



# Common Questions and Answers about the Montessori Method

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**Introduction**

Welcome to our school, we are delighted and honored to share with you a few of the common questions we are asked every day about the Montessori Method. We have derived our answers primarily from our many years of working in a Montessori environment and from a variety of books we have read and trainings in which we have participated.

**Questions and Answers:**

Where did the Montessori Method originate?

This approach was developed by Maria Montessori (1870—1952) a philosopher, physician, and teacher at the turn of the century. She was the first female doctor in Italy and worked with socially deprived children in the slums. She soon discovered that her philosophy was effective with all children.

What are the major differences between the Montessori Method and traditional early child hood classrooms?

Traditional classrooms are usually teacher directed, group oriented, subjective and often punitive. In the Montessori classroom, the teacher is the guide, the lessons are individualized, the child is intrinsically motivated to do work and mistakes are accepted and the child is able to correct it himself.

The teacher's training is also a huge difference. Montessorians are trained to educate the "whole child". Learning incorporates not only academics but also social skills, emotional growth, physical coordination and ways for children to create self generated knowledge about the world. Students are guided according to individual needs.

### What is the Montessori Method?

There are 3 general parts:

A. *Preparation of the Environment:*

The classroom feels orderly, calm, inviting and interesting. It is set up to be the "children's house" everything is child sized and at their level, including sinks, tables and chairs. The materials on the shelves are designed to attract children and an appeal to their senses. They are used in a specific sequence and are self correcting.

B. *Observation of each child:*

Montessorians are trained to understand the developmental stages of children. They allow for each child's pace and abilities. They guide each child's learning according to observations of his/her mental, physical and psychological needs.

C. *Freedom within limits:*

The Montessori environment and method allows for movement, choice and socialization. But with that freedom, there are definite rules associated with respect, good conduct, and self-control.

### What subject areas are taught?

As in traditional schools, language and mathematics are fundamentals of the Montessori classroom. However the environment also offers considerable curriculum enrichment in what is termed "cultural areas. These include History, Geography, Zoology, Botany and Geometry.

Because of the nature of the Montessori materials and environment and consistency of being in the same classroom for three years, a child has the opportunity to more systematically build knowledge.

"Practical life" is another specialized curriculum area in Montessori environments. It will include but will not be limited to; learning to tie button and zip as well as pour polish and clean. Though these activities vary, they also often incorporate gardening sewing, knitting, using hand tools, table setting, using a compass, reading a map and cooking.

### How do I know if a Montessori School is really a Montessori school?

This is a good question because the name "Montessori" is not legally protected. The short answer is, ask if the teachers are certified and then ask where they got their certification, if it is from a program and holds the "MACTE" seal of approval or is AMS or AMI then they should be upholding the Montessori standard.

### What happens in a typical day?

Often after arrival children sit in a circle or an ellipse for a group meeting. The teacher takes this opportunity to set the tone for the day. The agenda may vary: singing, exchanging news, reminders, birthday celebrations, etc.

Next the children typically go to “work”. Work takes place throughout the room; at tables, on small rugs or a special work stations. Students are free to move respectfully around the environment. Choosing work consists of self-initiated repetition or exploration of materials.

### What are some examples of the materials?

- *Binomial Cube*: a cube made of colored blocks. It shows how a cube can be divided and subdivided, laying the foundation for the algebraic equation  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ .
- *Brown Stairs*: a sequence of brown bars which provide children the opportunity to distinguish “width” with their hands. This is always a set of ten pieces to set the ground work for our “base 10” math system, similar to the pink tower and the red rods.
- *Color Tablets*: colored plastic tablets with colors used to initially learn color names and later to sequence their hues.
- *Constructive triangles*: a set of colored triangles which allows experimentation with three sided shapes, discovering how they can be built into other shapes.
- *Control Maps*: used with puzzle maps, they provide the names for the puzzle pieces representing states and countries. Students often trace color and label maps for the geography curriculum.
- *Hundreds Board*: numbered tiles placed on a board in various sequences to practice number 1-100.
- *Knobbed Cylinders*: round, wood cylinders differing in diameter.
- *Land and water forms*: a series of tools used to show the relationship of land and water forms. Examples: lake/island, gulf/peninsula, bay/cape, strait isthmus etc.
- *Golden Beads*: gold colored beads used to illustrate quantity. Children learn what 1, 10, 100 & 1000 look like and use these skills to do math.
- *Moveable alphabet*: a wooden box containing every letter in the alphabet plus punctuation. Consonants are blue and vowels are pink. Children compose words and then sentences with this alphabet.

There are many more materials with educational objectives, so many it would be difficult to list them all. If you have a question about a specific work, please ask!

### What about art, physical education foreign languages and music in the Montessori classroom?

Maria Montessori believed these should all be inclusive, not separate in the

curriculum. Therefore you will often see these taught individually, through work or in a group lesson.

### What about snack?

Snack is considered a practical life activity and usually it is eaten at a small table where 2 or 3 children can eat at one time. Children have the opportunity to follow directions, prepare food, count, socialize and clean, as well as eat!

### Why don't I see the teacher when I come into a classroom?

Montessori teachers are trained to place themselves at eye level with the students. You will often see Montessori teachers seated on the floor with their students or in a chair next to them. The focus of the environment is never about the adults in the room.

### How do Montessori students transition into mainstream classrooms?

When children stay in Montessori through their Kindergarten year they do well. Their brains are moving from concrete thinking to abstract thinking and therefore the tradition pen/paper activities are easier for them. The Montessori student will be an active learner, seeking information.

### How can Montessori be implemented at home?

The core of Montessori is respect and support for a child's inner quest for learning. To implement that kind of learning does not require special classes, toys or equipment. It does require time, attention and awareness and the modeling of respect, enthusiasm, and patience.

### How can the Montessori philosophy be implemented in parenting?

One of Dr. Montessori's renowned quotes is "follow the child". That does not mean give over your authority to the child. Nor should they have free reign. Children need the security and structure of consistent, firm and wise adult guidance. For Montessori teachers "follow the child" means accommodating individualized learning in the classroom. For parents it simply means to be watchful for those special gifts that a child brings to the world, and to give space, attention and support to nurture those gifts. Allow children choices when appropriate. Encourage self sufficiency by designing age-appropriate practice in gardening, cooking, cleaning and repairing activities.

### Is Montessori for every child?

The Montessori environment requires student to be capable of control and cooperation in order to successfully handle the freedom and responsibility of this teaching method.

### What about Discipline?

Ground rules are discussed and enforced from the first day of school. Students, with teacher guidance, are often invited to be creators of these rules. Rules generally can be categorized under having impulse control, showing consideration and being responsible. All of these are based on the primary rule of respect: respect for the classroom, friends, teachers, visitors and self.

Consequences from breaking the rules usually consist of first re-directing the student toward proper conduct. Next the student will lose the right to choose and move in the classroom. Lastly, the teacher may ask for a parent/teacher conference.

### Why are the classrooms multiage grouped?

Older children act as mentors and models for younger children. This helps with the normalization of the classroom, in other words children can observe expected/acceptable behavior. It also allows for balance, we try to have equal numbers of older/younger and boy/girls in the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

In the end, the best way to understand Montessori is to immerse yourself in the environment, come and spend a morning with us we would love to have you as our guest and answer all the additional questions you may have.