

Montessori Elementary School Years

Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952), the Italian physician, educator, and founder of the Montessori Method, described the Elementary-age child as a very different being from the younger, preschool child. In Montessori's view, successive levels of education must correspond to the stages of the development of the child. Thus, the educational approach for students ages 6 through 12 is not a direct continuation of what has gone before but instead builds upon the foundation laid in Early Childhood.

Maria Montessori reminds us of three important tendencies emerging at the Elementary school age: the transition of the child's mind from concrete to abstract reasoning, the birth of a moral sense, and the intensification of the drive to explore the natural and social environments.

The child at this stage of life shows a growing capacity for tackling problems, reasoning, socializing, and harnessing the imagination.

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Montessori The Elementary School Years

AGES 6 – 12



Social and Moral Development

Montessori Elementary classrooms are multi-age settings. Classes are divided into groups of children ages 6 – 9 (sometimes called Elementary I or Lower Elementary) and 9 – 12 (Elementary II or Upper Elementary). Mixed-age grouping encourages an organic sense of family and community, while providing mentoring opportunities in which the older students help the younger, thereby reinforcing their own skills in the process.

Children of this age demonstrate an intense desire to develop strong connections with their peers. They take increasing responsibility for their own conduct in personal relationships, as well as in caring for the environment. The Montessori Elementary environment offers opportunities for social interactions and collaborative learning that strengthens peer relationships.

Various student-led projects, trips, and outreach experiences provide opportunities for students to learn stewardship in their communities.

Maria Montessori pointed out that morality has a practical side that governs social relationships and a spiritual side that presides over the awakening of conscience. Questions of right and wrong are considered in class meetings, which serve as arenas for discussions of fairness, rules, and procedures. Regular class meetings also encourage cooperative effort. This is the stage during which an individual's sense of justice is formed, and the experience of being part of a classroom community helps children build and internalize a moral code.

Physical and Motor Development

The Montessori Elementary classroom is characterized by freedom of movement, open workspace, and uninterrupted blocks of time for individual and group projects. These features all help to support children

ages 6 – 12 as they work to gain control over their growing bodies and as their drive toward autonomy becomes more sophisticated.

Regularly scheduled periods of physical exercise that include noncompetitive sports and games help develop gross motor coordination while emphasizing the benefits of teamwork.

Lessons for language, mathematics, cultural studies, and science (such as history, geography, botany, zoology, and the physical sciences) include Montessori materials that help refine small motor skills. As the children grow, the many hands-on projects of the curriculum provide increasingly sophisticated and challenging small motor exercise.

Cognitive Development

Correlating with the child's maturation during the Elementary years, the Montessori curriculum builds on three characteristics of this age period:

- The growing ability to form abstractions from concrete information
- The drive to develop and to be accepted by one's peer group
- The child's fascination with all aspects of their culture and with the grandeur of the world at large

Montessori Elementary studies are based on a cultural curriculum that integrates history, geography, mathematics (including geometry and algebra), life and other sciences, language, literature, art, and music. This interdisciplinary approach helps children understand the interconnectedness of the universe as they develop creative and critical thinking skills.

The Elementary student embarks on lessons, projects, and field trips that include individual work, cooperative work in large and small groups, and opportunities for decision-making and evaluation.

A hallmark of the Montessori Elementary classroom is that the children follow their own interests in choosing their work and designing follow-up projects, fostering strong internal motivation. At the late Elementary level, seeds are planted for advanced concepts in math, chemistry, and physical and Earth sciences.

In keeping with Montessori's process-oriented educational philosophy, assessment of performance is based on a systematic collection of information, including observations by teachers and parents, portfolios containing examples of work, test scores (if administered by the school), and conferences. Students may choose work samples to be added to their portfolios; in some schools, students are included in the parent conference.

Impact of Montessori Elementary Education on the Child

A child who has completed a Montessori Elementary program will have developed competence in social, emotional, physical, and cognitive areas. By experiencing the value of working cooperatively in a community of trust, the student will have a strong sense of their place in the world, including respect and responsibility for self, community, and the environment, and an understanding of the importance of creating a personal code of morals. They will have set the foundation for a lifelong love of learning, knowing that one may use both concrete information and one's own imagination to explore the world.

Through working with a wide array of stimulating learning materials as well as real-world experiences, the student will have honed the multidimensional skills necessary for succeeding in the future, including critical thinking, the ability to communicate and work collaboratively, and the ability to think creatively across disciplines.