

## **The Method Behind Montessori**

What's behind the Montessori Method? Would my child be successful in this unique and ever-so-growing educational classroom style? Ahead of her time, Dr. Maria Montessori, the Italian physician, founded this child-centered philosophy over 100 years ago.

The Montessori Method is designed to create optimal learning environments specific to the needs of the child. It allows the opportunity for students to become independent workers as well as learning how to work in groups with people of different learning styles and personalities. They are able to build their self-confidence through positive interactions with children and adults.

Communication skills and problem solving techniques are improved because Montessori classrooms are not silent work environments; there is a busy hum of activity as students go about their business of learning and interacting. Children are moving about in a calm and cooperative manner making decisions and sharing ideas and information with each other. Children teach other children in a three year mixed-age group. Younger students obviously benefit by being taught by older students, however, studies have indicated that older students may benefit even more by teaching their younger classmates. These older students' self-esteem and leadership skills are enhanced and their own learning is reinforced.

All of this is going on in a classroom that is entirely "hands-on". Dr. Montessori created hundreds of manipulative learning materials that allow children from the age of three to participate in concrete experiences in math, geometry, reading, science, geography, and history in a developmentally appropriate way. All this growth takes place in a supportive, non-pressured way that allows children to progress at their own pace and enjoy learning!

Dr. Montessori began her work with young children ages three through six, however, her work expanded into elementary and adolescent years. Due to the success of her method, today there are thousands of Montessori schools throughout the world. Many schools now offer a Montessori environment through middle school, and in some cases, high school.

When visiting a Montessori school, how does a parent know what questions to ask in order to determine if the Montessori Method is right for their child and to be reassured that the school they are visiting actually follows this method? A few fundamental elements make up the foundation of a good Montessori program. First, it is important to see if the classrooms are fully equipped with Montessori materials. In addition, Montessori classrooms should be physically attractive, organized, and have a variety of space available for children to work on tables and the floor. Second, there should be the three year age mixture; in general the first level should be 3-6 years of age, then 6-9, 9-12, 12-15, and 15-18 years of age. A school may have infants and toddlers which are typically grouped by birth-18 months and then 18 months-3 years.

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Third, parents should ask if the teachers are certified by a MACTE accredited Montessori teacher training center. The two largest Montessori organizations in America that train teachers are the American Montessori Society (AMS) [www.amshq.org](http://www.amshq.org) and the Association Montessori International (AMI) [www.ami-usa.org](http://www.ami-usa.org). A good Montessori school is usually affiliated with one of these or another MACTE-approved Montessori organization.

Determining if the Montessori Method is right for your child may involve not only visiting and asking those questions, but also observing a classroom when children are actually working. This will allow a parent to see how the method works and determine if it would be a match to their child's learning style and needs. This will also allow the parent to get a sense of the "atmosphere" of the school; it should be positive, peaceful, and nurturing. In addition, examine your goals and expectations of the educational experiences you would like your child to have. This unique learning environment offers a different type of learning setting, but it also results in very different outcomes.

Students who complete their school years in a Montessori environment emerge as unique young people. They have learned how to learn. They are usually self-assured, kind, and respectful young leaders. They are thinkers who ask questions. They are independent learners, capable of managing their time and meeting goals. They are highly creative individuals who will follow their passions and think *outside of the box*. They are excellent communicators who are able to problem solve and work well with all kinds of people. If these are the types of educational goals you would like for your child, then Montessori would be a good choice for your family. Visit a Montessori school near you to begin the exploration of this time-tested method known for providing excellent learning environments in a non-traditional way.