

Montessori Education Defined

Educator explains the ins and outs of the Montessori approach

By Julie Bragdon, M.Ed.



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As a Montessori educator and parent, friends, family members and other acquaintances often ask me, "What exactly is Montessori?" Here are a few responses I give, which I hope will explain the wonders of [Montessori education](#) developed by Dr. Maria Montessori that are time-tested with over 100 years of success worldwide.

1. The Montessori approach to education is child-centered. Children are free to choose materials that appeal to them. We know students learn effortlessly if they are engaged and interested. Montessori teachers tailor lessons to capitalize on each student's ability and demonstrated interest.

2. Each child is encouraged to reach his or her full potential in all areas of classroom life; there is no ceiling on the curriculum. Each child works independently and is able to maintain momentum without having to keep pace with any other child.
3. Montessori **teachers** do not dominate the classroom but rather act as gentle guides. They are encouraging and give students personal, meaningful feedback. False praise and extrinsic rewards are damaging to children and have no place in a Montessori classroom.
4. Montessori classrooms use special materials that are beautiful, hands-on and designed to help children develop concentration and work through the process of learning. These materials introduce concepts in concrete terms, which then enable abstract learning and reasoning when developmentally appropriate. Dr. Montessori deliberately designed her materials so that children can spot their own errors, self-assess and complete tasks on their own, gaining self-sufficiency and independence. Errors are viewed as part of the learning process rather than things to be ashamed of (Montessori, 1967). We believe that mistakes are critical to learning and often highlight our own mistakes in the classroom for students to see.
5. Montessori students work in a variety of settings and contexts, from working alone in a quiet classroom to applying lessons learned out in the fields with peers, which encourages social and academic growth. It features a variety of learning situations; this keeps negotiation and leadership skills sharp and requires students to exercise flexible thinking strategies, a skill we know they will need for future success.
6. A fundamental belief of the Montessori Method is that children learn best within a social environment that supports and respects each child's unique development—a comfortable setting filled with developmentally appropriate materials and experiences that contribute to the growth of self-motivated, independent learners. We are social creatures and want to teach others what we know (Lieberman, 2013).
7. Immersion learning, independent investigation and multisensory instruction are all part of the Montessori classroom. Montessori students learn in a variety of ways so that new information can be stored in multiple ways.
8. Montessori students are free to move about the classroom at will, to walk to get a drink when they need it, to talk to a friend about an exciting new idea or maybe even to do a math lesson graphing how far each first-year elementary student can jump. Dr. Montessori believed that movement and learning were rooted together, a concept backed up by current brain research on what is called "embodied cognition" (Bennett, 2008).

I hope the principles of Montessori education that I've outlined here will inspire you to want to learn more. For additional information on Montessori education, visit the American Montessori Society's website at amshq.org.

References

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