



Just Ask

What is Montessori School?

Dr. Maria Montessori, the first woman to practice medicine in Italy, developed this method of education based on her observations of children. She discovered that children have an innate desire to learn and that they do it best when teachers are “guides” who allow children to learn and to correct themselves at their own pace, with minimal interference. Moreover, she emphasized that children learn differently at different stages of development.

Though there are Montessori schools for infants and toddlers, and for older students, a typical school includes a mix of children ages 3 to 6, allowing older children to help the younger ones.

At that stage of development, children are encouraged to master practical skills as a way of building self-esteem and independence. They learn to dress, for example, and to comb their hair, wash their hands and clean up.

They are also “sensorial” learners, using their sense of touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing to learn how to order and classify impressions. For example, the children might be encouraged to listen to the sounds of beads in a shaker; different sized beads make different sounds. Tiles and other easily manipulated objects are used to help children understand concepts of math.

“We don’t force academic learning,” stressed Audrey Harpe, curriculum coordinator at the Webster Montessori School. “We’re interested in developing the whole child – socially and academically – so that each child can achieve his or her own highest potential.”

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Comparisons Between Montessori and Traditional Education

Montessori	Traditional
<p>Emphasis on cognitive structures and social development</p> <p><i>Teacher's role is unobtrusive; child actively participates in learning</i></p> <p>Environment and method encourage internal self-discipline</p> <p><i>Individual and group instruction adapts to each student's learning style</i></p> <p>Mixed-age grouping</p> <p><i>Children encouraged to teach, collaborate, and help each other</i></p> <p>Child formulates concepts from self-teaching materials</p> <p><i>Child works as long as he/she wants on a chosen project</i></p> <p>Child sets own pace to internalize information</p> <p><i>Child spots own errors through feedback from material</i></p> <p>Learning is reinforced internally through child's own repetition of activity, internal feelings of success repetition</p> <p><i>Multi-sensory materials for physical exploration development</i></p> <p>Organized program for learning care of self and self-care environment (shoe polishing, sink washing, etc.)</p> <p><i>Child can work where he/she is comfortable, move and talk at will (yet doesn't disturb others); group work is voluntary and negotiable</i></p> <p>Organized program for parents to understand the Montessori philosophy and participate in the learning process</p>	<p>Emphasis on rote knowledge and social development</p> <p><i>Teacher's role is dominant, active; child is a passive participant</i></p> <p>Teacher is primary enforcer of external discipline</p> <p><i>Individual and group instruction conforms to the adult's teaching style</i></p> <p>Same-age grouping</p> <p><i>Most teaching done by teacher and collaboration is discouraged</i></p> <p>Child is guided to concepts by teacher</p> <p><i>Child usually is given specific time for work</i></p> <p>Instruction pace set by group norm or teacher</p> <p><i>Errors corrected by teacher</i></p> <p>Learning is reinforced externally by rewards, discouragements</p> <p><i>Few materials for sensory, concrete manipulation</i></p> <p>Little emphasis on instruction or classroom maintenance</p> <p><i>Child assigned seat; encouraged to sit still and listen during group sessions</i></p> <p>Voluntary parent involvement, often only as fundraisers, not participants in understanding the learning process</p>