

Questions Most Frequently Asked About Montessori

“Montessori is an attitude, not just a technique and one must have great love for and understanding of each individual child. Montessori is a spiritual attitude towards mankind and mankind begins with childhood.” Maria Montessori

Doesn't Montessori over-emphasize intellectual skills?

Montessori parents have been overly impressed with the academic success of Montessori training, expecting their children to read, write and calculate at an unusually early age, but such pressure is deplored by well-trained Montessori teachers. Dr. Montessori herself never singled out one kind of growth at the expense of another. She provided many inter-related ways to help a child develop his individual abilities, personality, and spirit. The Montessori goal is not an intellectual genius, but a responsible, secure, balanced human being, who thinks for himself and has discovered the joys of self-education.

Doesn't Montessori stifle creativity?

Dr. Montessori explained in her writings that her entire method is aimed at the release of the child's creative soul. Montessori methods stimulate creativity by developing the perception, judgment, and skills necessary to express thought and emotions, as well as the ability to appreciate this talent in others. Dr. Montessori encouraged children to work creatively, not only in the more obvious areas of art and music, but also language, mathematics and all the other academic disciplines.

Doesn't structured activity with "programmed" apparatus produce a personality unable to adapt to new situations and to provide new solutions for the problems of a rapidly changing world?

The purpose of the methodical Montessori steps used in the beginning activities is simply to enable a young child to accomplish otherwise impossible tasks that can make him feel more grown-up, competent and independent. The self-confidence that comes with learning to do for himself, together with the sensory training that better enables him to interpret and evaluate his environment, makes the Montessori child unusually adaptable to strange situations.

It is a misconception to think that the children are taught that there is "one right way to do things". Montessori does not teach that the apparatus has only one use; it uses the apparatus to teach. The apparatus is a means to an end, never an end in itself. Furthermore, much of the apparatus is designed to teach by discovery. If a child is to learn what a tool has to teach him, however, he must of necessity learn how to maneuver that tool correctly towards the desired result. If he is allowed to give the letter "d" the phonetic sound "s s s", and the letter "s" the phonetic sound "da", a child will never produce meaningful words when he puts these sounds together. Dr. Montessori encouraged a child to master the fundamental concrete relationships first, because she discovered that once he gained a clear understanding of such relationships, his mind would expand spontaneously of its own accord, into abstract reasoning. She used the word "explosion" to describe this phenomena and experience has proved that after such an explosion a child tends to be daring, questioning, and original in his approach to learning. The real danger is not in holding the mind too long in contemplation of the concrete, but rushing it into abstract reasoning and calculation before it has had sufficient experience with the concrete.

Does Montessori provide enough opportunities for socialization?

The Montessori system is sometimes criticized as being too individualistic. Actually, it is in the ordinary schoolroom that expression of social sentiments is stifled. Observation of a Montessori classroom settles any doubts one might have about the opportunities it provides for socialization. Although individual work is more common than collective teaching, the children are constantly helping one another, sharing each other's successes, borrowing and lending, comparing their work, and asking each other's opinions. Most interesting is the fact that a number of children sometimes spontaneously band together to accomplish a particular task by division of labour or will do the same task side by side at the same time. A Montessori classroom provides excellent opportunities for children to learn patience, sharing, consideration for others, and for them to experience meaningful communication with others.

In the long run, is anything actually gained by early childhood education?

Recent research indicates that much is to be gained by early stimulation of the intelligence. Studies based on controlled research confirm Dr. Montessori's theories about very rapid growth of the intelligence during the early years. After analyzing thousand of such studies, Dr. Benjamin S. Bloom, of the University of Chicago writes, "From conception to age 4, the individual develops 50% of his mature intelligence; from ages 4 to 8 he develops another 30%". It is now generally agreed that IQ is not static, but can be elevated or depressed by environment, which confirms Dr. Montessori's belief in the great influence of the early environment upon mental development. Another Montessori theory reinforced by research such as that being conducted at Harvard's Centre for Cognitive Studies is the importance of using the sensitive periods for teaching particular skills. Therefore, we believe that there is a great deal to be gained by early childhood education.

Why are Montessori classes so large?

There are usually around 25 children in an ideal Montessori classroom. This is in order to have enough children in each age group to provide sufficient opportunities for the children to help and learn from each other. A group this large is necessary for "knowledge to take wing and fly from child to child". Even though there is usually only one teacher for these 25 children, the Montessori set-up enables each child to get more individual attention than they would in most smaller traditional classrooms.

How are children disciplined in your school?

Montessori discipline emphasizes positive methods which avoid personal humiliation. Whenever practical the teacher guides the unruly child towards equipment that will more fully absorb his attention. If this fails, he is temporarily separated from the group; usually by putting him to work in a less heavily traveled area.

If Montessori methods were originally to teach brain-damaged and environmentally deprived children, why are they now used for normal children?

Dr. Montessori, after several years' work with deficient children, realized that they were scoring at least as well as normal children in testing. She then transferred her work to the normal child, to see what she could accomplish under such training and this proved to be her life's challenge. The bulk of the apparatus used in the Montessori classroom was designed by her for normal children. Basic pieces, designed for the deficient, proved equally useful as beginning activities for normal children and were therefore kept.

At what age should a child enter a Montessori school?

Ideally, the child should enter a Montessori school between the ages of two and one half and three and one half, depending upon when he can be productive and happy in the Montessori environment. Good results are usually obtained also with the child who enters between ages three and one half and four, provided they remain in the school long enough to complete the entire cycle of Montessori learning.

Is Montessori for every child?

Montessori teachers regard their methods as exceptionally good and well-proven. They do not regard them as the one and only right method, or a magic cure-all for every child's problems. Parental expectations, native temperament, and home environment all contribute to or detract from a child's response to a Montessori environment. If a child is not able to benefit fully from our teaching approach, it does not necessarily reflect poorly upon his intelligence, family, personality, or ability to flourish under another type of instruction.