

# The Top 12 Misconceptions About Montessori Education

Montessori revealed that children ages three to six do not really distinguish between work and play. For them, their work in the classroom *is* play. In fact, when speaking to parents Maria Montessori (2017, 31) once stated, “You will be surprised when I tell you that the greater part of what you call ‘play’ is really work.” When engaging in these meaningful tasks, children find immense joy and are free to interact with others. Montessori found that children at this age typically choose to work alone.

On the other hand, Elementary-aged students, naturally in a sensitive period for socialization, have a strong desire to engage with their peers. They are encouraged to work together in pairs and small groups, exploring topics of interest each and every day.

The incorporation of art, music, and drama also provide opportunities for children of all ages to engage in creative play in the Montessori classroom.

## MYTH #10

### “The Montessori Method stifles creativity.”

Some people falsely believe that Montessori Education is against fantasy, therefore stifling creativity. Maria Montessori actually recognized that a child’s ability to implore their imagination was indeed a sign of a special mental ability of high order. However, she also realized through careful observation that children under the age of six are mesmerized by the world around them, captivated by what they hear, see, touch, and taste.

To capitalize on the absorbent mind that children in this first plane of development possess, Montessori emphasized the need to provide children with practical experiences that fulfill their inner needs, allowing them to better understand the world around them. For example, a child would much rather cut a fruit for a snack than play with plastic food or “cut” wooden fruit. The freedom within limits approach she encouraged provides a natural balance between providing these practical experiences and allowing opportunities for creative problem solving through fantasy play initiated by the child.

It is important to also note that art and music are an integral part of the Montessori classroom, providing additional opportunities for students to express their creativity. The Montessori bells are an integral part of the Early Childhood classroom, allowing children to begin learning to hear and play music sensorially.

In lieu of more traditional methods of recording work, Montessori students are encouraged to express the knowledge

The Montessori Method is an intricate pedagogy and philosophy that took many years of experience and careful observation for Maria Montessori to develop. By providing clarity on some common misconceptions, AMS hopes to help people understand and appreciate the wonder of Montessori.

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they have acquired in creative mediums; perhaps they build a model of a volcano or draw a flower and label its parts. Creativity abounds in a Montessori environment; in fact, a recent study has even revealed that Montessori students demonstrated higher levels of creativity than their peers without a Montessori background.

## MYTH #11

### “Montessori is not appropriate for all children.”

Montessori environments are designed to promote the success of all children. Some people falsely believe that Montessori Education is designed solely for neurodivergent students. While the method is highly effective with students with learning differences, it was designed to ensure success for *all* children.

To outside observers, Montessori students may seem advanced for their age as they have been practicing academic skills, receiving scaffolded learning experiences, and practicing life skills since the age of three. This may lead to the incorrect assumption that Montessori is for gifted learners. In reality, Montessori schools help children discover their unique talent and potential, promoting the giftedness of all students.

The fact that Maria Montessori began her work with children with disabilities also leads some people to believe that Montessori Education is designed for children with learning differences. Although there are Montessori schools and programs designed specifically for students with exceptionalities, neurodivergent children are welcomed and included in Montessori classrooms globally.

## MYTH #12

### “Montessori Education is not based on scientific research.”

The Montessori Method has its foundation in the observation and experience of Dr. Maria Montessori, a physician and educator. Since the life of Montessori, modern changes have been applied to more traditional teaching practices with the introduction of new technologies and the expansion of cultural curriculum. Over the years, her approach has been studied and validated by a growing body of scientific research, confirming the effectiveness of the Montessori Method. In fact, in Dr. Angeline S. Lillard’s book entitled *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*, it is revealed that current scientific research provides astonishing support for Montessori’s major insights.



The American Montessori Society  
Dispels the Most Common Myths



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Although Montessori pedagogy has been around for more than one hundred years, it is still a misunderstood method of education. The American Montessori Society (AMS) would like to address these misconceptions, hopefully shedding light on the unique benefits of the Montessori Method.

#### MYTH #1

**“Montessori is a chaotic “free for all” with little to no teacher interaction and no rules.”**

From an outside perspective, Montessori classrooms may appear chaotic. However, Montessori classrooms are carefully prepared environments, spaces that contain specific materials designed and arranged in a way that meet the needs of the children they house.

Montessori guides receive specific instruction within their teacher education programs (TEPs) that help them learn the skills necessary to design these prepared environments and plan for students’ needs.

Within these spaces, students are free to move about and are empowered to choose which works they would like to explore under the careful observation of Montessori certified teachers and within clear boundaries that have been established as a collective classroom community.

This practice is rooted in Montessori’s observation that children are more motivated to learn when they are given the freedom to choose. If visitors take the time to carefully watch the happenings in a Montessori classroom over a three-hour work period, a variety of self-directed activities intended to develop concentration and independence would be recognized.

In certain situations, when students become disruptive, distracting, or destructive, teachers (or peers) will intervene, redirecting the child and encouraging them to make more appropriate choices; these are the limits. Since children become accustomed to these freedoms within limits, they develop a stronger sense of self-discipline without the need for punishment.

Although the structure in a Montessori classroom may look different from that in a traditional educational setting, it exists nonetheless and has been carefully designed to promote the natural process of human development.

#### MYTH #2

**“Montessori is a strict, structured program.”**

Interestingly enough since some believe Montessori Education lacks structure altogether, others believe that the method is too strict.

Montessori classrooms do embody an inherent structure and order, but this is only one part of the approach. Teachers give lessons to carefully illustrate the intended purpose of each material, demonstrating the works step-by-step in a methodical manner. However, students are given the freedom to choose, allowing them to decide when, where, with whom, and on what they would like to work each day, while the guide, through observation and notetaking, ensures that concepts are practiced for skill development and mastery.

Montessori Education promotes following the child, a practice that focuses on meeting each child’s individual needs and providing opportunities for them to freely explore their own interests.

#### MYTH #3

**“Montessori schools do not emphasize academic skills.”**

Although a first look into a Montessori classroom from someone unfamiliar with the methodology may lead one to believe children are not focusing on academic learning; the reality could not be farther from the truth. Montessori Education places a strong emphasis on academic learning including reading, writing, math, and science. However, it does so in a way that is engaging and meaningful for students, using hands-on manipulatives and real-life applications.

In fact, the Montessori approach is actually shown to be associated with better academic performance than conventional methods of education.

#### MYTH #4:

**“Montessori does not prepare students for the real world.”**

Maria Montessori<sup>1,2</sup> intentionally designed her pedagogy as a preparation for the real world. In fact, she once said, “The education of even a small child, therefore, does not aim at preparing him for school, but for life.”

The hallmark Montessori practice of multi-age groupings creates a diverse learning environment that more closely resembles real-world communities as students learn how to interact with people of various ages and racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. The

level of independence, critical thinking, and problem solving supported by the Montessori approach to education also serves as an invaluable preparation for real-world experiences.

#### MYTH #5

**“Montessori is elitist and expensive.”**

While Montessori schools can sometimes be more costly than traditional schools, the Montessori approach has been adapted in schools servicing communities from a large variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, the Montessori Method has its roots as a full-day childcare system for members of a poor inner-city district of Rome.

The misconception that Montessori schools are only for upper-class, wealthy families likely stemmed from the stigma established during the mid-twentieth century when the American Montessori movement began as it was led by private preschools funded by tuition.

Today, however, Montessori pedagogy has been implemented in public school settings, charter schools, private schools, and in homeschool environments. Montessori Education is available in nearly 600 public schools (district, magnet, and charter) around the world. Many private Montessori schools offer scholarships and co-ops and some states provide childcare credits and assistance to low-income families, making Montessori Education accessible to many families.

Although some Montessorians do practice exclusivity, many Montessori educators have an intense desire to serve the child and to spread their knowledge of the Montessori Method with the world. While many Montessori communities are tight knit, they are not elitist. In fact, this is an area in which the American Montessori Society (AMS) and its member schools are continuing to develop. There are new anti-bias anti-racist (ABAR) requirements for schools and a newly released equity audit tool used to support schools in their inclusivity efforts. Visiting local Montessori schools and asking questions about their practices and about the philosophy as a whole should reveal the welcoming, accepting nature of the Montessori Method.

#### MYTH #6

**“Montessori schools are religious.”**

While it is true that some private Montessori schools do incorporate religious education in the classroom and Maria Montessori herself was a devout Catholic, Montessori is not a religion in itself, nor is it religiously oriented. Montessori Education is secular and is based on scientific observation and evidence. Students and families from all religious backgrounds are welcome in Montessori schools around the world as diversity is embraced and encouraged.

#### MYTH #7

**“Montessori-educated children are ill-prepared for traditional educational institutions when they are older.”**

While the switch to more traditional school will be something new and different for a child who has attended Montessori schools, their educational foundation will have prepared them for the transition. Not only does the Montessori Method promote academic learning, it focuses on the development of the whole child, fostering independence, problem solving, critical thinking, concentration, social skills, and innate love of learning that will serve students well in any educational institution and in the world beyond the classroom.

#### MYTH #8

**“Montessori is just for preschool children.”**

Although many Montessori schools around the world are preschools, the Method itself is designed for children from birth to 18. In fact, Montessori shared quite a bit of knowledge about teaching Elementary-aged students and adolescents. Her book entitled *From Childhood to Adolescence* analyzes the characteristics and needs of children from seven to twelve and also describes the ideal setting of a farm school for adolescents which is incorporated into both private and public Montessori programs.

Dr. Montessori referred to this carefully prepared farm school as the Erdkinder. She envisioned this as a space within which adolescents would live and work together, caring for themselves, their community, and the land. The farm would yield animal and plant products to sustain the community and surplus goods could be sold to those in the surrounding area. Adolescents would develop and manage this business, establishing economic independence.

In more urban settings, adolescents are offered opportunities to run small businesses such as coffee shops.

*The Advanced Montessori Method, Volume II* is another text of Montessori’s that introduces materials and techniques for teaching older students.

#### MYTH #9

**“Montessori schools do not promote social play and focus only on individual learning.”**

Although Montessori Education places a large emphasis on identifying a child’s individual needs, it also supports collaborative projects and activities that promote social and emotional development. The child’s activities in a Montessori environment are referred to as their work, appealing to a child’s desire to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

1. Montessori, Maria. 1972. *The Discovery of the Child*. New York: Ballantine Books.

2. Montessori, Maria. 2017. *Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents: A Selection of Articles*. Netherlands: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company.