LIFE
READING - MECHANICS	SENSORIAL	MATH
READING - LITERATURE	HANDWRITING	EXPRESSIVE WRITING
CULTURAL STUDIES	SCIENCE	COMMUNITY SERVICE
MUSIC	DANCE/MOVEMENT	FINE ARTS
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	FOREIGN LANGUAGE	GARDENING
ECOLOGY/NATURE STUDY	RESEARCH SKILLS	TECHNOLOGY USE
MATERIAL MAKING/FIXING	USE OF HUMOR	ADULT CONFLICT

MENTORS ARCHIVE “*Brain Drain*” Exercise

WORKSHEET

Crucial Conversations

Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High

*“A Crucial Conversation
is a conversation between two or more people
in which stakes are high, emotions run strong,
and opinions vary.”*

Knowing Your *Tendencies* in *Crucial Conversations*

1. I tend to avoid conversations when the subject turns to or the issue involves

2. I tend to avoid people who

3. I tend to hold off giving my full and candid opinion when

4. I have a tendency to make jokes, snide remarks, or be sarcastic when

5. I have a tendency to offer insincere praise or compliments when

6. I might exaggerate a bit when I am faced with

7. I have cut people off or changed the subject abruptly when

8. I can be too blunt in my response when someone

9. When I am stunned or hurt by what someone says unexpectedly I have a tendency to

10. When things get heated I can resort to

11. I am willing to apologize if

12. I am generally unwilling to apologize if

13. I can be hard on someone when they

14. I can be hard on myself when I

15. When someone starts to get defensive I tend to

16. I tend to become defensive when someone

17. I tend to blame myself for

18. I tend to blame the other person for

19. I tend to obsess or ruminate on things when

20. I tend to ignore or avoid things when

“The Conversation with Parents I Hate to Have”

Tools for Building Trust and Support When the Topic Turns Tough

1. **Do your homework!** Seek to understand the parents as well as the child. Seek additional perspectives from others whom you respect.
2. **Do your “spiritual preparation” homework.** Become aware of your true feelings, mindsets, biases, and blinders about the child, about the parents, about yourself. *“Purify your heart and render it burning with charity . . .”* – Maria Montessori
3. **Play in your own ballpark - and win!** Don’t be lured into responding to upset parents in the wrong place, at the wrong time, or in the wrong state of mind. You prepare the discussion environment – for trust-building and learning.
4. **Build up a robust savings fund of “emotional bank account deposits” early and often with parents** – before something hits the fan with their child.
5. **Begin tough conversations with parents with appreciations and affirmations** of mutual purpose, mutual respect, and your unwavering intention to support their child and their family until the issue is resolved.
6. **Ask more questions and actively listen.** Then **ask more questions and listen some more.**
7. **Be as interested in how the parents are feeling as in how their child is doing.** Let them know you care about them as much as their child.
8. **Share your observations without conclusions, labels, or incendiary language.** Cite specific observed learning or social behaviors in context and how these current tendencies appear to be keeping “your child from being the happy, inquisitive, and engaged learner we know they are capable of being.”
9. **Ask the parents if they have observed any of these obstructive behaviors and tendencies at home.** If so, build on these commonly shared observations.
10. **Assure them that you have come to no conclusions about the causes of these challenges or behaviors and that no one – parents, child, teachers – is being blamed for this disruption in their child’s learning.** *“The point is for us to understand what is truly going on here so we can help your child. In some cases this may require some outside evaluation and support, in some cases we may need to do some different things with your child in the classroom and you may need to try some new approaches at home.”*
11. **If the parents get defensive, defiant, or combative, try the “feel”, “felt”, “found” approach.**

“I know that this is not easy for you. It’s scary and frustrating to see one’s child not be able to express their potential.” (“I feel for you,” is the message)

“As a parent myself (if true) I have gone through this kind of challenge with my child (perhaps share a few details). *It’s was very difficult.*” (**“I have also gone through something similar and felt this,” is the message**)

“I have found that in these kinds of situations a sound course of action is to . . . (**“This is an effective approach to solve the problem,” is the message**)

12. **If the parent(s) becomes disrespectful or abusive, stop the meeting.** *“I can see that we are really struggling here to find common ground and that at this moment we are having trouble really listening to one another. I want to support you and your child. At this moment I am unable to do that and I don’t want to do anything to add to your frustration and stress. So I am going to suggest we stop the meeting now and schedule a time to talk again as soon as possible, so we can find a mutually agreeable way to help your child move through this challenge and get on with their learning.”*
13. **Get coaching and support from more experienced people** (including your administrative team) before the meeting, at the meeting, or afterward.
14. **Do not relinquish your advocacy for the child, no matter how resistant the parents are to the facts or to the recommended course of action.** Impress upon them that their child is not being the successful student they can be. If need be, bring in some “bigger guns” (administrators) to reinforce the point.
15. **Recap the conclusions, agreements, and assignments at the end of the meeting.** *“So let me check my understanding here, this is what we discussed and concluded. Is that correct? And here is what I am going to do over the next two weeks. And here is what you’ve agreed to do in the next two weeks. Did I get this right?”*
16. **Set a firm date for a follow-up meeting and evaluation of progress and needs.** *“I suggest we plan to talk (or get together again) in two weeks to check on our progress here. Does that work for you.”*
17. **Take notes at the meeting and send the parents a written recap.**

10 Characteristics of Effective Montessori Teaching Teams

1. **Define roles and responsibilities:** in the daily schedule; lesson presentation and re-presentation; classroom leadership/behavior management; upkeep of the environment; communication with parents, fellow staff, and administration; observation and record keeping.
2. **Get to know the whole person** – beyond roles and responsibilities: background experience (personal/professional/ cultural; interests and talents; learning styles; aspirations (personal and professional); and default modes when under stress, fatigued, or overwhelmed
3. **Engage early and often in “pre-nuptial agreement” conversations:** “What’s your view on...” “What’s your assessment of...” “What are your ideas about...?”
4. **Value ideas over experience, training, and seniority.** No one has all the answers. Sometimes the newest and least experienced teacher sees things the clearest, finds solutions we never thought of.
5. **In training a new teaching partner follow the Three Period Lesson Model we employ with students:**

Period I	Present/model/demonstrate the desired activity/action
Period II	Facilitate guided observation, practice and experimentation
Period III	Encourage independent practice and refinement with constructive feedback, encourage and re-presentations
6. **Make time to meet on a daily and weekly (longer meeting) basis** to review progress, needs, goals, and plans
7. **Establish a standing agenda for your weekly team meetings that includes:**
 - Appreciations, acknowledgments, encouragements, progress, and successes
 - Relationship check-in: communication and coordination of the team, including goals for greater effectiveness
 - Lesson/event/project/environment planning
 - Children of concern or challenge
 - Communication with parents
 - Training for individual and team improvement
8. **Be immediate, direct, and transparent with your partner.** Don’t bury hurts, disappointments or frustration or act them out passive-aggressively.
9. **Seek first to understand your partner before seeking to be understood,** Practice active listening and “I” message speaking.
10. **Help your partner express their talents and manifest their dreams.** Create an environment where they can glow and grow.