



AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY
education that transforms lives

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The Montessori Method is a child-centered educational approach that recognizes the child as naturally eager for knowledge and capable of initiating learning when provided with a supportive, thoughtfully prepared environment and sequential, hands-on learning materials. It is an approach that values the human spirit and the development of the child as a whole.

Montessori education dates back to 1907, when Dr. Maria Montessori, one of Italy's first female physicians, opened a child-care center in Rome. Drawing on her previous work experiences, including scientific observations of young children, Dr. Montessori designed a unique learning environment and materials that fostered the students' natural desire to learn. They made gains that exceeded all expectations.

News of the success of the Montessori Method sparked the interest of educators worldwide, and, in the following decades, Montessori schools for children of all ages opened on every continent but Antarctica. There are now thousands of Montessori programs dotting the globe, with an estimated 5,000 Montessori schools, both public and private, in the United States alone.

The innovative premises that guided Dr. Montessori's work over 100 years ago are still embraced by Montessori educators today and are continually confirmed by contemporary research:

- Children are to be respected as different from adults and as unique individuals, each developing at his or her own pace, according to specific developmental stages.
- The most essential life skills, such as language development, are acquired from birth to age 6 and honed in the elementary and secondary years.
- Children learn through purposeful activity.
- Children possess unusual sensitivity and cognitive abilities for absorbing and learning from the people and things in their environment.

People who have been touched by Montessori comprise a gloriously diverse group. Montessori alumni in the public eye include: Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page; Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon; Will Wright, creator of *The Sims* and *Spore* computer games; actors Lee Thompson Young and Helen Hunt; and singer-songwriter Taylor Swift.

LEARN MORE! Visit the
American Montessori Society Web site:
www.amshq.org

The American Montessori Society is a leading advocate for Montessori education.

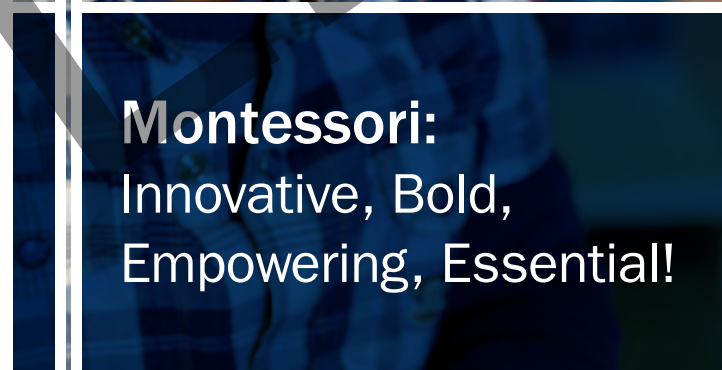
AMS maintains a primary focus on establishing and preserving the highest standards through its accreditation of Montessori schools, support and oversight of teacher education programs, and creation of professional development resources.

AMS also advances Montessori education by supporting research, helping to develop education policy, and sustaining a global community of education professionals, families, and policy makers.

Through these actions, AMS works to ensure that the Montessori approach is a positive and growing force in education throughout the world.



PHOTOS: Front and back, Frida Azari.



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Montessori: Innovative, Bold, Empowering, Essential!

What makes Montessori education unique?

- **The Whole Child Approach.** A primary goal of Montessori education is to help each child reach his or her full potential in all areas of life. The child's emotional, social, spiritual, physical, and cognitive needs and interests are considered to be inseparable and of equal importance. The child is seen as naturally eager for knowledge and capable of initiating learning in a supportive, thoughtfully prepared learning environment, with the guidance of a specially educated teacher.
- **The Prepared Environment.** To set the stage for self-directed and joyful learning to take place, the entire classroom setting is thoughtfully prepared by the teacher to encourage exploration, independence, freedom within limits, beauty, harmony, and a sense of order and trust. The child, through individual choice, makes use of what the environment offers to develop him- or herself, interacting with the teacher when support or guidance is needed.
- **The Montessori Materials.** Students in Montessori classrooms work with specially designed learning materials, manipulating and investigating them to master the lessons they embody. Each material, as presented by the teacher, teaches one skill or concept at a time. Built-in "control of error" allows the child to determine if he or she has done the exercise correctly. Materials offer multiple levels of challenge and can be used repeatedly at different developmental levels. Students use real objects and actions to translate abstract ideas into concrete form.
- **The Teacher.** The Montessori teacher functions as a role model, guide, demonstrator, and meticulous observer and recorder of each student's behavior and growth. In preparing the classroom, she makes sure it meets each student's unique interests, academic levels, and developmental needs. Like her students, she is an active and curious learner. The program of study required to become an AMS-credentialed Montessori teacher is specialized and extensive.

How does Montessori education work?

Every Montessori classroom operates on the principle of freedom within limits. Ground rules appropriate to the age level (infancy through adolescence) are based on core Montessori beliefs: respect for self, for others, and for the environment.

Teachers present individual and small-group lessons on the various materials in the environment. Students are then free to work at their own pace with materials they have chosen, either alone or with others. The teacher relies on his observations of the children to determine which new activities and materials to introduce. The aim is to encourage active, self-directed learning and to strike a balance between individual mastery and small-group collaboration.

The multiyear age span in each class (typically three years) provides a family-like setting, where learning can take place naturally. More experienced children share what they have learned, while reinforcing their own learning. Younger students look up to their older "brothers" and "sisters" and get a preview of the work to come. Ideally, members stay with the class, and teacher, for the entire cycle, forging a stable community and meaningful bonds.

How is creativity encouraged?

With an emphasis on guiding children to follow their curiosity and to become active, confident problem-solvers and thinkers who delight in self-expression, the Montessori classroom is founded on the essential nature of creativity across all curricular areas, including not only the arts, such as music, drama, and visual design, but also the academic components. Materials that inspire interest, involvement, and experimentation; opportunities for exploration, discovery, and work without interruption; a multisensory approach to learning that supports each child's unique style; and an atmosphere of freedom, acceptance, and trust work together to create a vibrant atmosphere in which curiosity flourishes.

How can a "real" Montessori classroom be identified?

Since "Montessori" is a word in the public domain, it is possible for any individual or institution to claim to be Montessori. But an authentic Montessori classroom must have these basic characteristics at all age levels:

- Teachers, credentialed in the Montessori philosophy and methodology for the age level they are teaching, who put the key concepts into practice.
- A partnership established with the family. The family is considered an integral part of the individual's total development.
- A multi-aged grouping of students.
- A diverse set of Montessori materials, activities, and experiences that are designed to foster physical, intellectual, creative, and social independence.
- A schedule that allows large blocks of uninterrupted time for problem solving, seeing connections in knowledge, and creating new ideas.
- A classroom atmosphere that encourages social interaction for cooperative learning, peer teaching, and emotional development.

How does Montessori education prepare a student for the future?

Montessori children are unusually adaptable. They have learned to work independently and in groups. Since they have been encouraged to make decisions from an early age, these children are problem-solvers who can make choices and manage their time well.

They have also been encouraged to exchange ideas and discuss their work freely with others. Good communication skills ease the way in new settings.

Montessori programs, based on self-directed, noncompetitive activities, help children develop a positive self-image and the ability to face challenges and change with skill, confidence, and creativity—all essentials for life in the 21st century.