

Benefits of Montessori



Montessori education offers our children opportunities to develop their potential as they step out into the world as engaged, competent, responsible, and respectful citizens with an understanding and appreciation that learning is for life.

- **Each child is valued as a unique individual.** Montessori education recognizes that children learn in different ways, and accommodates all learning styles. Students are also free to learn at their own pace, each advancing through the curriculum as he is ready, guided by the teacher and an individualized learning plan.
- **Beginning at an early age, Montessori students develop order, coordination, concentration, and independence.** Classroom design, materials, and daily routines support the individual's emerging "self-regulation" (ability to educate one's self, and to think about what one is learning), toddlers through adolescents.
- **Students are part of a close, caring community.** The multi-age classroom—typically spanning 3 years—re-creates a family structure. Older students enjoy stature as mentors and role models; younger children feel supported and gain confidence about the challenges ahead. Teachers model respect, loving kindness, and a belief in peaceful conflict resolution.

- **Montessori students enjoy freedom within limits.** Working within parameters set by their teachers, students are active participants in deciding what their focus of learning will be. Montessorians understand that internal satisfaction drives the child's curiosity and interest and results in joyous learning that is sustainable over a lifetime.
- **Students are supported in becoming active seekers of knowledge.** Teachers provide environments where students have the freedom and the tools to pursue answers to their own questions.
- **Self-correction and self-assessment are an integral part of the Montessori classroom approach.** As they mature, students learn to look critically at their work, and become adept at recognizing, correcting, and learning from their errors.

Given the freedom and support to question, to probe deeply, and to make connections, Montessori students become confident, enthusiastic, self-directed learners. They are able to think critically, work collaboratively, and act boldly—a skill set for the 21st century.

Montessori Schools



More than 4,000 Montessori schools dot the American landscape, offering a unique educational model to families nationwide. Thousands more bring the Montessori method to every corner of the world.

Montessori schools can be found in rural, urban, and suburban settings; in working-class towns, affluent communities, and even remote villages. Some schools offer all levels of learning, from infant/toddler through the secondary (high school) level. Others offer only certain levels.

In the United States, most Montessori schools are privately owned. A growing number, however, are part of public school systems, making it possible for families of any means to give their child a Montessori education.

Private Schools

Linked by a common philosophy, each private Montessori school is nonetheless unique. It may be housed in a small, homelike setting, on an expansive campus, or surrounded by gardens that hold discoveries for every age. Individual schools may be part of a larger entity, often a nonprofit agency or religious institution. Some schools offer parent/infant classes, in which parents learn to observe their child and meet his needs in the Montessori way.

Like other private schools, most independently owned Montessori schools are funded by tuition revenue. Some schools provide scholarships for families in need of assistance, and many offer reduced tuition when parents enroll more than one child.

Public Schools

Montessori is a presence in more than 400 U.S. public schools, including neighborhood, magnet, and charter schools.

Public Montessori programs come in many sizes, from a single early-childhood classroom to an entire elementary, junior high, or high school. Some share a facility with other programs that have a different instructional approach.

Teachers in public Montessori schools have a dual responsibility. In planning an age-appropriate Montessori curriculum, they need to make sure it matches their state's grade-level standards.

Public Montessori school students must take the same standardized tests as students in traditional public schools.

What's in a Name

If you're considering Montessori education for your child, it's important to know that the Montessori name is not trademarked. Any school can call itself Montessori, and programs vary in how they interpret and practice the Montessori approach.

The American Montessori Society believes that certain elements are essential to quality Montessori education. These include—

- mixed-aged classes, in which older children serve as role models and helpers;
- a full array of developmentally appropriate Montessori learning materials;
- teachers with credentials from a Montessori teacher education program;
- adherence to the Montessori instructional approach, with teachers serving as guides rather than givers of information.

All Montessori schools may opt to become AMS members. Many schools choose to be accredited by AMS or other National or Regional accrediting agencies which includes the National Independent Private School Association (NIPSA) and AdvancED.

All Montessori schools may opt to become AMS members, but only schools that have been accredited by AMS are affirmed as meeting AMS standards.

Montessori Classrooms



To grasp the essence of Montessori education, just step inside a classroom.

Beautiful, inviting, and thoughtfully arranged, the room embodies each element of Maria Montessori's revolutionary approach.

Natural lighting, soft colors, and uncluttered spaces set the stage for activity that is focused and calm. Learning materials are displayed on accessible shelves, fostering independence as students go about their work. Everything is where it is supposed to be, conveying a sense of harmony and order that both comforts and inspires.

In this safe and empowering environment, students find joy in learning.

Classroom Design



The design and flow of the Montessori classroom create a learning environment that accommodates choice.

There are spaces suited to group activity, and areas where a student can settle in alone. Parts of the room are open and spacious, allowing a preschooler to lay out strands of beads for counting, or an elementary student to ponder a 10-foot-long Timeline of Life.

You won't find the customary rows of school desks; children work at tables or on the floor, rolling out mats on which to work and define their work space.

Nor are you likely to find walls papered with brightly colored images of cartoons and syndicated characters. Rather, you might see posters from a local museum, or framed photographs or paintings created by the students themselves.

There are well-defined spaces for each part of the curriculum, such as Language Arts, Math, and Culture. Each of these areas features shelves or display tables with a variety of inviting materials from which students can choose.

Many classrooms have an area devoted to peace and reflection: a quiet corner or table with well-chosen items—a vase of daisies; a goldfish bowl—to lead a child to meditative thought.

And always there are places to curl up with books, where a student can read or be read to.

Each classroom is uniquely suited to the needs of its students. Preschool rooms feature low sinks, chairs, and tables; a reading corner with a small couch (or comfy floor cushions); reachable shelves; and child-sized kitchen tools—elements that allow independence and help develop small motor skills. In upper-level classrooms you're likely to see large tables for group work, computers, interactive whiteboards, and areas for science labs.

Above all, each classroom is warm, well-organized, and inviting, with couches, rugs, and flowers to help children and youth feel calm and at home.

Montessori Learning Materials



A hallmark of Montessori education is its hands-on approach to learning. Students work with specially designed materials, manipulating and investigating until they master the lesson inside.

Beautifully crafted and begging to be touched, Montessori's distinctive learning materials are displayed on open, easily accessible shelves. They are arranged (left to right, as we read in Western languages) in order of their sequence in the curriculum, from the simplest to the most complex.

Each material teaches a single skill or concept at a time—for example, the various “dressing frames” help toddlers learn to button, zip, and tie; 3-dimensional grammar symbols help elementary students analyze sentence structure and style. And, built into many of the materials is a mechanism (“control of error”) for providing the student with some way of assessing her progress and correcting her mistakes, independent of the teacher.

The concrete materials provide passages to abstraction, and introduce concepts that become increasingly complex. As students progress, the teacher replaces some materials with others, ensuring that the level of challenge continues to meet their needs.

The Teacher as “Guide”



The Montessori teacher, child, and environment may be seen as a learning triangle, with each element inextricably linked, and a vital part of the whole. The teacher thoughtfully prepares a classroom environment with materials and activities that entice her students to learn. She may guide her students to new lessons and challenges, but it is the child's interaction with what the environment has to offer that enables learning to occur.

Because the teacher isn't meant as the focus of attention, he can often be difficult to spot. Typically you'll find him sitting on the floor or at a table, observing his students as they work and making notations about their progress, or consulting with an individual or a small group.

Multi-Age Groupings

A Montessori class is composed of students whose ages typically span 3 years. Ideally, members stay with the class, and teacher, for the entire cycle, forging a stable community and meaningful bonds.

It is common to see students of different ages working together. Older students enjoy mentoring their younger classmates—sometimes the best teacher is someone who has recently mastered the task at hand. Younger students look up to their big “brothers” and “sisters,” and get a preview of the alluring work to come.

A Caring Community

The Montessori classroom radiates harmony and respect.

Members address each other respectfully and in modulated tones. There are no raised voices; no rude or hurtful behavior. There is a busy hum of activity, yet also a profound respect for silence.

Students show grace and courtesy, and an interest in the welfare of others. “Let me help!” is a common classroom refrain.

Students work together as stewards of their environment. They take turns caring for classroom pets and plants; do their part to maintain order, such as by returning materials to the shelves after use; and help keep outdoor spaces groomed and litter-free.

How to live in community, to learn independently, to think constructively and creatively: These are the lessons of the Montessori classroom that remain with its students as they make their way in the world.

Montessori Learning Materials

You might see a 4-year-old boy forming words using 3-dimensional letters called “the movable alphabet.” A 2½ -year-old may be sitting by a teacher, ever-so-carefully pouring water from 1 tiny pitcher to another. Several children kneeling on the floor may be intently struggling over a puzzle map of South America.

Throughout the room, children will be sorting, stacking, and manipulating all sorts of beautiful objects made of a range of materials and textures. Many of these objects will be made of smooth polished wood. Others are made of enameled metal, wicker, and fabric. Also available to explore are items from nature, such as seashells and birds' nests.

How can a preschool-aged child be trusted to handle fragile little items independently? Montessori teachers believe that children learn from their mistakes. If nothing ever breaks, children have no reason to learn carefulness. Children treasure their learning materials and enjoy learning to take care of them "all by myself."



Montessori teachers make a point to handle Montessori materials slowly, respectfully, and carefully, as if they were made of gold. The children naturally sense something magical about these beautiful learning objects.

As children carry their learning materials carefully with 2 hands and do their very special "work" with them, they may feel like they are simply playing games with their friends—but they are actually learning in a brilliantly designed curriculum that takes them, 1 step at a time, and according to a predetermined sequence, through concepts of increasing complexity.

Ingenious

Each learning material teaches just 1 skill or concept at a time. For example, we know that young children need to learn how to button buttons and tie bows. Dr. Montessori designed “dressing frames” for children to practice on.

The frame removes all distractions and simplifies the child’s task. The child sees a simple wooden frame with 2 flaps of fabric—1 with 5 buttonholes and 1 with 5 large buttons. His task is obvious. If he makes an error, his error is obvious.

Built-in “control of error” in many of the Montessori materials allows the child to determine if he has done the exercise correctly. A teacher never has to correct his work. He can try again, ask another child for help, or go to a teacher for suggestions if the work doesn’t look quite right.



Materials contain multiple levels of challenge and can be used repeatedly at different developmental levels. A special set of 10 blocks of graduated sizes called “the pink tower” may be used just for stacking; combined with “the brown stair” for comparison; or used with construction paper to trace, cut, and make a paper design. The pink tower, and many other Montessori materials, can also be used by older children to study perspective and measurement.

Montessori materials use real objects and actions to translate abstract ideas into concrete form. For example, the decimal system is basic to understanding math. Montessori materials represent the decimal system through enticing, pearl-sized golden beads.

Loose golden beads represent ones. Little wire rods hold sets of 10 golden beads—the 10-bar. Sets of 10 rods are wired together to make flats of 100 golden beads—the hundred square. Sets of 10 flats are wired together to make cubes of 1,000 golden beads—the thousand cube.

Children have many activities exploring the workings of these quantities. They build a solid inner physical understanding of the decimal system that will stay with them throughout school and life.

Later, because materials contain multiple levels of challenge, the beads can be used to introduce geometry. The unit is a point; the 10-bar is a line; the hundred square a surface; the thousand cube, a solid.

Montessori learning materials are ingeniously designed to allow children to work independently with very little introduction or help. The students are empowered to come into the environment, choose their own work, use it appropriately, and put it away without help.

Invite Activity

Maria Montessori believed that moving and learning were inseparable. The child must involve her entire body and use all her senses in the process of learning. She needs opportunities built into the learning process for looking, listening, smelling, touching, tasting, and moving her body.

When you look at Montessori materials, you are drawn to explore them with your senses. For example, you would want to pick up the sound cylinders and shake them. They consist of 2 matched sets of wooden cylinders containing varying substances that create different sounds when shaken.

The child sorts the sound cylinders using only his listening skill. Two cylinders have the barely audible sound of sand. Two have the slightly louder sound of rice inside them. Others contain beans or items that sound louder still. After matching the cylinders, the child can grade the cylinders—that is, put the cylinders in order of softest to loudest, or loudest to softest.

“Grow” with the Child

Montessori materials are designed to follow the students throughout their education; they are like familiar faces greeting them in their new classrooms as they advance.

For example, exploring the “binomial cube”—made up of 8 red, black, and blue cubes and prisms—the early childhood student develops visual discrimination of color and form. The elementary child labels the parts to explore, concretely, the algebraic formula $(a+b)^3$. The upper elementary child uses the binomial cube as the foundation for work with more advanced materials to solve algebraic equations.

Invite Discovery

Montessori-structured lessons are the “work” or procedures for each set of materials. A teacher may give a lesson to a child or small group of children, another child may give a lesson, a child may learn how a lesson works by watching others, or a child may explore certain types of materials freely.



For a young child, the Montessori-structured lesson may be silent and may be only a few moments long. This lesson models a method for laying work on a mat or table in an orderly fashion. The lesson helps children develop work habits, organization skills, and general thinking strategy, but it never teaches children the answers.

Teaching children the answers steals their chance to make exciting discoveries on their own—whether the child is a baby wondering “Can I reach that rattle?,” a preschooler contemplating “Why did this tower of cubes fall down?,” an elementary school student pondering “When you divide fractions, why do you invert and multiply?,” or a high school student puzzling “How does city council operate?”

For students of every age, the Montessori environment offers the tools to discover the answers to their own questions. The teacher is their trusted ally and the learning materials are their tools for discovery, growth, and development. The teacher stays with the students for the entire span of their

multi-age grouping, usually 2 or 3 years, nurturing each child's development over that extended span of time.

Elementary and high school materials build on the earlier Montessori materials foundation. Because older students have built a solid foundation from their concrete learning, they move gracefully into abstract thinking, which transforms their learning. Now they learn how to carry out research. At these upper levels, students broaden their focus to include the community and beyond. They learn through service and firsthand experience. The Montessori materials support responsible interactive learning and discovery.

Montessori Teachers



It's often hard to spot the teacher in a Montessori classroom. She may be sitting with a preschooler next to a floor mat, arranging colored rectangles from darkest to lightest, or intently observing as a handful of elementary students dissect a leaf.

She won't be presenting information for rote learning. Rather, she'll be demonstrating specially designed learning materials that serve as a springboard for investigation and discovery. At the heart of the Montessori Method is the concept that mastery is best achieved through exploration, imitation, repetition, and trial and error.

The teacher thoughtfully prepares a classroom environment with materials and activities that meet his students' unique interests, academic level, and developmental needs. These he introduces to each child sequentially, laying the foundation for independent learning.

Always, the teacher is aware of each student's progress as she works toward mastering the particular concept or skill. He knows when to step in to offer special guidance, and when to challenge a student with the next step in a learning sequence.

Mentor, Model, Guide

Montessori education addresses the whole child: his physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth. As well as helping each child become an independent learner, the teacher helps turn his attention outward, fostering community, collaboration, and respect for the dignity of others.

Teachers educated in the Montessori Method bring distinctive skills to the task. Their quiet orchestrations lead to magical moments as young children exclaim "I learned it myself!"—and older students think it.

Called a "directress" by Montessori Method founder Dr. Maria Montessori (back in the day when teachers were mostly women!), and sometimes known as a "guide," the Montessori teacher plays many roles as she directs, or guides, her students.

Skilled Observer: Through careful observation, the Montessori teacher comes to know each student's interests, learning style, and temperament. He understands the student's developmental needs, and is receptive to her "sensitive periods," when she is most ready to learn a new concept or skill.

With this information the teacher chooses materials and lessons that will capture the student's attention and entice her to learn. When he observes that the student has mastered a concept or skill, he introduces new lessons that become increasingly complex and abstract.

Creative Facilitator: The teacher serves as a resource as students go about their work. She offers encouragement, shares their triumphs, and steers them to greater understanding.

She helps them advance through the curriculum as they master new skills, so they are continually challenged and eager to learn.

As students progress, the teacher modifies the classroom environment, adjusting the learning materials to meet the students' changing needs.

Character Builder: A Montessori class is a close-knit community, fertile ground for nurturing the qualities that help children and youth become citizens of the world and stewards of the planet.

By his own behavior and attitudes, the teacher models values such as empathy, compassion, and acceptance of individual differences. He encourages the students to be courteous and kind. And he brings students together in collaborative activities to foster teamwork, responsibility, self-discipline, and respect.

A Rewarding Career

The Montessori classroom is a place of discovery, often as much for the teacher as for her students. It's not hard to imagine how, in the spirit of inquiry, the curriculum sometimes takes an unexpected turn. For Montessori teachers, that's part of the pleasure.

Like their students, Montessori teachers delight in the challenge of new ideas and experiences; they are enthusiastic learners with a passion for life.

In the course of helping children become lifelong learners, Montessori teachers enjoy a personal journey of continued discovery and growth.



Innovative... Imaginative... Incredible... Montessori

Visit www.MontessoriSchools.org to learn more.