



Montessori: Frequently Asked Questions

How will my child's education at Montessori compare to a student from a traditional environment?

The basic aid to education in a Montessori school is to follow the natural development of the child. From three- to six years, the child is in a highly sensorial period of learning. They are absorbed with how things appear, taste, sound and feel. In the Montessori classroom, these senses are challenged with objects from nature and specially designed equipment. A child must first understand the real world before they can grasp abstract concepts such as math, reading and science.

Through manipulative materials, all concepts are brought from the concrete to the abstract. For example, a young child manipulates small golden beads representing units of numbers, ten connected golden beads representing the ten bar, ten connected bars representing the hundred square, and ten stacked squares representing the thousand cube. In this experience, a child can understand the concept of the hierarchies of numbers (units, tens, hundreds, and thousands).

This concrete material is used to teach all the operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division). During the process of the operation, the child writes the problem in its abstract form. Eventually, the child exclaims, "I can do this problem without materials!".

Education through the senses and hands-on experiences are two of the major differences in Montessori education and the traditional approach. We invite parents to visit a classroom to observe the children discovering these ideas.

What are some benefits that my child will receive from attending a Montessori school?

The primary goal of a Montessori school is to create an environment so that each day a child enters, it is like an adventure. The early years are so important for nurturing the eagerness to learn and witnessing the joy of discovery. Mixed age classrooms present a wide range of curriculum which is available as the child is naturally drawn from one interest to another. Some of the benefits that children receive from their Montessori experience are the following:

Learning how to get along with others, how to communicate feelings and ideas, and how to work together as a team are some of the areas our students 'practice' in their character development.

Self-esteem or confidence emerges as students gain skills in specific tasks. In the Montessori classroom, students are given presentations in every new skill. Through lots of repetition and encouragement; the child becomes more capable and there is a motivation to strive for excellence. Too often students are pushed into competition before gaining the skill to succeed, leading to discouragement and frustration.



Montessori students are taught how to do things themselves. Even the smallest children can dress and feed themselves, and move things about to take care of their own needs. By observing the students working around them, they learn to ask for assistance from others when necessary and are eager to give assistance when asked. This independence and interdependence creates a harmonious community, which is always noticed by visitors to our classrooms.

Discovery is the key to 'keeping' what has just been learned. If a child is given the opportunity to discover how a concept works, rather than simply being told it is so, we feel it is a lesson learned for life.

So our students discover how a new plant comes from a seed that dies. They discover what the '0' means in a number quantity and how there are 60 seconds in each minute.

The Montessori guide allows for these discoveries rather than jumping in too soon to give the answers.

Physical coordination is a series of exercises in movement. Montessori students practice coordination in the way they move about the classroom choosing exercises, carrying weighted materials, and negotiating around tables, rugs, and other children. Trays of activities are carried to tables where the students explore them. Then the trays are returned to the shelves and another activity is chosen. This is their work time that improves the body as well as the mind.

There are two basic rules in Montessori classrooms: 1. You cannot hurt anyone and 2. You cannot hurt anything.

So that means the students cannot hit, bite, push, intimidate, embarrass, or slander another student or teacher. That would hurt them. Likewise, they cannot break pencils, tear pages, kick chairs, or write on tables because that would be damaging something. The code of conduct teaches respect and responsibility that are core values our students practice on a daily basis.

Skills learned in the Montessori classrooms help students throughout their academic careers. Students learn:

- Problem solving
- Effective communication
- Time management
- Creativity through art, music, and storytelling





When will my child learn how to read?

Learning to read begins when a child is born and she hears the voices of her parents. The child is listening between birth and age 2. When a child first joins a Montessori program, the child learns the phonetic sounds of the letters as they use the sandpaper letters and other Montessori materials which isolate the sounds at the beginning of words such as 'a' as in 'apple'. They then begin to put the letters together to 'write' words by sounding them out. Then the letters become words that are familiar to them. Reading words usually begins after they have 'build' (spelled) words several times. Reading skills grow and develop over time as the child acquires an understanding and usage of the increasing difficulties of the English language. Reading books may not come until the child associates the reading of words to communicating ideas. This is a very spontaneous period. Maria Montessori calls it an 'explosion into reading'.

It is important to remember that not all children read at the same age. Some may not begin until age 6 or more. Being patient for this to take place is one of the difficulties for parents, and sometimes teachers. Pushing a child too fast through the stages of reading may cause anxiety and frustration or even the delay in attempting to read.

Why is my child scrubbing tables as a part of their education?

Preschool students (ages 2 to 6 years) scrub tables because water and bubbles intrigue them. Nature calls to them to explore and discover if there is too much water; it drips. If there is too much soap; it takes longer to rinse and dry. They are totally absorbed in the process. Attention to this process is focusing. Learning to concentrate and complete a task is a goal of the practical life activities provided in the Montessori preschool classroom. Through many similar exercises, the student is exploring the transformation and how they can control it.

An elementary student (ages 6 and up) scrubs the table because it needs to be cleaned. Children in a Montessori setting are responsible for their environment. They do not proceed to another exercise without completing the last, which includes cleaning up after themselves.

Why is there no homework in the Montessori environment?

Note: Not all Montessori schools share the same philosophy, and it may vary for children of advanced grades. The following comments specifically relate to younger Montessori students. The highly specialized equipment used in the Montessori classrooms serves the purpose of allowing the student to experience a concept through hands on activities. Since the materials cannot be taken home, it is a thing to be enjoyed and respected in the environment under the guidance of the teacher.

Students learn to manage their time in the classroom. Completing assignments on time is a practice in responsibility. The teacher's role is to give direction to the students, and to then allow them to have the success or failure of completing their tasks. Experience is the best teacher. Better it is learned at a young age rather than at the university level.





Parents are encouraged to give 'homework' as it was done in the early 1900's. Such chores as sweeping, washing, mopping, planting, weeding, harvesting, cooking, baking, sewing, sawing, hammering, caring for animals are just as important in educating for life. Take your children to the library, the museums, the symphony, the country, the city, the zoo, on trips to historical places, to visit old people.

Include them in planning a vacation, a garden, or the family entertainment. The best homework is done through life experiences, like shopping for a bargain through price comparison or explaining why the cookies burned on the bottom while staying mushy on the top. Life is full of teachable moments that the Montessori program uses to enrich the students' knowledge.

Will my child be able to successfully transition into a traditional classroom environment?

There is a normal adjustment period as the student learns a new structure and makes new friends, but it is generally no more difficult than transitioning to a new classroom. Children who have been in a Montessori environment are usually very adaptable. They have confidence in their abilities, they know how to solve problems, they have learned respect for rules and, most importantly, they love to learn. A child with these skills is capable of succeeding in any environment.

Will my child be well socialized as a result of her Montessori education?

Absolutely! Being well socialized is one of most important aspects of a Montessori education. Students learn how to communicate feelings and thoughts with others. Becoming socialized begins when one learns to communicate and respect others.

