

PRUHP1 - Research Project, Liam Cruddace

by Daniel Symons

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The University of St Mark and St John

Research Project:
How the Environment in a Montessori
Setting Affects Children's Development
in Early Years

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Acknowledgements	2
Chapter 1: Research Proposal	3
1.1 Aim	3
1.2 Introduction	3
1.3 Literature Review	3
Chapter 2: Methodology	7
2.1 Case Study	7
2.2 Observations	7
2.3 Participants	7
2.4 Thematic Analysis	8
2.5 Limitations	8
Chapter 3: Ethical Considerations	9
3.1 Ethical Consideration with Observing Children	9
3.2 Consent	9
3.3 Bias	9
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion	10
4.1 Role of the Teacher	10
4.2 Conflict to Freedom	11
4.3 Development of Senses through the Environment	11
4.4 The Calm Environment	11
4.4 Physical Objects	12
4.5 Social Development	12
Chapter 5: Conclusion	13
Chapter 6: Recommendations	14
References	15
Appendix A - Observation Notes	17
Appendix B	20
A: Peace Corner	20
B: Maths corner	21
C: Reading Corner	22
D: Broad Stair	23
E: Fraction Puzzle	24
F: Draft letter sent to parents/carers	25
G: Literacy	26

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Chapter 1: Research Proposal

1.1 Aim

I aim to research how children in an early years setting based in South Devon use their environment to promote their development. The focus of this will be to look at the environment before the children use it to see the set up, is it a Montessori or Reggio Emilia set up, for example? I will then look at how the children use this environment, see what they do and how they use it for their development such as fine motor skills, social development and cognitive and holistic development.

1.2 Introduction

The reason I have chosen to do this project is due to my passion for child development and the importance it has in Early Years. I chose to focus primarily on the environment because it is widely agreed that it is a key element in child development. Children in Early Years develop through exploration and their different senses.

As the environment is a key aspect to child development I have chosen to perform my research in a setting that uses the Montessori approach as the central part to Montessori philosophy is the Environment.

"Montessori recognised that for self development to take place, children need freedom within limits to explore the favourable environment specifically prepared to meet their developmental as well as individual needs. In an atmosphere of autonomy which is supplemented by a wide range of accessible activities, the child would reveal the true potential of the human being and could be nurtured to achieve this" (Isaacs, 2012. P 9)

I believe this research is important because development is one of the key elements in Early Years and I want to research and observe how impactful the environment is on development. This research is important because it is how the children develop themselves without any scaffolding or support.

1.3 Literature Review

The Montessori approach has a number of key elements to enable a child to reach fulfilment. Lillard (1972, P 56) writes in her book "through the freedom he is given in a Montessori environment, the child has a unique opportunity to reflect upon his own actions, to determine their consequences for both himself and others" . Reflection is an important part of a child's development, more specifically in problem solving skills however it can also influence a variety of other areas of development. Early years environments promote reflection by having children work pinned up on walls, hanging off strings attached to the ceiling and

special displays throughout the school. This promotes children's reflection because it allows the children and practitioners to look at their past work and see their development throughout the year. Work is displayed in a Montessori environment however not too much as to not distract the child from their activity. Lillard (1972, P 56) describes the second key element as "internalised order" where the child "learns to trust his environment and his power to interact with it in a positive way" . This means that the child is able to understand their environment and have a non-chaotic environment where the children know where everything is therefore not interfering with their internalised order.

"The Montessori approach is holistic and aims to develop the whole child. Fundamental to the approach is the belief that a child's early years from birth to six are the period when they have the greatest capacity to learn." (Montessori Group, 2016, Online)

Speaking with a Montessori practitioner I have learnt that the role of the practitioner in a Montessori environment is to allow the child to use the environment independently and the practitioner provides continuous provision. Isaacs (2012) writes that the idea of carefully prepared continuous provision is described as the "prepared favorable environment".

"Every material in a Montessori classroom supports an aspect of child development, creating a match between the child's natural interests and the available activities. Children can learn through their own experience and at their own pace. They can respond at any moment to the natural curiosities that exist in all humans and build a solid foundation for life-long learning." (Montessori North West, 2017, Online)

Environment in general, either Montessori, Reggio Emilia or a traditional classroom layout, is an important part of a child's life. Jean Piaget (2013) says that the environment is a key element of learning. Devi quotes Piaget on the environment helping children in cognitive development by stating "belief depends on a continuous interaction between the organism and the environment" (Devi, 1997, P 4). This describes Piaget's belief that cognitive development can be influenced by children interacting with their environment on a continuous level. To relate to this, the theory of a Reggio Emilia classroom describes that the environment is very much a third teacher, preceded by parents and teachers (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 2012). This says that a child can learn just as much from the environment as they can from adults. The environment also plays a part in the idea of assimilation and accommodation of knowledge which in Early Years is a significant part to the child's gain of understanding of the world around them and ultimately holistically developing (Piaget, 2013, P 240).

"The Holistic approach emphasises on the complex pattern of reciprocal relationship between person and the environment components... The studies of Barker (1968) and Wicker (1979) in a range of settings like churches, schools, playgrounds are examples of application of holistic perspective which includes the contributions of physical, social and psychological components" (Nagar, 2006, P 35 and 36)

I have found that holistic development is the development of a multitude of different aspects; social development where the child is able to communicate efficiently and work well with

others, physical development with aspects such as fine motor skills and basic needs such as walking, and psychological development where a child is able to problem solve. The environment, as stated in the works of Nagar, plays a big role in holistic development. Through my own understanding, it also becomes apparent that "cognitive is holistic by its nature" (Brodie, 2018, Chapter 7). Cognition is a part of holistic development because of its characteristics: perception, memory, language, reasoning and problem solving. As I stated above, holistic development involves psychological development which involves a number of the characteristics involved with cognitive development such as problem solving. Involving a lot of environmental factors, both holistic and cognitive development rely on the child's relationship with the environment and how they use it.

Montessori and Reggio Emilia involve a lot of environmental interaction. Reggio Emilia is based very much upon "the environment as the third teacher" but how does Montessori and Reggio Emilia differ? A Montessori layout is a classroom where the practitioner has placed certain stations with materials which benefits the children's freedom of choice where they can choose where to go (Isaacs, 2012). These stations involve both individual and group work. Children use either the floor or tables as opposed to the traditional classroom setup with desks. Reggio Emilia is set up for activities with different sized groups of children. Practitioners pay close attention to texture and such as exploration through touch is a key element in the development of young children. Children in an early years setting tend to explore the world through their mouth and touch hence the practitioner paying close attention to this. Documentation of children's work is also a big part of the Reggio Emilia approach. As stated above, children's work is displayed throughout the classroom to allow reflection which is another key part in children's development.

"In both the Montessori and Reggio Emilia approach, children use their senses to explore and direct their educational experience. With Montessori, children are given the freedom to select pre-prepared activities, to work independently, and to employ movement. Montessori children pace themselves. They choose which projects to interact with, when to have a snack, play with others, or be quiet. In a Reggio Emilia model, a collaborative approach to learning is taken and any student may steer classroom learning. Using their many languages, children direct personal curiosity and inspire lessons through questioning, answering, and questioning further, using the environment as teacher, and following teacher guidance." (Goodwin University, 2017, Online)

To compare, both approaches are beneficial to children's holistic development. Montessori allows for the children to have freedom of choice which allows them to develop on their own accord, promoting their psychological development and problem solving abilities. Reggio Emilia allows them to explore different textures and use their senses for the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge. Both environments allow the children to develop holistically. As well as this, both approaches include putting work up on the walls; the Montessori approach puts a small amount of work up and ensures that it is not distracting for the children. This is opposed to the Reggio Emilia approach that takes a strong emphasis on decorating walls with children's work which is often bright and colorful however can sometimes distract the children regardless of the strong promotion for reflection.

To summarise, both approaches aim to be beneficial for children's development as both approaches aim to utilize their environments as much as they can. Montessori uses their environment to promote the children's freedom of choice as opposed to Reggio Emilia which promotes the children's reflection skills. Both approaches use the environment to benefit the children's holistic development and cognitive skills. The Montessori approach emphasises on allowing the children to choose what they do with continuous provision which can help the children to develop their problem solving skills, if something isn't there, what should they do? Through the children's interaction with their environment in both approaches, the children are able to develop through the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge. Reggio Emilia takes a big emphasis on texture and such, as children in Early Years develop through exploration and senses, therefore children are able to feel the different textures and accommodate these textures to find out the difference between, for example, paper and bark. Goodwin University (2017. Online) mentions that "In both the Montessori and Reggio Emilia approach, children use their senses to explore and direct their educational experience" . As opposed to the Reggio Emilia approaches texture, the Montessori approach allows for the children to move around the environment with nothing in their way as well as having everything they need at eye level.

To conclude on my decision to research an environment that uses the Montessori approach, it is because of its emphasis on environment, not having too many bright and colorful things to distract the children, having everything on their level. The ability for reflection greatly outlines the emphasis that the Montessori approach has on child development and how "order and cleanliness is important to this type of classroom environment" (Goodwin University, 2017). The Montessori approach aims to have everything that the children need in a place that is easy to access. The layout provides ease for the children to get to their provision as well which, as stated, is what Isaacs (2012) describes as a "prepared favorable environment".

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Case Study

I decided to do a case study based on the idea that it would be very time consuming to go to all different settings, therefore I based myself in a setting in South Devon. This setting was one of a few choices however I chose this setting as it was Montessori based and this is where I would like to base my observations around. Having based myself within a Montessori, as against a more traditional Early Years setting, I was able to see how this different setting affects children's development therefore getting more rich and conclusive results as a traditional setting is very broad and uses numerous theories.

Choosing a case study also helped me to collect more data and observe the children's activities to a much more in-depth level. I was able to see if specific children chose the same activity, or similar activities, on multiple days and see how the practitioners interact with the child, if any.

"In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed" (Yin, 2003, P 1) and having the questions of "how do children develop in the early years?" and "why is the environment important?" as well as questions that relate to this, a case study would bring in the results for the questions I will be answering.

2.2 Observations

I chose to observe the setting and the children. Taking notes, my main observations involved the environment and how it is set up, how the children interact with their environments and what activities they choose to partake in. Doing this, I would then see how the children develop in this environment. The environment was Montessori inspired.

"Observation is a research method that entails gathering data through vision at its main source" (Sarantakos, 2013, p 229) therefore my interaction with practitioners and children was very limited. The only interaction involved was to ask the practitioners about certain topics and activities, for example on one occasion a child decided to use a fractions activity and the practitioner told me how the child chose to do this activity. This was the extent of interaction. Due to the fact my observation was based mainly on observing the children, my observations were of "human observation" nature which "focuses on people and their activities" (Sarantakos, 2013. P 230).

2.3 Participants

I chose to observe children of 3 to 5 years. Children of this age are within the preoperational stage of development (Piaget) which is where "intelligence is demonstrated through the use

of symbols, language use matures, and memory and imagination are developed" (Huitt and Hummel, 2006, P 2) therefore is a key stage of development in one's life. This age range is best for my research question.

Because my observations were very non-interactive, they were non-participant based; "In non-participant observation, investigators study their subjects "from the outside". Their position is clearly defined and different from that of the subjects. Ideally, they are "invisible" and remain unnoticed by the members of the group they observe... Observing children in the school playground through a window is another example of non-participant observation" (Sarantakos, 2013, P 231). If I were to involve myself in the children's learning, and join in with the children and "observe it from the inside" (Legewie, 1991. Cited in Sarantakos, 2013, P 231) then this would be participant based observations.

I decided on a non-participant observation because I aimed to see how the children develop in the Montessori setting, therefore me interfering with this would also give me partially non-conclusive results as I would be helping them to develop instead of allowing them the freedom that Montessori environments have. It also allowed me to see how the children in a Montessori environment move around freely without instruction and to allow them to continue what they would normally do on a day-to-day basis without myself interrupting.

2.4 Thematic Analysis

To analyse this piece of qualitative research I chose to use thematic analysis. Thematic analysis the process to which qualitative data is analysed and the researcher would then identify common themes that arise within the notes of the research; "A method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, P 79).

To do this I looked at my carefully notes, going through them line by line, and compared them to find common themes that arose.

2.5 Limitations

There were a few limitations that presented themselves. Timings for the observations was the primary limitation that presented itself. Being that the children have certain times of the day where they can go from different rooms and where they have lunch, my timetable was restricted to the afternoon where most of the activities would take place. Having this, I was able to overcome this by observing on two different days. I also took detailed notes on each day and combined them together to create one whole section of notes.

Although my choice was to focus on one setting and create a case study, there are a few limitations to this that presented themselves. I was not able to get a majority idea of Montessori, meaning if I was able to focus on multiple settings then I would have results that include the majority of South Devon. Different settings may set up different activities as well, therefore I was not able to get lots of different activity corner ideas.

Chapter 3: Ethical Considerations

3.1 Ethical Consideration with Observing Children

There are many different ethical considerations and issues in regards to working alongside children then writing up pieces of work based around them;

To begin, I ensured that the children, setting and staff within the setting had been kept anonymous. There has been no comments (see notes) made that could help to identify any and all individuals and settings involved within this piece of work. If there has been any comment made in regards to an individual child's activities, then the phrase "the child" has been used.

All interactions with practitioners were in the form of an "informal chat" and was kept to questions specifically about how the environment is set up and questions to which part of the environment has what activity, why was that activity in that corner, etc... I did not interact with the children when carrying out observations. This way I made the least possible impact on their day-to-day activities which also allowed me to get better observation results.

3.2 Consent

Consent of both the children themselves and the parents was requested before observations began (appendix B: G). Before beginning the session, children were asked if they would like to be observed and all children involved with the observations had both given consent themselves and by parents. The letter (appendix B: G) had been given out long before I entered the setting and began my observations. Children were also given the right to leave the room at any time to not be included in observations, I would then remove any kind of note made on that child if they were working individually. If a child working in a group decided to leave then I would simply remove any comment regarding that child's specific work (if any were made).

3.3 Bias

Considering this in a solo project, there is some bias in opinion in whether Montessori is best for development, whether it does help to develop children or whether Montessori allows for development, therefore in the results section I have included a small section that outlines some of the issues surrounding Montessori and used Reggio Emilia, an approach that uses complete freedom as an example, to combat the bias and to prevent it.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

I based myself within a Montessori environment in South Devon observing children at nursery age. My observations consisted of firstly seeing how the classroom is set out then to see how the children use it. Upon first arrival I was shown around the classroom and saw that everything was set up into corners with each having their own theme, for example the peace corner (appendix B: A). Each activity had a physical object that was usually wooden, which from the literature review I have found that this is a common aspect in the Montessori approach. One example of having physical objects is in the peace corner there is a soft blanket which I observed that the children enjoyed (appendix B: A).

4.1 Role of the Teacher

Montessori, as well as other educators such as "Rousseau (1712-1771), Froebel (1782-1852) and Steiner (1861-1925)" (Isaacs, 2012, P 46), is child centred based therefore the practitioner interacts with children on a minimal level. During observations, the adults only 'scaffolded' learning where necessary and if the children wanted to. Issac's states that we need to follow the child's lead, this is also called by Isaacs as 'self-construction' (2012, P 47) and this was observed as a child asked for a practitioner to help them with a certain maths activity called "the bead bank" where beads are set into units, tens, hundreds and thousands and the child would then make up a number using these beads (appendix B: B). Having the child lead the learning the practitioner must also have knowledge of the particular children interests and learning styles. This was observed through the two days I was in the setting, the children would do similar activities, for example a small group of children liked to draw and therefore their activities mainly focused on writing names and drawing pictures, as opposed to another child who enjoyed reading and thus was primarily observed in the reading corner (appendix B: B).

I took the opportunity to observe how the practitioners are involved with the children and how they support a child's learning and development. To begin, the practitioner only observed the children. Feez (2010, P 24) discussed how Dr Montessori stressed the importance that the practitioner must remain more of an "observer than a teacher" and this was observed by myself. The interaction observed consisted of speaking to the child and allowing them to do the activities themselves, the practitioner may give ideas, help with specific activities and help children to choose activities. Another key role of the practitioner is to document children's choices and development in certain areas. I had the opportunity to look at a child's document and it includes everything that the child has done and any improvements to knowledge in activities involving subjects such as maths, reading and writing, behaviour, and other areas that are involved in later Primary education. They also record what activities children choose and what they are interested in. "Montessori teachers are also trained to observe and record the use of individual materials over a morning or over a week. In this way teachers monitor which materials continue to capture and hold children's interests and

what materials and lessons might need to be changed" (Feez, 2010, P24) meaning the environment is constantly providing for what the children's interests are.

4.2 Conflict to Freedom

A key theme that arose within my observations is the freedom within the environment. Within a Montessori environment, children's "freedom is limited by the physical space and by the need to maintain social harmony and the conditions that support learning" (Feez, 2010, P 40). Whereas Reggio Emilia environments involve a degree of "freedom without licence" (Hall, et al, 2010, P 38) meaning a sense of freedom without limits. Children are free to explore their environment and the environment is free to change as the practitioner sees fit; "most spaces can be changed and used for different purposes at different times" (Thronton and Brunton, 2010, P 52). Aside from this factor, the majority of Reggio Emilia is very similar to Montessori and some aspects are even based on Montessori. Although most aspects are similar, I believe that the freedom within the environment is a very important aspect to both approaches. This freedom progresses children's development through their abilities to freely choose activities and to explore their environment, therefore develop social skills, problem solving and their to make decisions for themselves (Isaacs, 2012).

4.3 Development of Senses through the Environment

Within the Montessori environment, there is a key aspect to developing the senses for education. In my notes I have noticed that the majority of the activities have physical objects or are made up of certain materials, such as the blanket in the peace corner or the wood of the broad stair (appendix B: A and D) and some activities have visuals, like images or different colours and shapes.

"Each activity focuses on a specific sensory aspect such as visual perception or identification of identical sounds, textures, shapes, weights or temperature." (Isaacs, 2012, P 78). Upon observations, the children always had a physical object to use, enhancing their identification of textures, shapes and weights which is among the key aspects of a Montessori environment.

4.4 The Calm Environment

As stated already, the Montessori environment must remain "calm, relaxed and harmonious" (Isaacs, 2012, P 71). During my observations it was seen that "children who were roleplaying within the classroom were told to sit and choose an activity, this is a perfect example of the above about freedom with limitations" (Appendix A: 27). This also shows how the environment must be calm, and to challenge this was the observation of "A child takes out some toy animals and begins to play with them" (Appendix A: 13) keeping the harmonious and calm, relaxed environment. Another aspect to this is how "each activity has a mat to be used on" (Appendix A: 12) keeping the environment very organised and relaxed; "The classroom is not usually silent; instead it is humming with conversation" (Isaacs, 2012, P 71)

4.4 Physical Objects

Within the Montessori environment, physical objects are used for the majority of activities. This relates greatly with section 4.3.1 as the physical objects within the Montessori environment is part of the development of the senses. One activity, called Baric Tablets, involves different weights and this activity is made of "three types of wood, with soft wood being the lightest and hard wood being the heaviest in the set" (Isaacs, 2012, P 79) and the children would lift these objects by their handles and feel the weight difference. Speaking with the practitioner, each of the objects in the weight activity is all the same size as to teach the children that different materials weigh different things. Activities would also include things such as images that the children can pick up and place. This can be seen in appendix B: G with the letters to create words for phonics activities.

As can be read in my notes, I observed that most all of the activities have physical objects, these objects can be as simple as pencils and paper for a drawing or writing activity to something much more complex such as the bead bank (appendix B: B).

4.5 Social Development

Social development is among the key aspects the children's freedom within the environment. The children have the ability to choose to work independently or as a group, and both children refusing to allow other children to join in "I have noticed from time to time children refusing other children to join in, this is a part of the Montessori freedom whereby a child can choose to do the activity individually" (appendix A: 26) and children playing in large groups "A larger group of children decided to place cushions around and begin to roleplay stepping stones. The practitioner did not say anything to these children as they were being quiet and calm" (appendix A: 25) is beneficial to their social development because when the child heeds to the decision of a child wanting to use an activity individually, this is developing social and understanding skills as they are socially accepting that child's decision. Using an activity in a large group can develop verbal language and communication skills which is key to social development.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

To conclude, the environment in a Montessori setting affects children's development through their senses and sense of freedom. As stated, the physical objects within the environment allows for the children to develop their sense of weight perception and texture, for example.

The layout of the classroom allows for the children to freely explore and to take activities at will, however this freedom is limited to keep the environment calm and harmonious. Children are expected to take care of their environment and thus they take activities out one at a time.

One of the key development areas in the Montessori environment is senses. "Each activity focuses on a specific sensory aspect" (Isaacs, 2012, P 78) and this can be in weight perception, auditory or texture, for example. The activities all focus on a sensory aspect from having physical objects to them. Having freedom to explore the environment, the children are able to develop their sense freely.

The role of the practitioner within this environment is to observe and, from my observations, to scaffold the children's learning. The only interaction that I observed was the practitioner offering verbal help to the children. The practitioners may also offer children certain activities to do if they do not have any activity to do. "They must be able to observe children using diverse methods of observation" (Isaacs, 2012, P92).

The environment must remain calm and to do this the activities have mats where the children are able to use the activities on. Care for the environment is also a key part to keeping it calm and relaxed, once a child is finished with an activity, they will put that activity back before getting another out, therefore clearing their activity area for another child.

The environment has always been a key aspect within a child's life, and is often designated "the third teacher" (Thronton and Brunton, 2010, P 47) and the Montessori approach offers the children diverse ways to develop within their "prepared favourable environment" (Isaacs, 2012, P69) as the children are able to develop their key senses as well as other key areas. Montessori allows children to develop through the use of visual and physical objects, through observations I was able to see the children can develop in a number of educational areas such as literacy, numeracy and geometry. The children are able to have freedom in their environment with limitations which allows them to develop their sense of problem solving and social skills. Having the ability to develop holistically allows the child to develop their whole selves and everything about them, from cognitive to physical development.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

As it was seen within this piece of work, the role of the practitioner within a Montessori environment is to observe and scaffold. However, it is recommended that more research be

done into the role of the practitioner in the classroom with the aim of a deeper understanding into whether the role of the practitioner being an observer is beneficial to the children.

Having seen the benefit of sensorial learning within a Montessori setting first hand, it has become clear to me that learning in this sense is very beneficial to the children, However it is recommended that more observations and further research be taken place to give a more popular and non bias opinion to this form of learning and to more in-depthly see how effective this learning is to a child.

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Appendix A - Observation Notes

General - In this section of my notes, I explored the environment to see how a Montessori environment is set up and how it is carried out.

- (1) The environment is very pre-structured and everything is set out into activities in certain corners.

- (2) Everything is eye level and it became clear that the children know where everything is upon arrival into the room.
- (3) The children have freedom of choice to choose what activity they want to do however children put one activity back before getting another out.
- (4) Having an "informal chat" with the practitioner, they informed me that each activity is structured to the Montessori curriculum.
- (5) Montessori uses a sense of restricted freedom as opposed to that of Reggio Emilia which uses a sense of "complete freedom".
- (6) Upon "informal chats" and observations, development of individual senses is a key element.
- (7) Children develop holistically, meaning they develop their whole self.
- (8) Children, who choose to, can work in groups meaning they are developing their social skills and therefore aspects such as language acquisition is being developed.
- (9) The environment is based on touch, in order to develop senses, therefore there are lots of soft objects, wooden objects and physical activities.
- (10) Freedom within the Montessori environment is based on boundaries and routines, as opposed to Reggio Emilia which bases on complete freedom..
- (11) Children care for their environment, they take activities out one at a time and put all previous activities away in a neat and organised order.
- (12) I have noticed that each activity has a mat to be used on.

Each activity has physical objects, which is an important note for the next section of my notes;

Children - In this section of my notes I will observe the children and see what they do;

- (13) A child takes out some toy animals and begins to play with them. This can argue my above observation with roleplay, perhaps overly physical roleplay is not allowed however calm role play is?
- (14) I observed an example of continuous provision whereby a child has taken numbers and begins to arrange them in the correct order. There are numerous toys involving numbers including a bead activity (appendix B: B) which is organized into tens, hundreds and thousands to create a number (for example 1324 (ThHTU)).
- (15) Children within the crafts area make numerous things. One child decides to make a spider out of cut up cards and straws, putting a face in the middle. Another two children decide to make toy guns and roleplay with them whilst sitting down.
- (16) A small group of children decided to take some pencils and paper and draw. These children were not instructed in any way to do so. Upon having a look, the children were drawing families and writing their names, therefore holistically developing their language and writing skills as well as fine motor skills.
- (17) Children know where each activity is and how to get them out. One child uses the broad stair (appendix B: D) to help develop their sense of different sizes and see the difference.
- (18) A child goes over to the peace corner (appendix B: A) and begins to feel the blanket, which is soft, they then begin to tap a stone against the table.
- (19) A child decides to get out a letter activity (appendix B: G) and asks the practitioner to scaffold them with it. The practitioner would ask the child to pick out

letters that make up a word on the card. The child would then sound out each letter then eventually the word. This could play on phonics development.

- (20) A child decides to get out a fraction puzzle (appendix B: E) and, without knowing, the child begins to understand fractions. The “without knowing” part of this note is very important as this signifies their holistic development and the freedom within a Montessori environment.
- (21) Upon realising that an activity area was being used, a child decides to take the activity over to the peace corner (appendix B: A) and begins to use it.
- (22) An overactive child who enjoys physical play was shown a quiet activity to do by themselves, upon observing this was a very effective way to calm the child as they sat very quietly doing this activity with the practitioner.
- (23) One child was sitting down with no activity and a practitioner asked a child what they would like to do and the child then went off to choose an activity. This is a perfect example of continuous provision and the freedom that the children have within this environment.
- (24) A small group of children sat down reading a book to each other. This is an example of social development within the environment and how the children are using the continuous provision within the environment to holistically develop themselves.
- (25) A larger group of children decided to place cushions around and begin to roleplay stepping stones. The practitioner did not say anything to these children as they were being quiet and calm.
- (26) I have noticed from time to time children refusing other children to join in, this is a part of the Montessori freedom whereby a child can choose to do the activity individually.
- (27) Children who were roleplaying within the classroom were told to sit and choose an activity, this is a perfect example of the above about freedom with limitations.

Appendix B

A: Peace Corner



B: Maths corner



The bead bank can be seen to the left on the third shelf.

C: Reading Corner



D: Broad Stair



The broad stair is the activity on the middle shelf.

E: Fraction Puzzle



F: Draft letter sent to parents/carers

February 5th 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

On the afternoon of Friday the 21st February a third year student from Plymouth Marjon University will be coming to the setting to carry out observations for their education project (similar to a dissertation). The research is about how children use the environment to support their development.

The research will be passive observation, meaning the student will not be interacting with children, just observing how they interact with the environment on a normal nursery day. No photographs, videos or audio recordings will be taken of children as the student will be recording data by written notes. Children will be anonymised, with no names being given or recorded. Data will only be seen by the student, their markers and marking moderators.

Prior to the student beginning their observation the children will be asked if they are happy to be in the room or if they would like to go into Tadpoles 2. They will also be made aware that they are free to leave the session for another room at any time.

The observations have been designed to be as unintrusive and have as little impact on the child's day as possible. If you do not wish your child to be in the room during the observations please make a member of staff aware before Monday 17th January.

The entire letter could not be included to protect anonymity.

G: Literacy

