

What is Montessori?

Montessori is a philosophy with the fundamental tenet that a child learns best within a social environment, which supports each individual's unique development. Dr. Maria Montessori, the creator of what is called "The Montessori Method of Education," based this on her scientific observations of young children's behavior. Through her observations she found that children learn best in an environment filled with developmentally appropriate materials that provide experiences contributing to the growth of self-motivated, independent learners.

Montessori's Theories Include Premises Such As:

- Children are to be respected as different from adults and as individuals who are different from one another.
- Children create themselves through purposeful activity.
- The most important years for learning are from birth to age six.
- Children possess unusual sensitivity and mental powers for absorbing and learning from their environment, which includes people as well as materials.

What Makes Montessori Education Unique?

The "Whole Child" Approach:

The Primary goal of a Montessori program is to help each child reach full potential in all areas of life. Activities promote the development of social skills, emotional growth, and physical coordination as well as cognitive preparation. The holistic curriculum, under the direction of a specially prepared teacher, allows the child to experience the joy of learning, time to enjoy the process and insure the development of self-esteem, and provides the experiences from which children create their knowledge.

The "Prepared Environment":

In order for self-directed learning to take place, the whole learning environment: room, materials and social climate; must be supportive of the learner. The teacher provides necessary resources, including opportunities for children to function in a safe and positive climate. The teacher thus gains the children's trust, which enables them to try new things and build self-confidence.

The Montessori Materials:

Dr. Montessori's observations of the kinds of things which children enjoy and go back to repeatedly lead her to design a number of multi-sensory, sequential and self-correcting materials which facilitate the learning skills and lead to learning of abstract Ideas.

The Teacher:

Originally called a “Directress,” the Montessori teacher functions as a designer of the environment, resource person, role model, demonstrator, record-keeper and meticulous observer of each child’s behavior and growth. The teacher acts as a facilitator of learning.

How Does It Work?

Each Montessori class operates on the principle of freedom within limits. Every program has its set of ground rules which differ from age group to age group, but is always based on core Montessori beliefs: respect of oneself, respect for each other, and respect for the environment.

Lessons are tailored to each child’s abilities and academic readiness. The teacher relies on his or her observations of the children to determine which new activities and materials may be introduced to an individual child or to a small group. The aim is to encourage active, self-directed learning and to strike a balance of individual mastery with small group collaboration within the whole group community. The three-year-age span in each class provides a family-like grouping where learning can take place naturally. More experienced children share what they have learned while reinforcing their own learning. Because this peer group learning is intrinsic to Montessori, there are often more conversation/language experiences in the Montessori classroom than in conventional early education settings.

How Can a “Real” Montessori Classroom Be Identified?

Since Montessori is a word in the public domain, it is possible for any individual or institution to claim to be Montessori. But, an authentic Montessori classroom must have these basic characteristics at all levels:

Teachers educated in the Montessori philosophy and methodology for the age level they are teaching, who have the ability and dedication to put the key concepts into practice and to establish a partnership with the family.

- A multi-aged, multi-graded heterogeneous grouping of students.
- A diverse set of Montessori materials, activities and experiences, which are designed to foster physical, intellectual, creative, and social independence.
- A schedule, which allows large blocks of time to problem solve, to see connections in knowledge, and to create new ideas.
- A classroom atmosphere, which encourages social interaction for cooperative learning, peer education, and emotional development.

Taken from the American Montessori Society home page