Frequently Asked Questions About Montessori

How is Montessori different from other schools?

Montessori schools are based on a teaching method developed by Dr. Maria Montessori in the 1950s. A physician specializing in both pediatrics and psychiatry, Dr. Montessori believed that every child has incredible potential for learning and she designed a classroom to maximize the experience specifically for them – from the materials to the size and scale of the classroom itself. Such materials in each classroom are specifically constructed and their location consciously chosen.

"Ultimately, what sets Montssori children apart is not their brilliance... but their understanding of what they've learned, the joy on which they learn it and the ability to tackle future challenges." – Edward Fidellow

Montessori programs are created to address the developmental characteristics normal to children in that stage:

- Classes are organized to encompass a three-year age span, which allows younger students the stimulation of the older children, who in turn benefit from serving as role models.
- With two-thirds of the class returning each year, the classroom culture remains quite stable.
- Working in the same class for three years allows students to develop a strong sense of community with classmates and teachers.

Why do Montessori schools ask children to attend five days a week?

Two and three day programs are often attractive to parents who do not need full-time care; however, five day programs create the consistency that is so important to young children and which is essential to developing strong Montessori programs. Since the primary goal of Montessori involves creating a culture of consistency, order, and empowerment, most Montessori schools will expect children to attend five days a week.

Is Montessori unstructured?

At first, Montessori may look unstructured to some people, but it is actually quite structured at every level. Just because the Montessori program is highly individualized doesn't mean that students can do whatever they like. Like all children, Montessori students live within a cultural context that involves the mastery of skills and knowledge that are considered essential.

Why is there so much emphasis on freedom and independence in Montessori? Children learn best by doing. Montessori children are free to move about, working alone or with

others at will. Freedom is critical as children begin to explore. Our goal is less to teach them facts and concepts, but rather to fall in love with the process of focusing their complete attention on something and mastering its challenge with enthusiasm. The prepared environment of the Montessori class is a learning laboratory in which children are allowed the liberty to explore, discover, and select their own work. Work assigned by adults rarely results in such enthusiasm and interest and independence as does work that children freely choose for themselves.

* Questions and answers (in part) excerpted from The Montessori Way by Tim Seldin and Paul Epstein

Is Montessori for all children?

The Montessori system has been used successfully with children from all socio-economic levels, representing those in regular classes as well as gifted children, children with developmental delays, and children with emotional and physical disabilities. There is no one school that is right for all children, and certainly there are some children who may do better in a smaller classroom setting with a more teacher-directed program that offers fewer choices and more consistent external structure. Children who are easily over stimulated, or those who tend to be overaggressive, may be examples of children who might not adapt as easily to a Montessori program.

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