The Spirit of the Child: The Montessori Component in Godly Play Practice

Godly Play Europe:
Helsinki, 2010

The child is much more spiritually elevated than is usually supposed. He often suffers, not from too much work, but from work that is unworthy of him.
Maria Montessori

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The Montessori teacher education program that Dr. Jerome Berryman attended, in Bergamo, Italy, consisted of more than 400 hours of instruction. This included turning in albums of the exact presentations of many Montessori materials, making materials, and written and practical exams. My own albums were more than 600 pages of typing!

Initial Godly Play training (Core training) is 18 to 24 hours of instruction.

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Therefore, many key aspects of his Godly Play practice (giving lessons, room design and shelf organization, classroom management, intervention, for example) are not able to be conveyed in detail in our shorter training time.

Today, I will focus on the role of the environment, Montessori's idea of the role of order in the environment, and on the child's work in response time.

The legacy of Montessori work is a rich resource for the future of Godly Play. At the end of my talk today, I will indicate a few other areas with potential for deepening and enriching our practice.

Montessori Early Childhood, Brazil, JCM

There are a number of ways to approach Montessori's ideas of the environment and the ways in which it influences the child.

We could study this on three levels: the arrangement of the room as a whole (the macroenvironment), the arrangement of materials on the shelves, and the order within the materials as they are stored and as they are used (the microenvironment).

We could also examine the environment in relation to age and developmental level, using Montessori's ideas of the <u>sensitive periods</u>. We could also link Montessori's ideas to those of theorists such as Piaget, Maslow, and others.

Let's begin with an exercise for you: observing the macroenvironment.

Now, you must do some work, not just listen passively!
Please look at these slides of Montessori environments. See what has been done to show respect for the child—what has been done to:

Make it beautiful
Make it peaceful, allow children to get away from others,
or reduce distractions, noise, etc.
Allow children to work
Allow children to modify the environment
Meet the developmental needs of the child for order, activity

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

Montessori Early Childhood, Managua, Nicaragua, JCM

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

Montessori Early Childhood, Managua, Nicaragua, JCM

Relatively sparse decorations; lots of open wall space; clearly defined areas; a variety of areas to work in.

Montessori Early Childhood, Managua, Nicaragua, JCM

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Order; materials that attract the child.

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

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The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

Montessori Early Childhood, Masaya Nicaragua, JCM

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Montessori Early Childhood, Masaya Nicaragua, JCM

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

Montessori Early Childhood, Diriamba, Nicaragua, JCM

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

Montessori Early Childhood, Diriamba, Nicaragua, JCM

What did you see?

Montessori Early Childhood, Diriamba, Nicaragua, JCM

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

Montessori Early Childhood, Brazil, JCM

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

Montessori Early Childhood, Brazil, JCM

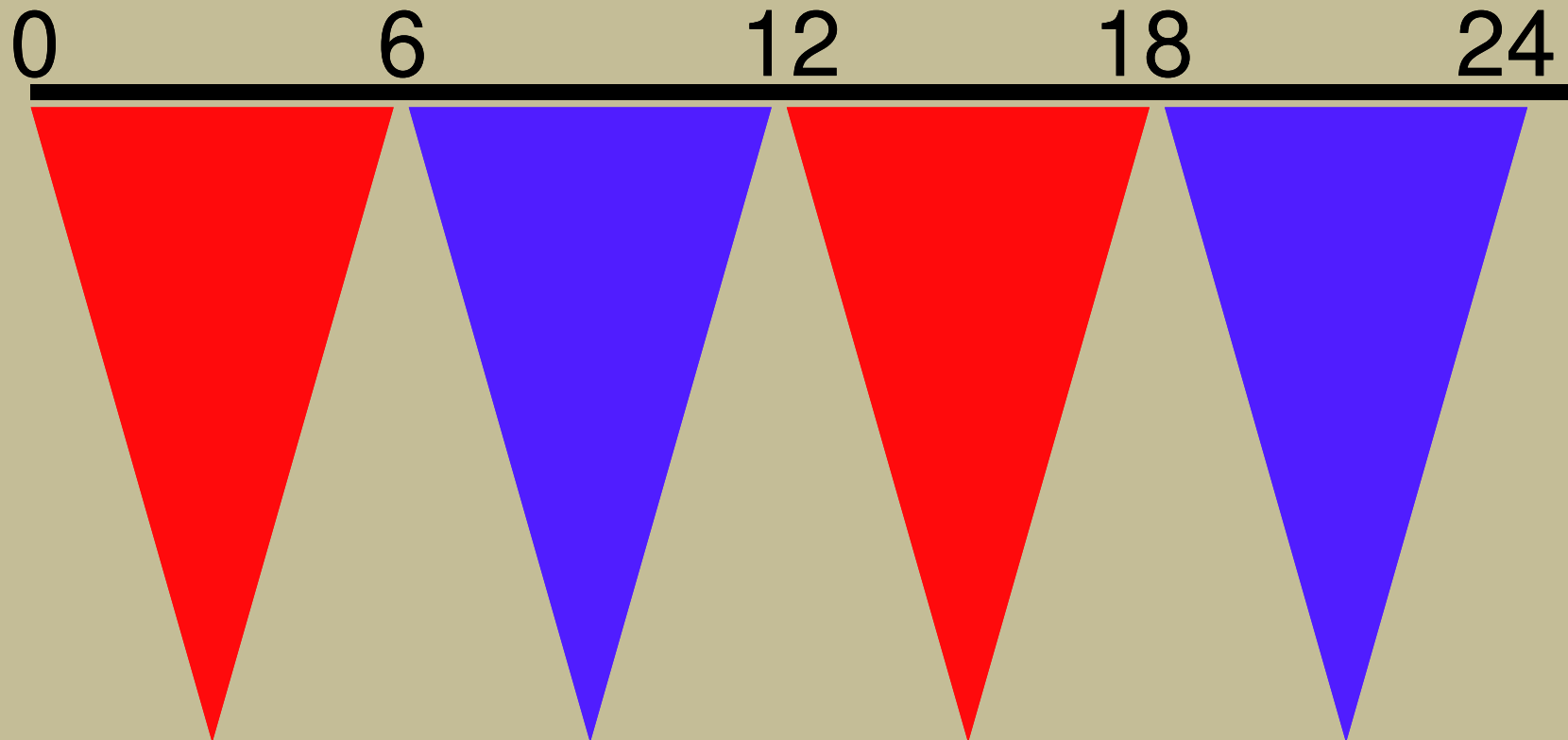# The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

What does the inclusion of special needs children do to develop the spirit of the child?

Montessori Early Childhood, Brazil, JCM

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment

Montessori Early Childhood, Brazil, JCM

The environment

What did you see?

Montessori Early Childhood, Brazil, JCM

Montessori's Four Planes of Development: how should our environments and our behavior change to reflect these differences?

0   6   12   18   24
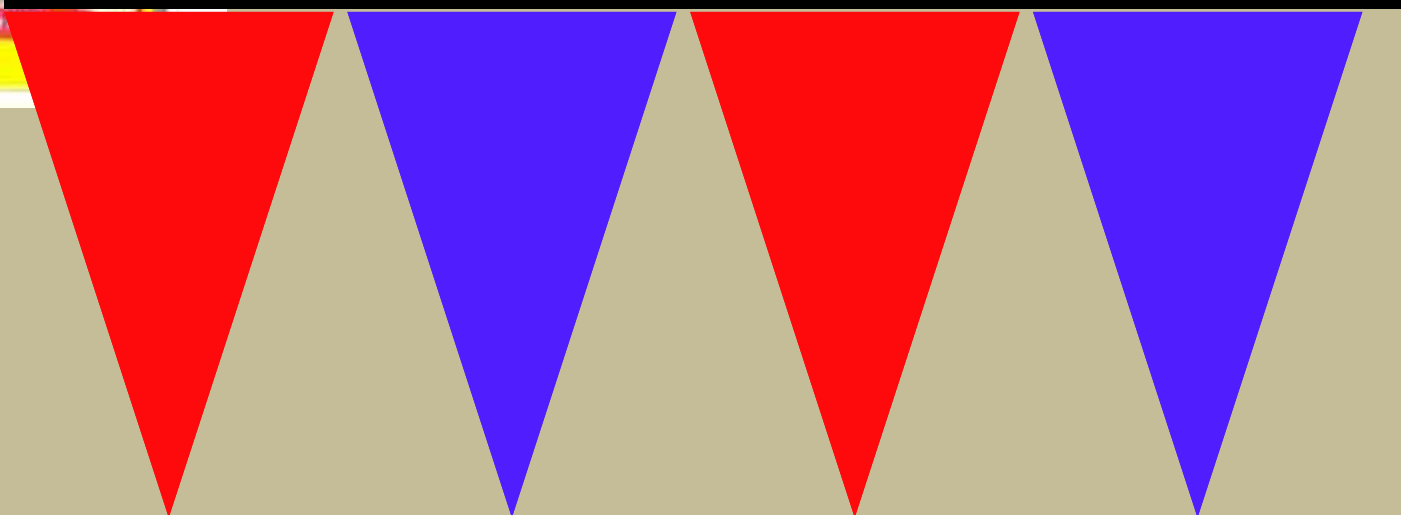
Absorbent Mind, MM

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In both 3-6 and 6-12, Montessori would emphasize intrinsic motivation for activity and learning, as would Piaget. This contrasts with the behaviorist emphasis on extrinsic motivation through rewards and punishments.
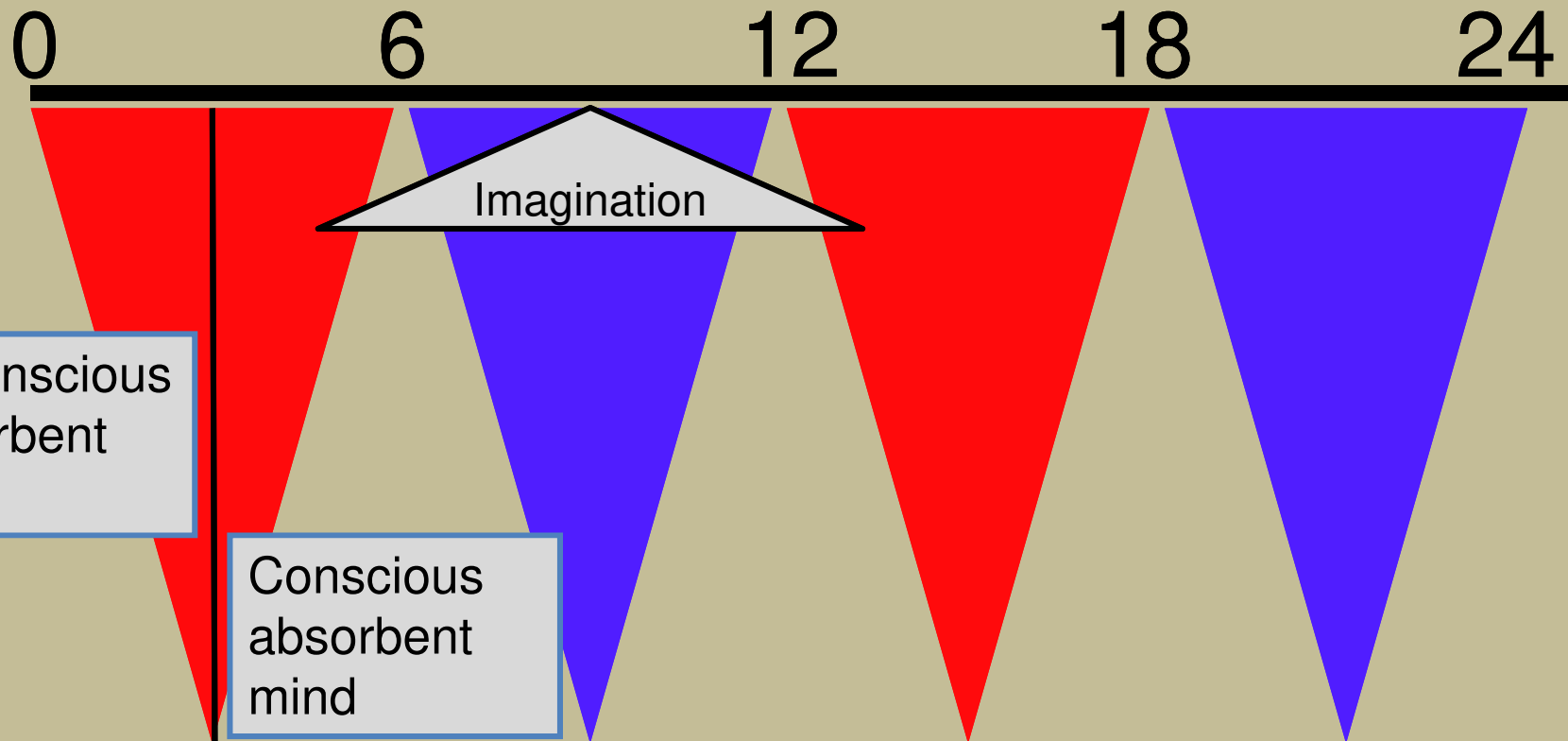
0   6   12   18   24

Absorbent Mind, MM

Here are some of the sensitive periods MM describes.

0   6   12   18   24

Imagination

Unconscious
absorbent
mind

Conscious
absorbent
mind

Absorbent Mind, MM

0   6   12

Imagination

Unconscious absorbent mind

Conscious absorbent mind

Montessori's placement for the sensitive period of imagination coincides with her major curricular use of storytelling: The Great Lessons, which typically begin around 5 or 6 years. Her ideas are supported by Keiran Egan in his book *The Educated Mind*. We need to study how children at 3, 4 and 5 understand our stories.
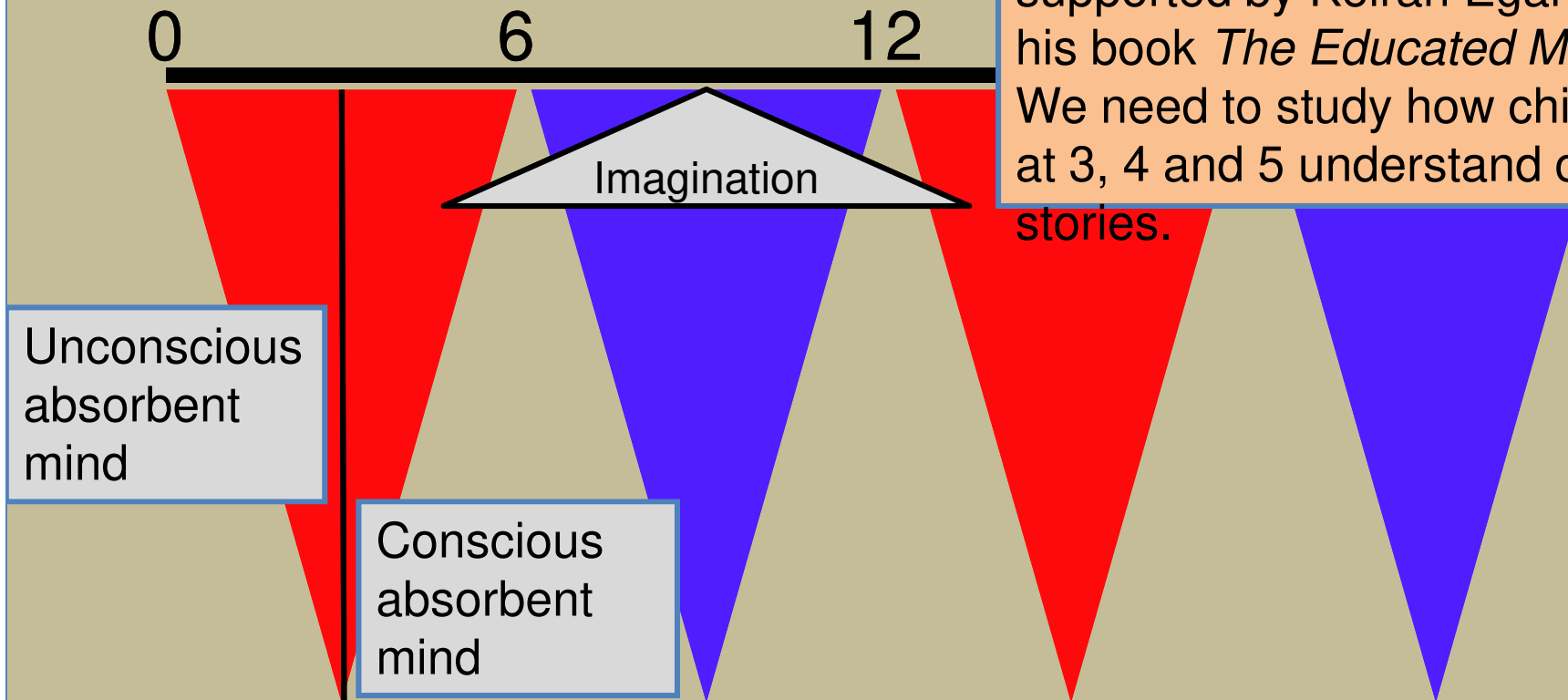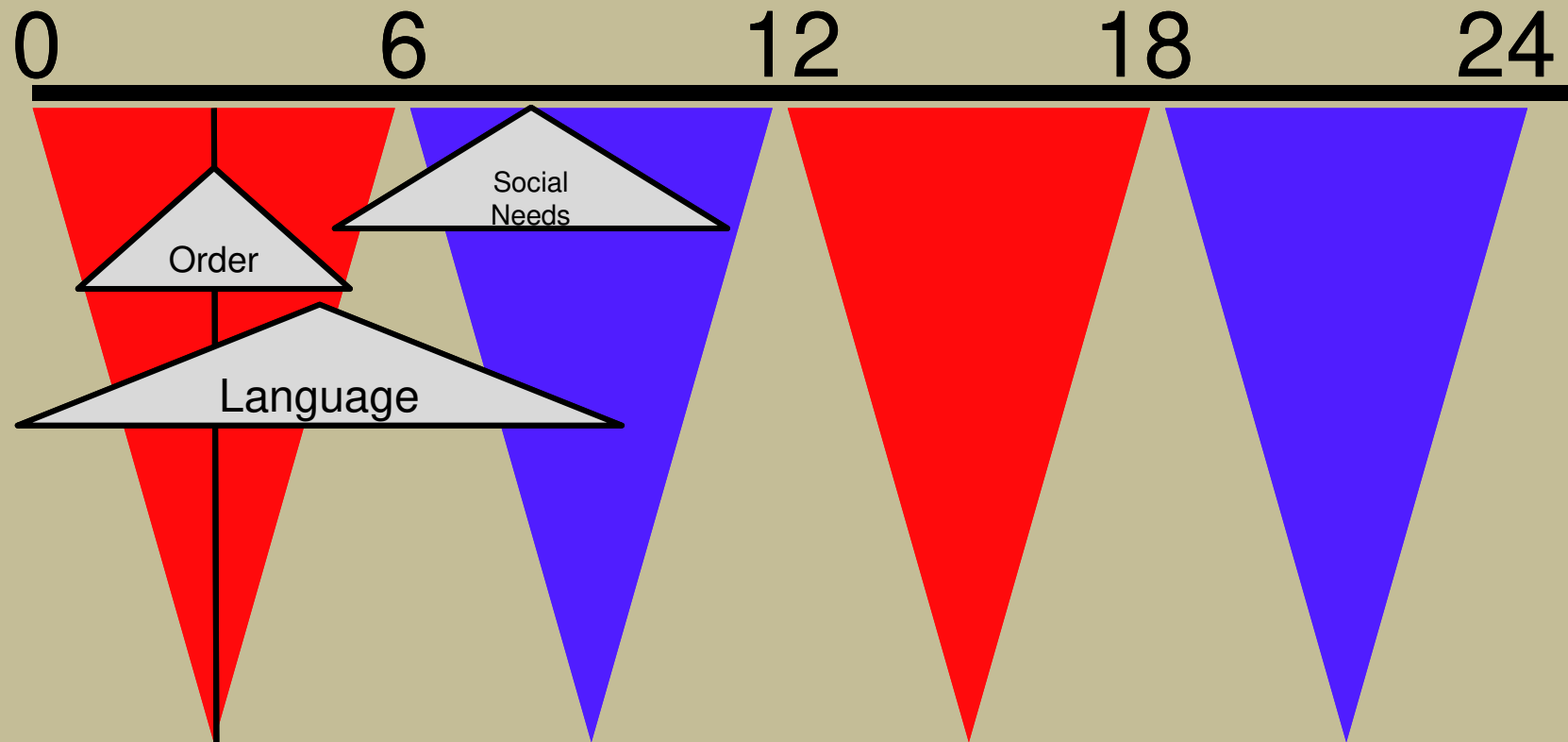
Absorbent Mind, MM

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A few more of the most important sensitive periods that differentiate the 3-6 from elementary child.

0   6   12   18   24

Order

Social Needs

Language

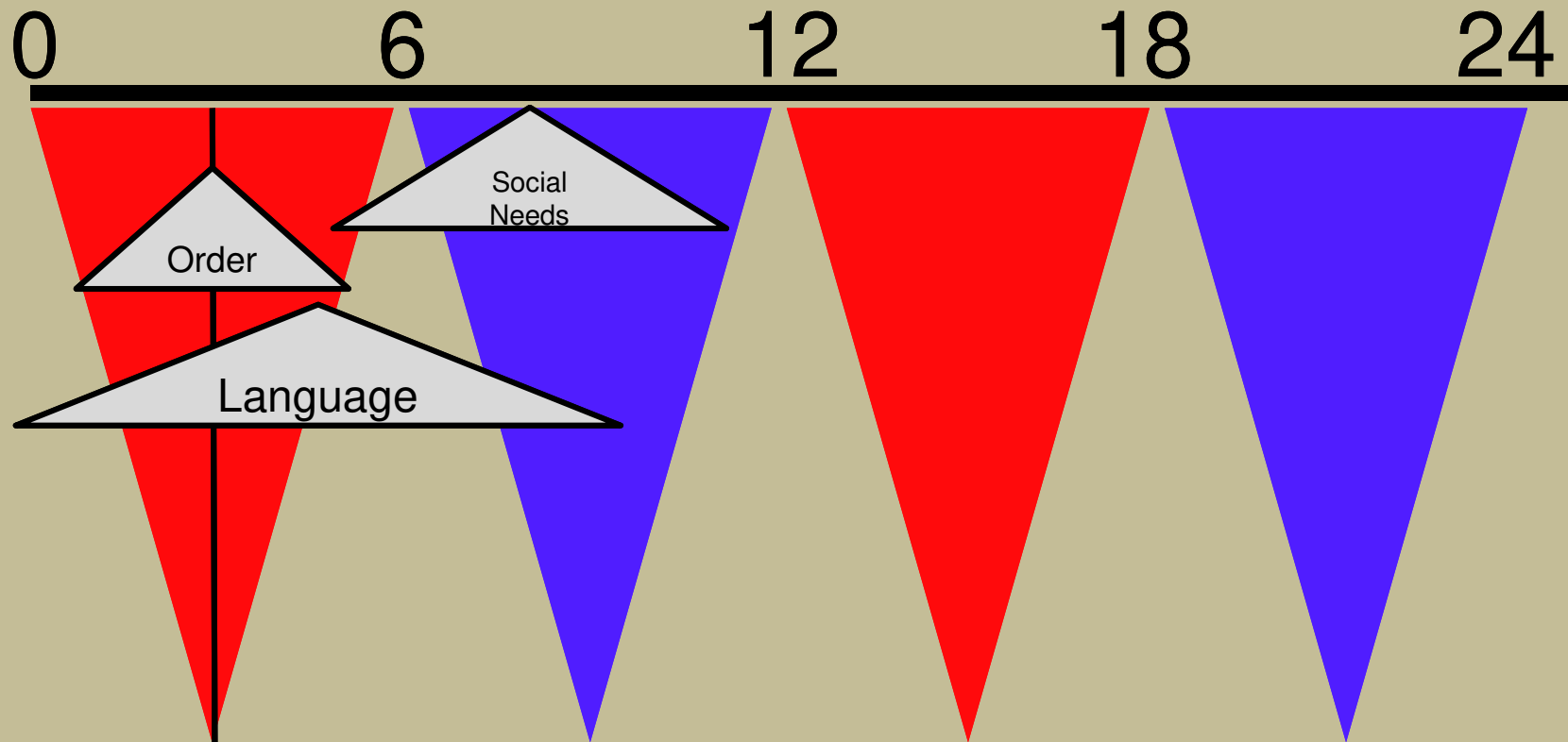*Absorbent Mind*, MM

The environment

Developmental theory

The elementary child is discovering the social world in a more focused and self-aware way. The teacher's lessons become more personal, the work of the child is embedded in the classroom social context.

0   6   12   18   24

Order

Social Needs

Language

Absorbent Mind, MM

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The Montessori Component in Godly Play

The environment

Developmental theory

For example, consider the "disconnected hands" of a 3-6 sensorial presentation with elementary work and lessons…
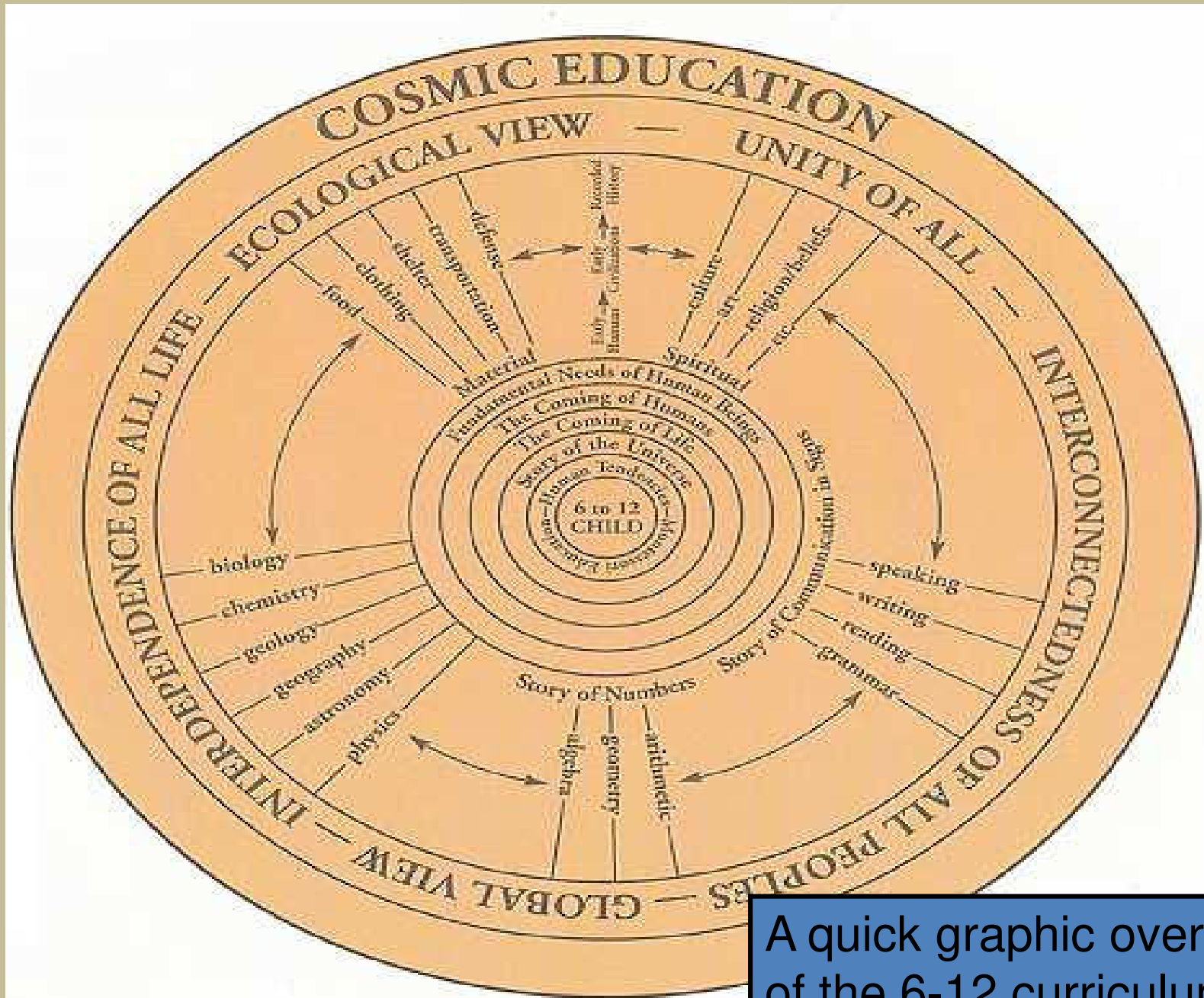
A quick graphic overview of the 6-12 curriculum

Before we look specifically at the application of these ideas to Godly Play, we need to understand some of what MM said about the work of the child, and what concentration on self-chosen work does for the child.

The environment

Developmental theory

"But those children who have been able to work with their hands make headway in their development, and reach a strength of character which is conspicuous."

MM, *Absorbent Mind*, p. 152

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
     The environment
     Developmental theory

"Rolling up a rug, brushing a pair of shoes, washing a wash-basin or floor, laying the table, opening and closing boxes or doors or windows, arranging a room, setting chairs in order, drawing a curtain, carrying furniture, etc.--all these are exercises in which the whole body is engaged...."

MM, *Discovery of the Child*, p. 114

The environment

Developmental theory

"One of the most brilliant experiments was that of harvesting grain and grapes"

MM, *Discovery of the Child*, p. 105

Work in Montessori terms must involve the body, most often the hands, in an activity that has meaning for the child.

The work of the child allows the development of attention, and leads to a normal child.

The Montessori Component in Godly Play

The environment

Developmental theory

The environment

Developmental theory

The Montessori Component in Godly Play

The environment

Developmental theory

The Montessori Component in Godly Play

  The environment

  Developmental theory

  Work with materials/response time

The Montessori Component in Godly Play

- The environment
- Developmental theory
- Work with materials/response time

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
The environment
Developmental theory
Work with materials/response time

The Montessori Component in Godly Play

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Developmental theory

Work with materials/response time

The Montessori Component in Godly Play

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The Montessori Component in Godly Play

The environment

Developmental theory

Work with materials/response time

The Montessori Component in Godly Play

The environment

Developmental theory

Work with materials/response time

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First Presentation of the Noun (Noun Game)

Age: 4 & up

Prerequisites: Good oral language background; most sandpaper letters; understanding of what a word is; some decoding of three letter phonetic words (pink level), including some word building with movable alphabets, ideally labeling of the farm objects.

Materials: Paper (either small slips or a roll of adding machine paper tape in a holder to allow slips to be torn off) and black felt marking pen; the farm or another small set of small, well-known objects. Montessori never intended that the farm would be the only set like this ever to be used in Montessori classrooms. Also, there are certainly less expensive farm sets available than the one from Nienhuis.

Presentation: (Individual or small group)
        1. Invite the child(ren)
        2. Recall the name of the set--the farm or whatever set you are using.
        3. Ask the child(ren) the names of 5 to 9 objects in the sets. As each one is named, write the name down carefully on the slip of paper with the pen. Use the same letters as the sandpaper letters and movable alphabets that the child has been exposed to.
        4. Each child is allowed to "read" the word from the paper after they have told you what to write. Give the slip to the child, ask him what it says, and then ask him to put it next to the object it names.
        5. As you proceed, begin to refer to the slip as a <u>noun</u>. Say things such as, *"Now John, what is this? Yes, a pig. Let me write the noun for you."* and "*Where will you put this noun?*"
        6. When you have finished labeling all of the objects, gather the slips together as a column. Say,"*These words are all names of things on the farm. These words are nouns. Can you say the word noun?"*
        7. Offer the children the opportunity to read and re-place the slips, or to copy them down on a chalkboard or their own slips of paper.

Variations: Later lessons will extend this concept with the "Bring me--" game, and the introduction of the noun symbol.

Extensions: The making of classroom noun lists, use of the noun symbol, noun family chart, etc., are not usually introduced until later in the sequence.

Points of Interest: 1) Seeing the familiar objects' names turned into written words 2) The first idea of word classes (parts of speech)

Control of Error: The teacher checks to be sure of correct matching of words to objects. If for some reason a child with poor initial sounds background gets included in the lesson, choose objects which have all different initial sounds.

Direct Aims: Introduction to the noun; the idea that words are in groups by func-tions, and that name words are nouns.

Indirect Aims: Additional experience with the relation between oral and written language; preparation for further work with the noun, and other parts of speech.

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Work with materials/response time

Other theorists in relation to Montessori

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
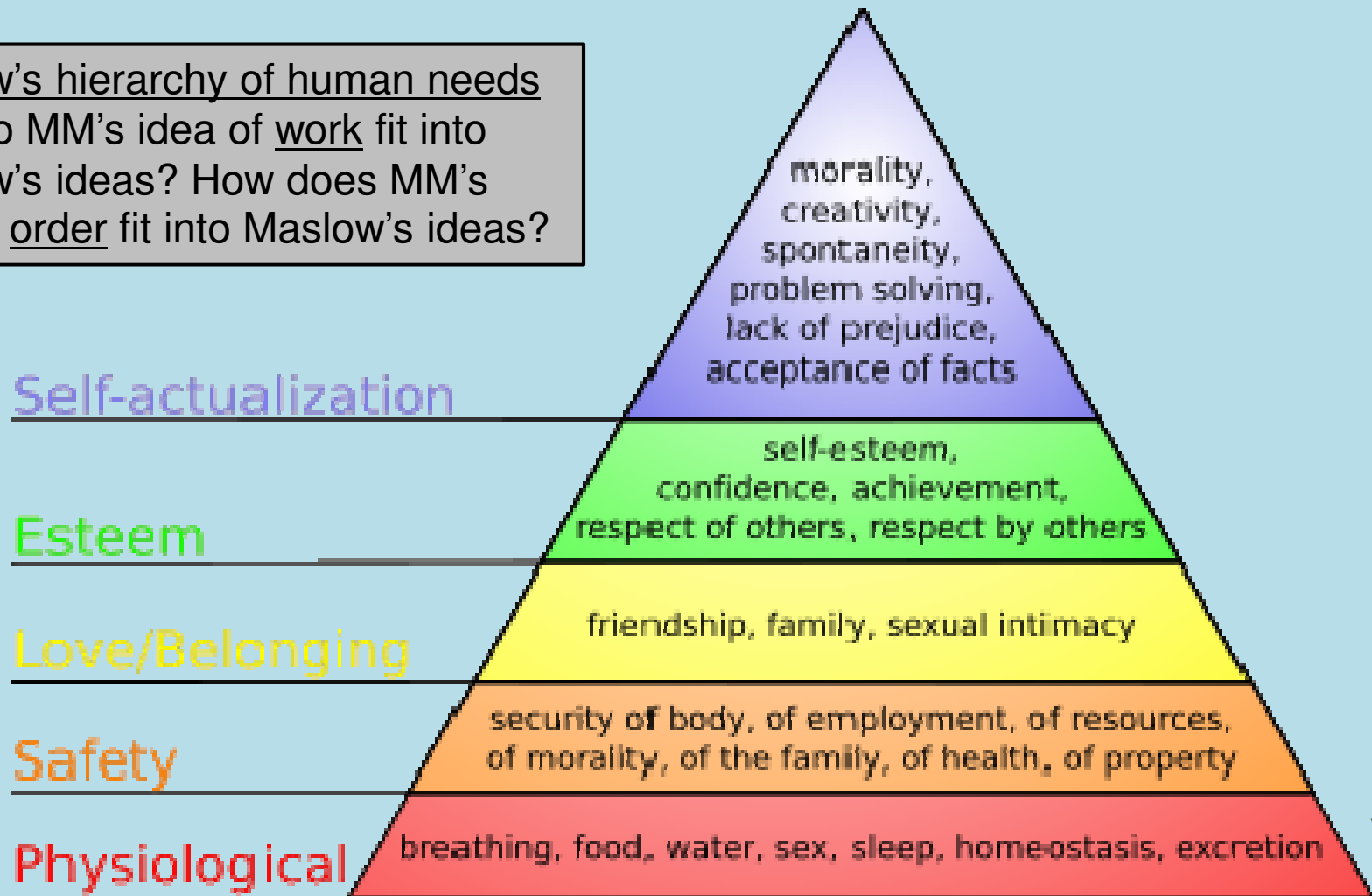
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Other theorists in relation to Montessori

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs
How do MM's idea of work fit into
Maslow's ideas? How does MM's
idea of order fit into Maslow's ideas?

Self-actualization — morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, acceptance of facts

Esteem — self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, respect by others

Love/Belonging — friendship, family, sexual intimacy

Safety — security of body, of employment, of resources, of morality, of the family, of health, of property

Physiological — breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, home-ostasis, excretion

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The Montessori Component in Godly Play
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Other theorists in relation to Montessori

Dr. Keiran Egan teaches at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia province, Canada. These ideas are from his 1998 book *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape Our Understanding.*

After the earliest mode, <u>Somatic</u> understanding, the child from five years or so is in what Egan calls <u>Mythic</u> understanding, in which story is the primary mode. The best stories for mythic understanders, such as traditional fairy tales, have these characteristics:

- <u>Binary structuring</u>
- <u>Fantasy</u>
- <u>Abstract Thinking</u>
- <u>Metaphor</u>
- <u>Rhythm & Narrative</u>
- <u>Images</u>

Somewhere around age 8, the child moves to Romantic understanding. Her concerns shift to:

- Extremes of Experience

- The Hero

- Humanized knowledge-interest in characters in stories and the emotions that motivate them

- Romantic Rationality-interest in the details…

The Montessori Component in Godly Play
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  Other theorists in relation to Montessori

At 12 to 14 years, the child shifts again, to <u>Philosophic</u> understanding, and debate (or argument!) is their primary mode of understanding. Characteristics are:

- Craving for <u>Generality</u>

- <u>Social Agent.</u>

- Lure of <u>Certainty</u>--

- <u>General schemes and anomalies</u>

- Flexibility in theories

And finally, around 18 years, <u>Ironic</u> understanding, in which flexibility in the understanding of theories and the ability to hold competing theories in mind are achieved.

<u>Christopher Alexander</u> graduated from Cambridge University, where he studied Mathematics and Architecture. He then obtained a Ph. D. in Architecture at Harvard University. For his Ph. D. thesis, later published as the book *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, he was awarded the first Gold Medal for Research by the American Institute of Architects. Since 1963 he has been Professor of Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, and Director of the Center for Environmental Structure.
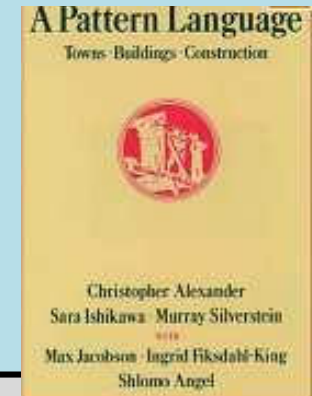
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- Other theorists in relation to Montessori

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Dr. Alexander's 1977 book *A Pattern Language* (with several coauthors) is perhaps the most revolutionary book on architecture, broadly defined, ever produced. In it, he proposes a set of patterns which determine the best answers to the common problems of design for the structure of a city, a building, or a single room. He has spent most of his life in searching for these patterns. His approach to solving this universal problem takes advantage of scientific reasoning, and totally opposes other, unscientific approaches based on fashion, ideology, or arbitrary personal preferences.
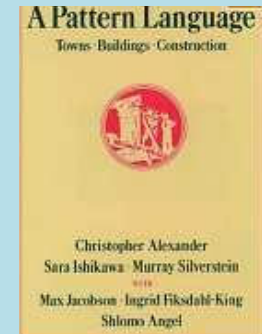
The Montessori Component in Godly Play

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    Other theorists in relation to Montessori

A Pattern Language
Towns·Buildings·Construction

Christopher Alexander
Sara Ishikawa · Murray Silverstein
WITH
Max Jacobson · Ingrid Fiksdahl-King
Shlomo Angel

> These patterns could be further developed for use in our Godly Play environments, but many of them seem to me to be useful as they are, as well as remarkably foresightful for a book 33 years old.

*Pattern 18: **Network of Learning**: In a society which emphasizes teaching, children and students--and adults--become passive and unable to think or act for themselves. Creative, active individuals can only grow up in a society which emphasizes learning instead of teaching.*

*Pattern 68: **Connected Play**: If children don't play enough with other children during the first five years of life, there is a great chance that they will have some kind of mental illness later in their lives.*

*Pattern 73: **Adventure Playground**: A castle, made of cartons, rocks and old branches, by a group of children for themselves, is worth a thousand perfectly detailed, exactly finished castles, made for them in a factory.*
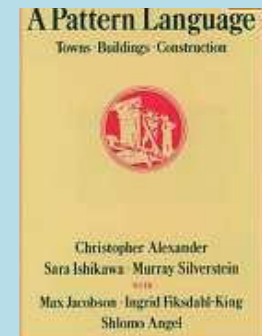
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Other theorists in relation to Montessori

Pattern 129: **Common Areas at the Heart**: No social group--whether a family, a work group, or a school group--can survive without constant informal contact among its members.

Pattern 159: **Light on Two Sides in Every Room**: When they have a choice, people will always gravitate to those rooms which have light on two sides, and leave the rooms which are lit only from one side unused and empty.

Pattern 179: **Alcoves**: No homogenous room, of homogenous height, can serve a group of people well. To give a group a chance to be together, as a group, a room must also give them the chance to be alone, in one's and two's in the same space.

Thank you for you time today.