



Are you wondering what type of preschool is right for your child?

There are many different types of preschools out there and the Montessori Method is one option, here we try to highlight some of the fundamental differences between a Montessori and a Kindegarden/preschool environment.

The Montessori program

Philosophy

Founded by pediatrician / psychiatrist Maria Montessori in 1907, Montessori school programs (there are over 5,000 in North America) emphasize the importance and connection of all living things, and the need for each person to find meaningful work and his or her own place in the world. Children learn about other cultures, animals, and plants in addition to reading, language, and mathematical skills.

Teachers — or "Directress's," as they are called — take their lead from each child, whom they believe will learn at his or her own pace. Montessori programs encourage a child's sense of independence: Children are always asked if they want to try a task, if they need help doing it, or if they feel they aren't ready. Directress's also like to involve parents closely in their children's education — the teacher-student-parent bond is carefully cultivated.

What is the difference between Montessori and traditional methods of teaching?

In Montessori schools the child is seen as a dynamic learner, full of creative potential and in need of the maximum possible freedom to be allowed to develop as a happy, confident individual. Montessori schools therefore place emphasis on the importance of process. In more traditional schools children are seen to be in need of more active instruction and control from adults – there is less trust in the child's own inner abilities and more emphasis on ensuring very defined results. So Montessori schools are learner-centered, whereas traditional schools tend to be more teacher-centered.

In the classroom:

The Montessori curriculum focuses on five areas:

Practical Life:

Practical life Exercises are just that, they are Exercises so the child can learn how to do living activities in a purposeful way.

The purpose and aim of Practical Life is to help the child gain control in the coordination of his movement, and help the child to gain independence and adapt to his society. Practical Life Exercises also aid the growth and development of the child's intellect and concentration and will in turn also help the child develop an orderly way of thinking.



Sensorial:

The purpose and aim of Sensorial work is for the child to acquire clear, conscious, information and to be able to then make classifications in his environment. Montessori believed that sensorial experiences began at birth. Through his senses, the child studies his environment. Through this study, the child then begins to understand his environment. The child, to Montessori, is a "sensorial explorer".

Language:

When the child arrives in the Montessori classroom, he has fully absorbed his culture's language. He has already constructed the spoken language and with his entry into the classroom, he will begin to consolidate the spoken language and begin to explore the written forms of language.

Because language is an intricate involvement in the process of thinking, the child will need to be spoken to and listened to often. The child will need a broad exposure to language, with correct articulation, enunciation, and punctuation. The child will need to experience different modes of language and to hear and tell stories. Most importantly, the child needs to feel free and be encouraged to communicate with others.

To help the child in his development in language, the Montessori classroom is designed to help the child reach the 3rd period of consciousness. Because the learning of language is not done through subjects as in a normal classroom, the child is learning at his own rhythm. This allows the child to concentrate on the learning of each important step in language so that each progressive step is done easily and without any thought on the part of the child. The special material also plays an important role in aiding the child to develop the powers of communication and expression, of organization and classification, and the development of thought.

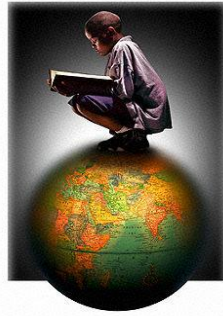
But the most important tool in the child's learning of language lies within the directress. She must support the child in his learning, give him order to classify what he has learned, to help the child build self-confidence, and to provide the child with meaningful activities. The directress is the child's best source in language development.

Mathematics

Work in the mathematics area of a 3-6 year old environment, is through hands on experience with concrete materials. These materials first develop the child's understanding and knowledge of concrete concepts and progressively moves the child onto more abstract numeric concepts. Within a Montessori environment, a child first gains an understanding and recognition of numbers 0-10 and then progressively works through all other numerical symbols and concepts.

Culture:

The Culture area in a Montessori environment encompasses famous artists, music, peace, science, botany, zoology and the celebration of various cultures, their location within the world and how they came to be. This area of the Montessori environment is really about engaging children in the arts and the acceptance and celebration of the broad cultural diversity around the world. Children are drawn to the Montessori Cultural materials as they have a natural curiosity about the world around them and are extremely inquisitive to know how the world works and where they fit into it.



All the disciplines are tied together in a complementary way. Toys and other developmentally appropriate learning materials are laid out in the classroom so a child can see what her choices are and then pick a task — called "work" — according to her interests. Work options include books, puzzle games, art projects, toys that test spatial relations, and more. When they're done, children put their work back on the shelves and move on to something else. The daily schedule allows time for children to play alone or in groups.

Directress's work with children as a group and one on one, but most of the interaction is among the children. In a Montessori school, teachers aren't the only instructors. Older kids often help younger ones learn how to master new skills. That's why each class usually includes children from a two- to three-year age span.

Nobody can say what is right for your Son/Daughter, but if you're thinking about Montessori here are a few of the basic goals of [Montessori Education](#):

--Building up concentration: A person learns best when they have the ability to concentrate. Uninterrupted work time is very important in the Montessori schedule. You might see a 3 year old focused on pouring seeds from one small pitcher to the other for a half hour. He's watching very closely as they do it. He might be focusing on the sounds and seeing if they sound different each time. He might be trying to steady his hand to pour perfectly to where they all come out in the same speed. He might be trying to balance it so one seed is left. It doesn't really matter. What you're seeing is a level of concentration that will carry over in to so many other areas.

--Believing in "I can do it myself." The teacher is not a "teacher" in the [Montessori classroom](#). The teacher takes hands off approach a lot more. They will teach, but for the most part, the learning is left up to the interaction with the materials. The child tries to go to the teacher to have the teacher tell them how to solve the problem. The teacher tells the student to "keep trying." Eventually, they get it. Now they have the confidence that they can master anything in the classroom given the appropriate time. They also learn a lot of creative ways to learn things.

--Freedom of movement in the classroom. The classroom in a Montessori school is not like a normal classroom. It really is the children's environment. They are free to move around and explore. As a result, they want to master what is in their environment and grow in it.

Frequently Asked Questions



How do Montessori schools view imaginative play?

Maria Montessori saw that there was a difference between truly creative imagination (based on reality) and fantasy (based on non-real events). When she watched children play she realised that they really wanted to be able to do real things in a real world, rather than just pretend. So Montessori schools really value imaginative play but will always try to help children work with real objects and situations.

How will my child fit in with a more traditional system after leaving Montessori nursery?

Montessori children tend to be very socially comfortable. Because they have been encouraged to problem-solve and think independently they are also happy, confident and resourceful. So they normally settle into very quickly and easily into new schools. In fact primary school teachers are often delighted to hear that your child has been in a Montessori school!

Are Montessori classrooms too structured?

Montessori discovered that structure was really important to help children feel safe and secure. She did a lot of experimentation to find out which, and how many, materials best suited the needs of the children. What she realised was that too much information was as bad as too little, and that children needed to be able to successfully build on their previous experiences. They could be overwhelmed with too many changing toys and options. So she carefully structured what was available. Montessori teachers, therefore, always watch the children to ensure that the right materials are available to support their individual interests and needs.

How is discipline dealt with in a Montessori school?

Montessori schools believe that discipline is something that should come from inside rather than something that is always imposed by others. They do not rely on rewards and punishments. By being allowed to be free in the environment, and learning to love and care for other people, the child develops confidence and control over his own behaviour. So Montessori teachers only step in when a child's behaviour is upsetting or disruptive to others. And then the child will be handled with deep respect and sensitivity. The belief is that the children are by nature loving and caring, and the emphasis is on helping them develop the vital social and emotional skills needed for participating in true community.

Does Montessori encourage creativity?

Montessorians believe that true creativity stems from individual freedom of expression. What you won't (or shouldn't) find in a Montessori school is 20 pieces of art to take home that all look the same! Your child will be encouraged to express him or herself through singing, dancing, acting, talking, drawing, painting, sticking, gluing, cutting, arranging and writing. What we know is that, unlike adults, children aren't really interested in the end result... they are much more interested in the fun and fascination of the creative process.



What kind of training do Montessori teachers have?

Montessori teachers tend to be people who really love being with children and who feel strongly about the importance of holistic approaches to learning. The philosophy often attracts more mature students, from very diverse backgrounds, who are disillusioned with conventional educational systems.

The training is comprehensive and includes: in-depth investigation of the Montessori philosophy and materials, exercises of practical life, education of the senses, literacy skills, mathematics, cultural Subjects, art and craft, music and movement, drama, child development, observation and assessment, contemporary issues, childcare and health, safety, nutrition and special needs.

Is Montessori still relevant?

Research shows us that, far from being old-fashioned and obsolete, Montessori's ideas are now being recognised by educationalists, cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists worldwide. Her emphasis on holistic learning with the importance of structure, intrinsic motivation, sociality and emotional intelligence were all ideas ahead of their time. She felt that it was education that lay at the root of social dis-function and that it was only by celebrating children as the hope of mankind, that we would ever be able to change the nature of society. Today Montessori education is wide spread in the world, predominantly in preschool education, however primary and secondary Montessori schools are now more common.

Finally

Children who spend their time in Montessori schools learn to think of the world as an exciting place full of possibilities. They begin to know themselves as powerful people who can do all sorts of things for themselves. They think of adults as helpful friends who are always there if needed, but who never try to overly interfere or control their activities. This is because Montessori teachers really respect young children as individuals and treat them as dynamic natural learners.

Your Montessori child will come home buzzing with ideas about what has gone on in the day or what is likely to go on tomorrow! From cookery projects, to learning about the life-cycle of butterflies, to the joy of discovering the skills of counting and writing.

It is really helpful, therefore, if parents can provide home environments that support this burgeoning confidence and creative curiosity. Your child needs you to slow down to his or her timetable, to spend time sharing the things that he is excited about or interested in. Depending on the projects they are studying many Montessori children become incredibly knowledgeable about such things as the different types of beetle, the shapes of leaves or the names of geometric shapes! It can be crushing if a mum and dad are too busy or tired to share in their child's new knowledge or excitement.

At school Montessori children can access all the things they need without the help of adults. They may want to draw, cut, stick, count, write, make books, build towers or read. At school they learn that everything can be found in its own place and that it helps others if things get put back again in the same place. So Montessori children tend to be pretty thoughtful about others and tidy.

If you can provide the same thing at home it will help your child to maintain the same level of consideration and independence. Special cupboards and shelves, all easily accessible, and beautiful materials and activities, all carefully laid out in boxes and trays, help the child feel that his or her work really matters. Many of the activities that are provided at school can easily be duplicated in the home. And if you ask your child's teachers they will let you know what things your child is particularly interested in at the time. One of the most important things we can do for children is to follow their interests - to really know what they are excited about and to provide as much support and further activities as possible for them to explore and understand.



We live in a world that is full of pressures and external expectations. The early years of life are recognised as the very foundation upon which everything else follows. Each child is full of natural curiosity and the desire to learn and needs only to be set free within the right environment. This way of learning is characterised by a concentration and passion that is rarely ever exhibited in adult life. Montessorians think that this is the most important quality that we can preserve in our children.

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Further information: <http://www.montessoriworld.org/>

Books on Montessori Education:

Britton, Lesley – Montessori play and learn a parent's guide to Purposeful play from two to six.

East Melbourne : Text Publishing 1992

Lillard, Paula Polk – Montessori from the start:: the child at home from birth to age 3. New York:schoken Books, 2003

Hainstock, Elizabeth– The essential Montessori. New York

NPlume 1997

