Our written examinations give you the opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the Montessori elementary program and your ability to communicate information clearly and appropriately in writing. The time allocation of 3 1/2 hours is intended to allow you to plan the answer, write and edit. You are permitted to leave the site to work and to refer to books and other resources.

Answers may be typed or handwritten legibly. Prepare your answer as if it is to be published and read by staff or parents at your school. Answers must be your own work and joint work is not permitted. Provide the specific source and reference for any quotes used. Write your answer on 8 1/2" by 11" sheets, with your name at the top of each page.

Before you hand in your paper, check the following:
- Proofread carefully for grammar and spelling.
- Make a copy of your paper.
- Write your name and the date at the top of this sheet.
- Place a check mark next to the question you have chosen to answer
- Staple this sheet as a cover to your answer papers.
  (Do not add additional covers or sheet protectors.)

QUESTION 1  Select one of the following:

___ a. Write a new text for the section in your school brochure that describes the Lower Elementary curriculum. (essay)

OR

√ b. You have been asked to give a presentation on the Lower Elementary program to the parents of current kindergarten age children who are considering enrolling their children in the Lower Elementary class next year. Write the text for your presentation (full sentences please). Focus on the developmental characteristics of 6-9 year old children and the instructional strategies used to meet their needs. (essay)

For MECR instructor use:

___ Outstanding 100 pts  √ Excellent: 90 pts  ___ Very Good 80 pts  ___ Satisfactory 70 pts

___ Return to student for revision

Comments:
June 14, 2003

Parents of Casa Tolteca,

I welcome you to our humble classroom! I am so happy to have each and every one of your children in my classroom this year. I would like to take this time to give you all a summary and brief overview of the lower elementary Montessori curriculum. I hope to answer some of your questions in this summary and also make the transition from the primary classroom as smooth as possible.

Sensitive Period and Absorbent Mind

First I would like to begin with an explanation of the developmental characteristics of a 6-9 year old child. Maria Montessori talks very much about “sensitive periods”. This is a time in a person’s life when absorption of certain concepts are at their most intense stage, and our job as the educator is to facilitate the special requirements of that sensitive period. She also speaks of children having an “absorbent mind” which is an unconscious state of mind for a child starting at birth and going until approximately age 6 where he/she is absorbing everything around his/her environment and therefore creating him/herself. For example, the 3-6 year old child is very sensitive to language, movement and order. Therefore, the curriculum taught in the primary classroom revolves highly around these areas. You may be used to seeing order in almost every work that the child does in the primary classroom.

Sensitive Periods of a 6-9 Year Old Child

By the time your child reaches the age of 6, he/she has reached a level of reasoning which is when he/she will start asking big questions like Why? They want explanations for everything. You may have already noticed this! Children in this age group are “sensitive” to the acquisition of culture and need a wider experience of nature and culture. Students are old enough to move around in the world. Therefore appropriate world experiences are designed to focus on the student’s academic, emotional and spiritual needs i.e. field trips, guests, visitors and much more exposure to nature.

They are also in a sensitive period for socialization. It is not uncommon for the child to think in terms of community and these ideas are further enhanced in the classroom. For instance, written rules are important; especially putting the rules in the children’s own words. These children enjoy organized and unorganized social activities. Hero/heroine worship is not uncommon so it’s important for educators and parents to provide and present good role models to our children.

Children in this age group also seem to have an infinite curiosity and interest in the extraordinary. Very large ideas contrasted with very small ideas are extremely appealing to students at this age. Large numbers are explored more in depth, as are larger ideas such as the infiniteness of the galaxies and beyond. You may notice that your child likes to collect things. I notice students tell me about their rock collections quite a bit! This is an important developmental milestone, which helps them explore the extraordinary and create a sense of order in nature.

This age group is also very sensitive to ideas of morality. Understanding right and wrong is very important, as is a sense of compassion and justice. That’s why you may hear your child tell you what someone else did to them from time to time. It is important for them to figure out the difference between right and wrong. Children tend to
use their own natural sense of competition to begin to judge things and themselves. It is important for teachers to understand that and make things work for the children and not against them. Making sure the rules are stated positively and focusing on encouragement and warmth are key examples. Instead of posting a rule that says “No Hitting” a friendlier version of that could be “Be Respectful of Others”. It’s toned down yet implies the same message and gives students a sense of respect- not only to each other but also to themselves.

**Prepared Environment**

Since these ideas are so important to the 6-9 year old child, the key to their learning involves allowing the child’s imagination and creativity to flourish. The whole idea is to get a student to a point of “normalization” which is where in practice the child freely chooses work, while integrating mind and body. We also describe it as **OCCI**,

which is when a student demonstrates **Order, Coordination, Cooperation and Independence**. The way to achieve fulfillment of the basic needs of a child are to have a prepared environment, and aware adults who consistently nurture and guide the child to **OCCI**, which I will now explain more thoroughly. Maria Montessori says, “The environment should reveal the child, not mold him.” The students have four developmental needs of the environment that they are in. It is up to the teacher (the aware adult) to help establish these guidelines. The basic design elements incorporate space, time and freedom for the students to flourish. To first acknowledge the students’ physical needs, the classroom space allows for movement, workspace, rest, exercise, group activities, outdoor time and food on occasion. Order and safety are apparent as well. To fulfill the students’ intellectual needs there are plenty of books, materials, interesting objects, and plants, stimulating presentations and lessons, research materials and planned field trips.

To fulfill the students’ social needs, the child may work independently, with another student or in a small group as they wish, or as the work will allow. Lessons are taught for individuals, in small groups or large group format. I generally structure one large group lesson per day followed by several small group lessons and/or individual lessons as needed or requested by the students.

To address the emotional and spiritual needs of the children, they need to feel it is a safe place to fail; therefore controls of error are incorporated into works. Controls of error are designed into works with the idea in mind that students can correct their own work. Some concrete things that can be implemented into the classroom to better enable children to concentrate are elements of beauty, reality, limits, order, silence, and independence from adults. According to Maria Montessori, “every useless aid arrests development.”

**The Aware Adult**

The role of the Montessori teacher is to prepare an environment and to permit and guide the students to act spontaneously in their own learning style. It is the teacher’s job to make it easier for children to do what it is they naturally want - and that is to learn! Students are guided towards individual, partner or small group works of their own free choice and plans. The student fills out work lists and use them throughout the day to organize their activities and work at their own pace. Students are expected to choose at least four works per day and complete them during the morning work period. Second and third year students tend to choose works that are longer and may require work over
several days. The teacher also spends a great deal of time observing the students to further discover what the needs of the children are and to hone the environment accordingly.

**Curriculum Overview**

Now I will discuss the day-to-day curriculum and how that plays out in the classroom. All subject areas are taught in a multi-level format, which enables the children to move forward at their own pace.

1. **Practical Life**—this is a shelf or group of shelves devoted to activities to help ground students, teach aspects of self-care, care of the environment, grace and courtesy.

2. **Language**—this large section of the room is divided into several categories including but not limited to handwriting, reading, spelling, word study, research skills and grammar.

3. **Math**—this large section of the room is rich with materials that emphasize the practice of basic operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and fractions, multiples and exponential concepts. We have an entire shelf devoted to geometry, which helps students develop a greater sense of space, shape and relationships between the two.

4. **Geography/social studies**—this section of the room consists of puzzle maps, labels and flags. Materials are available for students to learn more in depth about continents, countries, states and capitals as well as research each of these areas. We will have many opportunities to learn about cultures and lifestyles other than our own through field trips, visits and tours to various cultural areas around Denver. The fundamental needs of all humans are studied in this area.

5. **Living World/Universe/Cultural Studies**—These areas tend to be the most exciting part of the curriculum. In these sections, the outdoors is explored, and the universe is studied from the largest dimension (galaxies) all the way to the smallest dimension (cells). Within this section of the curriculum, it is possible and probable to incorporate many other subjects such as language, math, practical life, etc…

6. **Art**—art is incorporated into every workday. Students can choose an activity from the art shelf, which sometimes coincides with the practical life shelf and/or tempera painting, watercolors, clay sculptures, etc…

7. **Spanish**—because we are a bilingual school, our students receive a half-day of instruction in English, and a half-day of instruction in Spanish curriculum taught by Ms. Valerie.

8. **Dance, Music**—Students study Balet Folklorico (Mexican folk dance) with Ms. Gina and perform regularly. Students also study Suzuki’s violin style with Ms. Tessa and perform regularly.

9. **Art and computer classes** are available as after school programs and run until 5:00 pm.
Homework is given to students to further enhance studies at school. It is a benefit for students, as well as parents to be involved with student work. Homework will be given according to grade level. First year students shouldn't expect homework for the first several months of class since they are getting adjusted to a new system; second and third year students can routinely expect homework and be accustomed to turning it in on a timely manner.

I have summarized the developmental stages of a child ages 6-9, aspects of a prepared environment, aspects of an aware adult and the curriculum we will be studying on a 3-year cycle. Please call me with any questions or further details you may have after this brief introduction. I am open to so any feedback, comments or suggestions and I promise to try my hardest at making your child's early elementary experience as fulfilling and rewarding as possible. Thanks for your time.

You have provided parents with a lot of useful information.