

## The Uninterrupted Work Cycle



The mind takes some time to develop interest, to be set in motion, to get warmed up into a subject, to attain a state of profitable work. If at this time there is interruption, not only is a period of profitable work lost, but the interruption, produces an unpleasant sensation which is identical to fatigue.

MONTESSORI, WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR CHILD



Through years of observation around the world, Dr. Montessori found that when longer stretches of time were available for children to pursue activities according to their interests and work independently, the more work happened. When teachers interrupted or assigned tasks, the children became less engaged. Children, as young as three years old, are able to choose productive and challenging work, focus on the task at hand, finish a cycle of work, rest without interrupting those who are working, and repeat this sequence. Once the child's concentration is broken, it is very difficult to try to engage them to the environment once again. She also found that these blocks of time displayed a distinct work cycle, lasting approximately three hours. In Montessori schools, children are given three hours of open, uninterrupted time to choose independent work, become truly immersed, and repeat to their own satisfaction.

Externally imposed interruptions are most disruptive to a child's development of concentration when he is highly engrossed in activity. Often the child will become understandably emotional when such a disruption occurs. Parents sometimes question whether their child needs to take short breaks throughout the work cycle. It is important however to remember that although we use the term "work" to describe the child's activity, the child himself does not find this experience taxing. In fact, in a child's eyes, work is about energy; learning, engaging, strengthening, solving problems, overcoming challenges, and becoming independent. A child's work is all about creating himself. Montessori teachers find that when children need to pause to use the toilet, have a snack, or help a friend, they will make these choices freely for themselves and then return to their chosen activity on their own volition. They love their work because it is an active choice they have made for themselves and their choices often fulfill an inner developmental need: "The one means by

which exhaustion can be eliminated is to make work pleasant and interesting, to give joy in work rather than pain" (Montessori, *Spontaneous Activity in Education*).

Given uninterrupted work periods, children are able to go deep into their learning and continue at their own pace. When they emerge after these cycles of work, Dr. Montessori discovered that the children are not only refreshed, but full of satisfaction of their concentrated efforts: "Each time a polarization of attention took place, the child began to be completely transformed, to become calmer, more intelligent, and more expansive" (Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method*). In other words, children are able to develop better concentration skills and focus through undisturbed work of their choosing.