Introduction

The Montessori prepared environment is developed and maintained by the adult. The guiding principal in the maintenance and development of the environment is the nature of the child in his/her current plane of development. The nature of the young child has two guiding principles: **the absorbent mind and the sensitive periods**.

1. **The Absorbent Mind** refers to the ability of the young child to effortlessly take in as a whole that which is present in the environment. The absorbent mind functions between conception and six years old. The period from conception to three is call the "unconscious absorbent mind" because the child responds unreflectively to all aspects of the environment, animate and inanimate. The very young child does not consciously select what to absorb from the environment. Rather, the child is driven by sensory input and impulse. The very young child is most vulnerable to the influences of the environment at this time. The adult, therefore, is particularly critical in the role of preparer of the environment from birth to three years old.

2. **The Sensitive Periods** refers to the time between birth and six years old when the young child is particularly drawn to the practice and mastery of:

1. Movement
2. Language Acquisition
3. Small Objects
4. Toileting
5. Order
6. Music
7. Grace & Courtesy
8. Sensory Impressions
9. Writing
10. Reading
11. Mathematics.
12. Spatial Relationships

All aspects of the young child's environment must reflect an awareness of the need within the young child to be assisted in the support of the sensitive periods as they emerge over the six years.

The *Environments Manual* has been organized as follows:

Chapter 1: Newborn in the Home

Chapter 2: Young Infant in the Home

Chapter 3: Young Infant in Group Care

Chapter 4: Mobile Infant in the Home

Chapter 5: Mobile Infant in Group Care

Chapter 6: Toddler in the Home

Chapter 7: Toddler in Group Care

Within each chapter, the following environment considerations are addressed:

1. Ceiling
2. Walls
3. Floor
4. Air
5. Light
6. Ventilation
7. Furnishings (Home or Group Care)
8. Materials
9. Activities
10. Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Considerations
11. Communication and Language Considerations

Chapter 1: Newborn in the Home

Physical Environment

A newborn is the infant, or neonate, during the first 28 days after the birth. The general physical environment of the home for the newborn is quite unique and does not necessarily parallel environments for the infant, mobile infant, toddler and two year old child. The guiding principal for the development and maintenance of the environment for the newborn is to provide an environment that is transitional from the womb to the outside environment. Montessori refers to this time as **Symbiotic Period (birth to six weeks of age)**.

This transition by its very nature is enormous. The task of the newborn is to make the physiological adjustments to this new environment. The task of the adult is to provide an environment that will most sensitively assist the newborn in this adjustment.

The newborn's largest organ, the organ of touch (texture, temperature and weight), experienced the utmost protection while in the womb. Upon birth the child's skin is exposed to air rather than liquid amniotic fluid of the womb. The newborn experiences a harshness to the skin simply due to air. Vernix is a white, thick, cheesy material that is a protective covering for the skin at birth. Further, the newborn's skin is thicker than it will be than at any other time in *his*/*her* life. The superficial layers of skin that accumulated during the nine months *in utero* provide for the thicker skin of the newborn. Nature seems aware of the difficulty that the newborn will encounter submersed in this new media: air. The vernix quickly washes away, and the thicker layered skin diminishes in the first several weeks of life.

Not only does the air feel harsh to the newborn, but the temperature, which in the womb was regulated by the mother, now must become regulated by the baby (self-regulated): no small task.

The adult, therefore, provides a warm, soft environment with humidified air. The temperature of the room is warm enough to allow the newborn to easily regulate his/her body temperature.

The material that touches the child's body is very soft; silk-like polyester or fine cotton is suggested. The pillow (topponcino) upon which the child rests and is carried is soft and covered with the same type of material.

The newborn clothing is seamless (or the seams are sown inside-out) and draped rather than fastened to avoid rubbing of the fasteners on the sensitive skin of the newborn. Some newborns prefer the tightness of the womb; swaddling addresses this need. In this event the swaddling material is, again, soft as the other materials suggest.

Highly sanitary and dust-free conditions are necessary in all aspects of the newborn's environment.

Ceiling Environment for the Newborn:

The visual range of the child is limited to eight to twelve* inches so the ceiling is not of importance. The materials of the ceiling may be relevant insofar as it absorbs sound and supports a quiet environment such as was experienced *in utero*.

Wall Environment for the Newborn:

The visual range of the child is limited to about eight to twelve* inches so the walls are not visually important. The materials of the wall such as curtains may be relevant insofar as they absorb sound and support a quiet environment. The newborn is near-sighted with eyesight at 20/200 to 20/400.

* American Optometric Association

Floor for the Newborn:

The newborn is not typically placed upon the floor no matter how soft the surface. The floor is more drafty, prone to dust, and contaminants drifting downward.

A rug or carpet flooring has the advantage of being sound absorbing.

Air for the Newborn:

The air needs to be clean of microbes, animal dander, molds and other irritant to the delicate respiratory tissue of the newborn. Air HEPA purifiers provide an air cleansing system. Air purifiers use a fan and filter to catch pollutants, toxins, and allergens in the air. They remove various sizes of particles, from large ones like pollen and dust to tiny ones like pet dander and viruses. Air ionizers purify the air in the room by creating negative ions that attach to allergens, which are positively charged, helping impurities settle to the ground. However, the impurities are not removed and simply drift into the environment again.

Change or wash the furnace filter prior to the newborn's arrival.

Light for the Newborn:

The light, both natural and electric, is kept dim for the newborn's sensitive eyes during this transition from the darkened womb to the light of day.

Ventilation for the Newborn:

Ventilation relates to the quality of air. At this young age drafts are to be avoided, and generally clean air is to be optimized.