

Adventures at AIMS...coming together as a community

The Value of Self-Directed Learning

The idea of self-directed learning in a Montessori classroom is often a source of worrisome thought for parents. “What if my child scrubs tables or paints all day?” “Will my child learn anything?” “Can students really do whatever they want?” These questions resonate from prospective parents as well, as they look around at a busy classroom that initially appears chaotic. However, we cannot forget the science and structure found in Montessori child-centered environments – there is order there. The prepared environment supports self-directed learning, the freedom to work at one’s own pace, and not an established “norm”. The distinct design of our classroom environments encourages a student’s freedom to explore. The natural, aesthetically-beautiful materials are specifically designed for self-correction with controls of error, dismissing the need for follow-up adult guidance. Students use executive function (the skill of prioritizing/managing your time) and set their own goals within the framework of what a teacher has provided. The classroom environment allows students to focus and concentrate and enter/exit their own natural work flow. Repetition and practice are encouraged.

Self-directed learning does not mean that students are allowed the freedom to ignore areas of curriculum and only work on their preferences. Self-directed learners do not always act autonomously or independently. The Montessori Directress, or Guide, helps redirect focus if necessary so that they can become disciplined self-reliant learners. Guides learn how to “spark” or “hook” a child into a lesson and adjust lessons to the needs of the individual. The goal is develop an intrinsically motivated student who knows how and where to find answers and sees learning as a positive path forward.