What is a Work Cycle?

When children join a Montessori classroom, they tend to flutter about from one lesson to another without settling for long or repeating a lesson. Many people would, in fact, consider this to be the normal disposition of a pre-school child, and it is true that in an environment where children are constantly interrupted or made to change activity frequently this characteristic will become a behavioral trait.

In order to facilitate a children’s natural development, conditions which will encourage it need to be provided. To follow the natural rhythm of the child we need to offer a two and half to three hour period of time during which the child is free to engage in a wide variety of spontaneously chosen activities – this is called the work cycle. Within any one work cycle the child will engage in many cycles of activity, each cycle starting with the child’s decision to take the lesson from the shelf to a chosen place, to engage with it, and, when satisfied, make it ready for another child to use and return it to its original place.

These cycles of activity can include not only use of Montessori equipment but also any other occupation available to the child in the classroom. They can be carried out at a table, on the floor, or either inside or outside the classroom. They can be done alone, with a friend, or with a small group of friends. They may be initiated by the child, by a friend or by an adult. The work cycle also includes classroom routines such as snack time, story time, art or music activities or any specialist teaching such as music or PE for example. The only feature the cycles of activity have in common is the child’s freedom to choose whether to take part or not, thus ensuring that each child’s individual rhythm and learning disposition will be respected.

Montessori plotted each child’s work period during a whole morning of spontaneously chosen activity on a graph which she called the ‘Curve of Work’. From this she discovered that the natural work cycle of the child who had begun to concentrate was between three to four hours. The graph shows how the child’s engagement rises and falls over a three-hour period. Although the curve of work of each child will be different, it is usual for most children who are not fully normalized to show a serious drop in activity and attention after one to one-and-a-half hours. This she called ‘false fatigue’ because the child is not really tired but needs time and space to reorder his/her thoughts or energy. Montessori says that the child, during this period, should not be interrupted because if the child is left to wander around for a while s/he will resume work and will choose lessons of a higher level of difficulty than in the first stage. The second stage will become more concentrated and will last for an hour or so more before the child gradually ceases work and looks for an opportunity to relax with friends, read a book, or something similar.

If the child is allowed to engage in this uninterrupted work cycle, they become more disciplined, calmer, and more satisfied. Eventually, if they remained in Montessori education until the age of seven, the curve would delineate a higher level of activity being maintained throughout the morning.
Primary 1

Cameron working on a design matching activity with the Red Cylinders.

Sawyer and Lorenzo preparing organic bread from scratch.

We would like to thank Lorenzo's family for gifting our classroom a beautiful bouquet of sunflowers last week. We appreciate Lorenzo's and Sawyer's families for offering nutritious snacks to the classroom these past two weeks.

Lewis and Matthew working together in folding our classroom's laundry.
Thank You!
Elle for our community snack and beautiful flowers!

Thank You!

Arya, Lily and Madison caring for their plants.

Colton and Ethan dusting the classroom shelves.

Miguel working with a lesson on plants and animals.

Ehan telling a story using the chalkboard.

How many P2 children can happily sit in our cozy corner?
Aurora is working and building concentration by using the window washing activity in practical life.

Ian is using a magnify glass with a light to observe the different types of plants.

Isabella is taking care of the environment by cleaning the leaves of a plant.

Max is using a practical life activity to refine his fine motor skills.

Jayden is working with Metal Insets, activity that helps him with concentration and pencil grip.

Ian is working with a practical life activity, where he needs to transferred liquid into three

Thank you to Lola K, Elizabeth L. and Christos A. for providing the Community Snack this past weeks.