

*The
Elizabeth Ann Clune*



Montessori
School of Ithaca

Learning and Support

Over the course of its 30 plus year history the Elizabeth Ann Clune Montessori School of Ithaca has developed an extensive Learning and Support Model. This model is based on the collective wisdom accrued by founder Andrea Riddle, Laura Gottfried, and other Montessori trained faculty at the school, combined with the most current information available from neuroscience about the brain and how the brain learns.

The Learning and Support Model is a three tiered system. At the base level, all students are guaranteed an excellent educational experience grounded first and foremost in Montessori pedagogy and the Montessori Method, which is then supplemented by academic material not available at the time Dr. Montessori did her seminal work. This includes work with the movement integration curriculum developed by Movement Integration Specialist and teacher Melani Fuchs. This base level serves the needs of most children as the Montessori Method and our highly trained staff is able to accommodate the varying strengths and weaknesses inherent in most of our students.

The second level of the Learning and Support Model comes into play when a child displays a weakness that continues *over time* to cause an impediment to learning despite the remediating factors of the classroom environment, the concrete nature of the Montessori materials, and the expertise of the teachers. The weakness then becomes a “cause for concern”, when the child displays an issue that gets in the way of him/her taking in information or demonstrating to others what he/she knows. We believe that this is a crucial moment in the child’s academic journey because of the overwhelming data supporting the efficacy of early intervention.

Teachers formally document their concerns and observations and process the information with Laura Gottfried or Anne Robbins. If they feel the concerns are warranted, the EACMSI Child Study Team will observe and work directly with the child and then share their experience and suggestions with the classroom teachers.

The Child Study Team is an interdisciplinary think tank made up of Anne Robbins, Laura Gottfried, Melani Fuchs, Terry Cater-Cyker, and Liz Allen. They have been working together as the Child Study Team for over 10 years to provide another layer of support to students and classroom teachers. Each member of the team brings a different area of expertise and generates a different subset of information and observation.

Anne Robbins L.M.S.W. and a Family Nurse Practitioner, is our Director of Wellness, Social Worker, social skills coordinator, and faculty resource for health issues. Anne is also our liaison to the Ithaca City School District Committee on Special Education. She has worked with children in a school setting for almost 20 years.

Laura Gottfried combines a background as a Montessori classroom teacher, both at the Primary and Junior Level, with training and experience in learning intervention and assessment. Laura generates a synopsis of a child's cognitive and academic strengths and weaknesses as part of her contribution to the Child Study Team.

Melani Fuchs brings a wealth of experience as a Physical Educator and Movement Integration Specialist, in addition to her 25 years in the classroom as a Primary/Extended Day and Junior Level teacher.

Terry Cater-Cyker brings the perspective of the Upper Elementary program to the team. She has been remediating, bypassing, and

accommodating learning challenges for 20 years and has had extensive experience attending meetings for children at District Committees on Special Education.

The newest member of the group is Liz Allen, one of our Primary/Extended Day teachers. Liz holds a B.S. in Math and has training in the diagnosis and remediation of learning problems in Math.

The purpose of the Child Study Team is to generate ways to bypass, support or accommodate the child's learning challenge(s). The goal is to develop an individualized Learning Profile and Plan for Learning which combines interventions and accommodations, in an effort to better serve the student and address his/her weakness(es). Included in any Plan for Learning will be a section on maximizing the student's assets, and a sequence for "demystifying" the child about his/her strengths and weaknesses.

The classroom teachers and Laura will then meet with parents to discuss the findings and recommendations of the Child Study Team.

The third level of the Learning and Support Model comes into play when the student continues to display impediments to their learning despite the added support provided by his/her Plan for Learning. At this point the need for assessment goes one step farther than the Child Study Team, resulting in either a referral to the Ithaca City School District or a private diagnostician.

Frequently Asked Questions:

In a Montessori School where everyone learns at their own pace why does it matter if a child is experiencing delays?

It only matters if the cause of the delay is something more serious than developmental variability. If a delay has a developmental basis and all the child needs to thrive is to be given more time to mature, our system offers the built in flexibility of multiage classrooms. If a delay is not developmental it is our belief that educating the whole child is best accomplished by maximizing strengths and supporting weaknesses. It is precisely because of this emphasis that we want to have as much information as possible about a struggling child's learning profile.

How do you know a child is not just lazy, unmotivated, bored, or in need of a firmer hand with more structure?

The first tier in our Learning and Support Model exhausts all of these possibilities. Our classrooms are filled with materials and experiences specifically designed to excite and titillate and our teachers are masters in the subtle art of getting children to work. It is our conviction, and a basic premise of the Montessori Method, that children have an innate desire to learn and to work. If, over time, a child has experienced this combination of his/her own innate desire, our curriculum, and our classroom environments, we hold that it is nearly impossible for him/her to be lazy, unmotivated, bored, or in need of a firmer hand.

Will this information go in my child's permanent record?

In the second level of our model the purpose of any assessments and observations are for generating a Learning Profile and Learning Plan. Hopefully this will serve to maximize your child's school experience. If we are able to create something that works well for your child it is in his/her best interest for this information to be a part of his/her permanent record. That said, in the second tier we are not labeling, diagnosing, or classifying.

What if we exhaust the possibilities in the first and second level, my child is still not thriving, but I don't want to take the next step and have him/her diagnosed and/or referred to the Ithaca City School District Committee on Special Education?

That decision will be entirely up to you. We will of course, be available to guide and support you along the way.

Will there ever come a time when my child can no longer be at this school?

If a child's needs cannot be met in a Montessori multiage classroom and the kinds of support that are needed for the child to be successful are not available, then we would work together to find an environment better suited for your child's unique profile.