

12 Ways
MONTESSORI
SCHOOLS
ARE DIFFERENT
from Traditional Classrooms



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MONTESSORI
AMERICAN SCHOOL

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What makes Montessori different from other schools?

In the complex world of childcare options, it can be difficult to know where your child will thrive. Many parents consider sending their children to Montessori classrooms, but they want to know how the Montessori approach to learning is different from what they might find in a traditional setting. This 12-point guide highlights some of the key ways that the Montessori approach is distinctive.

12 Ways Montessori Schools are Different from Traditional Classrooms

Respect for Children as Unique Individuals



The core of the Montessori philosophy revolves around our firm respect for each child.

Montessori classrooms are deeply invested in the social and emotional development of every student. The Montessori approach to learning assumes that children learn in different ways at individualized paces. Young learners master skills at their own rate and the unique Montessori learning environment lets them advance as they are ready.

Montessori classrooms do not label some children and not others as “gifted.” We understand the specialness of each and every child in

the classroom. Montessori teachers help students learn for themselves by showing them how to perform tasks and encouraging them to learn at their own pace. By giving children choices, the Montessori classroom acknowledges their unique interests and tastes. We let children decide where they would like to focus their energies and concentration — and we understand that these choices change throughout the day. That’s why we provide a variety of learning centers, group and solo activities, as well as quiet and communicative time. We focus on developing the total child — his or her social skills, emotional growth, physical coordination, and cognitive abilities — and we do this by recognizing and respecting the unique personalities and mental traits each child brings to the classroom.

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12 Ways Montessori Schools are Different from Traditional Classrooms

Independence

Montessori classrooms place a high value on independent learning. Students are encouraged to reach their highest potential at their own individual pace. In traditional classrooms, students follow the same lessons — leaving some children behind while others pull ahead.

In Montessori classrooms, students don't have to keep pace with others. They set their own learning agendas, challenging themselves when they're ready.

The learning materials first designed by Dr. Montessori encourage young learners to assess their own learning progress and spot errors. In this way, they develop greater self-sufficiency and personal independence, which leads to an internal sense of purpose and motivation. We want our children to be able to do things for themselves, and in this way we give them many opportunities to do just that. Montessori classrooms allow students to choose which activity they would like to do, to help adults with tasks, to dress themselves, and to move about the classroom as they fit.



Being able to do things for themselves helps children develop a confidence they will carry all their lives. In Montessori classrooms, independence is an ongoing and organic process. As a child learns to pour water, put on his own shoes, or clean her own work space, he or she becomes a more independent individual.

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Varied Learning Styles

The Montessori philosophy assumes that all children are born intelligent. We believe that an individual child's learning style is as unique as his or her personality and each child learns in his or her own way at his or her own rate.

Montessori classrooms are conscious of these innate differences, and that's why we provide a wide variety of settings and activities to appeal to each child's interests. We offer learning centers where lessons can be completed alone or in small groups, as well as fieldwork excursions led by an instructor where children learn as a class. This variety not only ensures that each child's unique learning needs are being met, but it also helps young learners develop flexible thinking strategies. Montessori classrooms have high expectations for all students, **not a select few**.



Once a child masters a new skill, he or she is encouraged to progress to the next level. In this way, he sets his own pace for learning; she discovers what holds her interests.

In Montessori classrooms, children set the rate for their own advancement. They demonstrate what engages them and show us what they find fascinating. We don't tell children how to learn but instead let their natural intelligence guide them to the varied activities available in the classroom.

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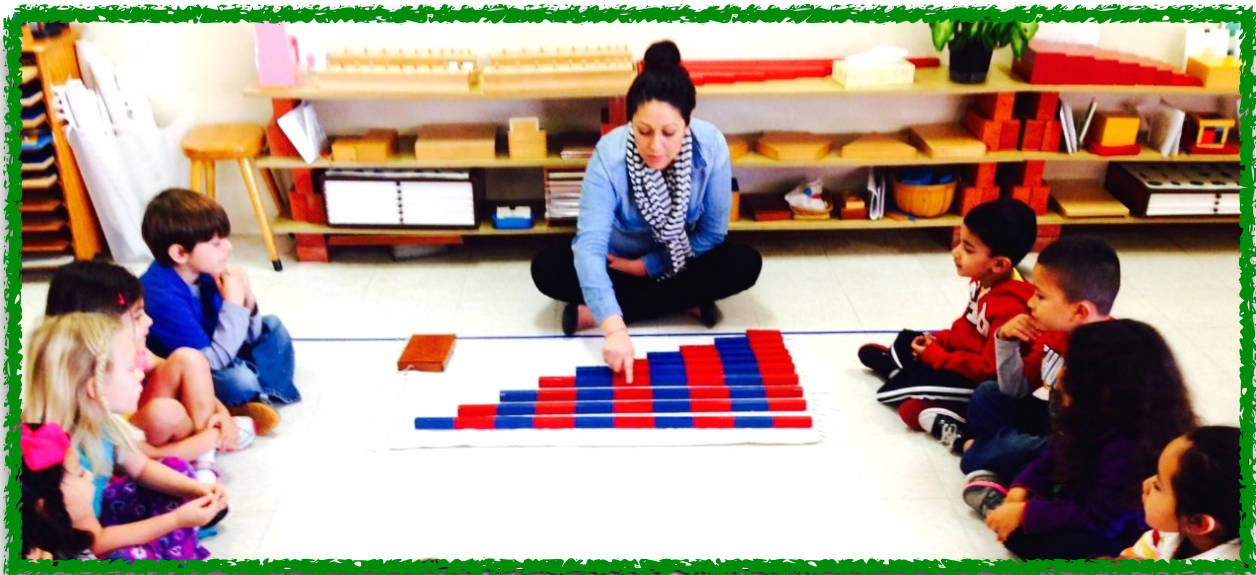
Teachers as Guides

The Montessori method holds that classroom teachers are collaborative members of the learning process. You will not find our instructors standing in front of the classroom giving a lecture. Instead of dominating the classroom, they act as guides in a child's developmental journey.

Our teachers offer personal and meaningful feedback to each child and never dispense false praise. Montessori teachers do not rely on harsh discipline or control to maintain a child's focus. Instead, they encourage learning both individually and in small groups as they work with children. They also lead large group activities and circle time.

By taking this non-traditional role, Montessori instructors make room for students to manage their own classroom experience. This allows children to develop their positions in the classroom community and encourages them to hone their leadership and independence skills. Our instructors facilitate learning, but a child's individual passion leads his or her learning process.

The Montessori philosophy puts faith in children to show us what they need to learn at any given moment. We believe that they understand where they are in their development and can best identify which activities will challenge their skills. Montessori teachers know and respect this, and so work alongside children to best direct their activities.



Mistakes are Part of the Learning Process



In the Montessori curriculum, we think that mistakes are part of the learning process. We teach students not to be embarrassed or ashamed by the errors they make. We want students to learn in a natural, human way and we think that rewarding perfection is not the best approach. Our teachers often use their own mistakes as learning moments in the classroom so that children can see that even adults are not perfect.

As we all know, the experience of childhood is filled with small errors like spilling water or dropping food. Instead of raising their voices or scolding the child, Montessori teachers use these moments as lessons.

They identify the mistake and then go about solving it with the child. For instance, a teacher might say, "It looks like you spilled water on the floor. Let's clean it up together." Children who are constantly corrected in more traditional classrooms may develop a fear of speaking up or trying new things. In the Montessori method, we believe that children use their own errors to learn. A child who is learning to drink from a cup and tilts the cup back too far, spilling water on himself, will learn the mistake right away. There's no need to point it out to the child; he can feel the water he spilled. Similarly, if a child mispronounces a word, the teacher will simply pronounce the word correctly. The child will hear her mistake and learn from the moment.

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Social Classrooms

The Montessori approach believes that children learn best in a social environment. We think that a comfortable classroom filled with developmentally appropriate materials open to exploration is the best way to encourage each child's unique development. Children are born with individual personalities and these personalities develop and grow as they interact with others, especially other children. In the Montessori classroom, young learners spend much of their day socializing with other students. This helps them grow both their interpersonal skills and independence.



How is this social classroom achieved? Through something we call “liberty within limits.” While children are free to explore and learn from a variety of activities, they are not permitted to run wild. We foster grace and courtesy in all our students, and we encourage them to use “please” and “thank you” as they socialize with others in the classroom setting. Students can work together in small groups at the learning stations throughout the classroom, and everyone gathers together in a large group for circle time. During this activity, children share stories about their own lives and learn how to listen to both the other students and the teacher with respect and consideration.

Other large group activities that call for socializing include singing, dancing, and playing games together.

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Unique Learning Environment

Montessori classrooms are intended to be exciting and fascinating places where children love to learn. We use natural lighting and soft colors, keep our spaces uncluttered, and arrange materials on open shelves so that children can access them easily. We believe that a harmonious, ordered, and calm classroom encourages learning.



Because we place such an emphasis on personal choice, Montessori classrooms are divided into different sections for various activities. There are quiet corners for solo learning projects and larger areas where students can work together in groups. A child might choose to sit for a time in the space devoted to peace and reflection or curl up in the classroom's library on a soft floor cushion. He or she might investigate the Language Arts or Math areas for a lesson on vocabulary words or counting.



What you won't find in a Montessori classroom is rows of desks. We believe that children thrive in warm and inviting learning environments, and to this end you'll find our classrooms filled with rugs, flowers, and comfortable furniture. Students work at tables built to their height or on colorful mats on the floor. We don't display pictures of cartoon characters or movie stars. Our walls are covered with framed photographs or posters from the local museum, as well as students' artwork.



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Specialized Materials

Montessori classrooms use special materials that are uniquely designed to encourage the learning process. We don't rely on texts or workbooks, but instead employ a range of beautiful, hands-on tools that foster a deep sense of concentration and a curiosity about the world. Many of the materials found in Montessori classrooms seek to teach lessons especially important for young learners, like how to tie a bow or fasten buttons.

Our learning materials are made from a variety of elements, like polished wood or enameled metal, and we like to use items from the natural world in our classrooms such as sea shells and fossils. These tools have a variety of unique textures and can be used for exploratory activities like sorting.

Our materials appeal to all the senses and encourage children to use their abilities to look, taste, touch, smell, and listen. For instance, many classrooms have sound cylinders filled with different materials — sand, rice, beans. Children are encouraged to close their eyes and sort the cylinders based on sound. Which has the softest sound? Which is the loudest? These sound cylinders, like other materials in the Montessori classroom, can be adapted to a variety of lessons. A student might explore them on his or her own, the teacher might give a lesson around these materials, or a student might work with other children to sort and classify the sounds.



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Instinctive and Active Learning



The Montessori curriculum emphasizes our belief that children gain knowledge instinctively through active learning. Our educational approach is hands-on, experiential, and investigative. Children don't wait passively to be taught. Instead, they seek out their own lessons and follow their own passions. We don't practice information drills or rote memorization. Children are free to choose the materials they would like to work with and lessons are constructed to appeal to a child's unique abilities and enthusiasms with a special emphasis on puzzles and problem-solving.

We believe that a child who is fully engaged learns effortlessly. This is why Montessori classrooms offer a wide variety of activities and materials — there are many ways of learning and information sharing. Our approach emphasizes immersion learning, independent investigation, and multi-sensory instruction. Moreover, we believe in embodied education, the philosophy that movement and learning are tied together. Our students are free to move through the classroom as they see fit. If they want a drink of water, they help themselves. If they would like to share something they've learned with a friend, they're encouraged to go to that friend. Traditional classrooms often emphasize disembodied education — seated, book learning. We believe that an ability to move about the classroom encourages the deep concentration that is at the core of the Montessori philosophy.

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Community



At Montessori schools, we believe that a strong community is at the heart of a productive learning process. Our community is made up of students, teachers, and parents, and we aim for this network to be as warm and supportive as possible.

How is our community different from traditional classrooms? Because we offer a multi-age-level approach to learning, students remain with a single teacher for three years. This allows strong bonds to form between the teacher and child, and between the teacher and the child's parents. The teacher is able to understand and appreciate a child's learning patterns and interests. Just as importantly, children come to

know the other members of their class on a deep and personal basis. This forms tight bonds and helps foster a sense of collaboration that is at the heart of the Montessori experience. These relationships between students encourage group work and learning, problem solving and sharing. We emphasize respect within this community — children are discouraged from raising their voices or using hurtful behavior. We like considerate, courteous manners and a willingness to help.

Montessori students are encouraged to care for their community. They help keep the classroom tidy and well-organized, they make sure the outdoor spaces around the school are litter-free, they water plants and care for pets in the classroom. We believe that by teaching community stewardship skills early, children will mature to become good stewards of their own wider communities.



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Love for the Natural World

The Montessori curriculum believes that an early and profound love for the natural world is an important part of a child's personal development. Dr. Montessori believed that nature possesses beauty, order, and harmony — all wonderful qualities for children to explore. Montessori students learn both from nature and in nature using lessons that not only contribute to an appreciation for the environment but also help develop a child's motor skills and foster creativity.

A significant number of the learning materials in Montessori classrooms focus on the natural sciences and encourage environmental exploration, and many of our classroom activities are performed outdoors where students can interact with the native ecology of their community. Students can take teacher-guided nature walks through the neighborhood surrounding the school, they may create their own composting bin or germinate seeds, or they might observe a caterpillar as it forms a cocoon and emerges as a butterfly.



When students learn outdoors and participate in activities that encourage a love and appreciation for the environment, then they become life-long environmental citizens.

As they mature, they will continue to carry this respect for the natural world into their lives, and they will become protectors and caretakers of our environment.

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Creating Global Citizens



Montessori schools understand the importance of preparing children to play an active, considered role in the global community. To that end, Montessori classrooms are diverse, with students from many different backgrounds. We teach our children the value of mutual respect and strive to foster a deep appreciation for different cultures.

We believe that our children are the key to a better future for this planet, and to that end the Montessori curriculum actively encourages kindness and peace in each of our students. Dr. Montessori famously said that preventing war was the work of politicians, but “establishing peace is the work of educators.” With this in mind, we emphasize good manners, a helpful attitude, and appreciation for a job well done. Peace, we believe, begins with the smallest courtesies.



Montessori classrooms teach children to be collaborators instead of competitors. Because of Montessori’s unique learning approach, children don’t strive to earn the best grade in the classroom. Instead, they learn to work with their peers in tandem. Our students don’t shout, bully, or use force to get their way. They learn that kindness, gentleness, and respect are more effective behavioral tools. In this way, they approach life with an open,

inquisitive attitude. We believe these are excellent qualities for young people to have as they participate in our increasingly interconnected world.