

What is Montessori Education?

Rooted in neuroscience and human development, Montessori education begins with the premise that children are naturally curious, learn from their surroundings, and desire increasing levels of independence. Recognizing that children are intrinsically capable, Montessori teachers create a classroom environment that cultivates confidence and empowers children to master the array of academic and social skills that will serve them not only in future educational settings, but throughout life.

By design, Montessori classrooms incorporate several core elements that work in concert with one another to optimize each child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Because these elements are interdependent, they must all be present and well supported for a classroom to be Montessori. Having a Montessori credentialed teacher leading every classroom is critical to ensuring that all of these core components are implemented.

A Prepared Environment

All aspects of the classroom including furniture, materials, and supplies are thoughtfully designed for and accessible to children, making all elements of the classroom integral components of a child's education. Ensuring that children have what they need to function independently builds confidence and allows them to take ownership in caring for their classroom community. An aesthetically pleasing environment draws children in to explore all that the classroom has to offer.

Materials

A full complement of carefully sequenced and scaffolded Montessori materials allows children to build skills, knowledge, confidence, and mastery of academic concepts that align with and go beyond accepted educational standards such as Common Core. Children receive lessons individually or in small groups, affording the teacher the opportunity to observe each child's comprehension and offer individualized supports.

3-Year Mixed Age Groups

Across certain age bands, children share multiple developmental characteristics. As such, Montessori classrooms intentionally group children together in specific three-year age groups. Younger children learn from their older peers and are motivated by observing their activities. Simultaneously, older children develop leadership skills and have concepts reinforced as they assist younger classmates. Children are often able to problem solve independent of the teacher because a community of peer support is fostered. Spending three years in the same classroom provides children the opportunity to experience the benefits of being the youngest and the oldest during their time in the classroom. In addition, spending three years in the same multi-age classroom allows children's cognitive, social-emotional and other skills to develop at a pace that is right for each child.

Higher Adult-Child Ratios and Group Sizes

The Montessori classroom is a dynamic learning environment with multiple activities occurring simultaneously. Because the entire classroom is designed to facilitate children's independence and sense of capability, adults are not needed to manage every situation or sustain the attention of the entire class at the same time. Larger class sizes are intentional because they give children greater agency over their own learning and foster independence; all of the components outlined above support optimal child development with larger class sizes and adult:child ratios.

Uninterrupted Learning Time

Developing focus, concentration, and a sustained attention span undergird children's present and future learning. Offering children open ended time to engage with educational materials bolsters children's skills in these areas.

A High Degree of Freedom

Children in a Montessori classroom have significant freedom to choose which learning activities they use each day, where and how much time they spend with any particular material. This freedom honors the child's own interests, abilities, and internal pace, allowing them to focus on a given concept until they feel confident with it, or dive more deeply into a subject they are passionate about. Within this environment of choice, teachers ensure that children engage with all subject material and acquire developmentally appropriate academic and social emotional skills.

Montessori Teacher Preparation

All of the above components can only be well implemented and supported by an individual who is prepared for teaching using the Montessori philosophy and curriculum, namely a person holding a credential issued by an AMI or AMS affiliated or a MACTE accredited teacher education program. Montessori teacher preparation includes extensive studies in child development, instructional methods (including differentiated instruction) and curriculum, classroom management, and culturally responsive methods, all within the context of a Montessori classroom. In addition, the coursework encompasses family relationships and professional standards for Montessori teachers plus a supervised student teaching experience. At a minimum, these intensive preparation courses are the equivalent of 32 hours of college coursework in early childhood education.

Research on the Effectiveness of Montessori Education

An Evaluation of Montessori Education in South Carolina's Public Schools

"Researchers matched Montessori students to non-Montessori students with the same demographics and similar baseline academic performance. These matched analyses provided evidence that Montessori students experienced greater achievement growth in ELA, math, and social studies. Further, the benefits of Montessori extend beyond standardized test scores."

Montessori Preschool Elevates and Equalizes Child Outcomes: A Longitudinal Study

A 3-year longitudinal study of children admitted through randomized lottery to public Montessori schools in a high-poverty American city. Montessori preschool elevated children's outcomes in several ways including measures of academic achievement, social understanding, and mastery orientation. They also reported relatively more liking of scholastic tasks.