



# THE MONTESSORI APPROACH



AT LOVE OF LEARNING MONTESSORI SCHOOL

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# INTRODUCTION

In many ways, the Montessori method is very different from how we traditionally think of school. Here, we will describe the core aspects of the Montessori approach and its impact. Let's start with a look at the outcome of this form of education beyond the elementary years.

## BEYOND THE ELEMENTARY YEARS

[Research shows](#) that Montessori-educated children reach higher levels of executive functioning skills which lead to academic achievement, including self-regulation, resilience, deep focus, critical reasoning, and problem-solving.

[Studies of high school graduates](#) found that attending a Montessori program from the approximate ages of three to 11 predicts significantly higher reading, math, and science standardized test scores in high school than peer groups from conventional programs. Confirming the research, 3 of our LOLMS spring graduates who moved on to the same middle school held three of the top ten scores for the seventh grade on a standardized ELA (English Language Arts) assessment this fall.

As well as academics, middle and high school teachers comment on how self-assured and comfortable our students are and notice their capacity for empathy and teamwork. [Research supports](#) that Montessori children have an advantage academically and in social and emotional development.

Since our school's start in 1999, as our graduates have gone out into the world, they return to tell us their own stories of the profound imprint of their foundational Montessori years. When they reflect to write their college essays, alumni have drawn from meaningful experiences they had at Love of Learning.

In 2018, Amazon Founder Jeff Bezos launched a two billion dollar plan which included establishing a network of tuition-free Montessori-inspired preschools. He gave back in this way because he credits his own success to his Montessori education as do Bill Gates, Chelsea Clinton, Steph Curry, Taylor Swift, and Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin.

The impact begins in Early Childhood.



## EARLY CHILDHOOD BEGINNINGS

The early years (birth through age 6) lay the bedrock of a child's identity. Children in this first plane of development have what Dr. Maria Montessori called the absorbent mind, meaning they soak in an understanding of the world without conscious effort. During these years, what the children absorb lays the foundation for their “executive skills”, intelligence and personality.



With reverence for the early years, the Montessori Approach begins with deep trust in a child's innate sense of wonder and curiosity and allows every child to develop naturally — to learn and grow at their own pace.

Rather than delivering a strictly academic curriculum, Montessori Early Childhood is carefully designed to value and meet the child's social, intellectual, emotional, and physical developmental stages. The elements of the child's experience build in a spiral curriculum through 6th grade.

Visitors to Montessori Early Childhood classrooms are awed watching the children work with concentration, joy, purpose, freedom of movement, and care for each other and the environment. In the classroom, the curriculum is centered on Montessori materials. Children learn to begin and go through a work cycle, to wait their turn for a material, and to put materials back in a special way to be ready for the next child.

# THE MONTESSORI DIFFERENCE

Below are comparisons between traditional and Montessori designs.

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION	MONTESSORI EDUCATION
Lessons advance for group learning at predetermined pace.	Lessons advance at individual pace as skills are mastered.
Work time is separated into shorter blocks of time by subject.	Work happens in large blocks of uninterrupted worktime daily for concentration.
Time spent learning and working on screens is prioritized.	Hands-on Experiential Learning and analog processing of knowledge are prioritized.
The teacher presents broad coverage across distinctly separate subjects.	Students do in-depth independent work for mastery of a concept for many hours and in some cases many years.
Behavior is managed by external discipline and rewards.	Behavior is guided by intrinsic reward and self-discipline.
Classes are grouped by age in single year groups and students change teachers and classmates each year.	Classes are 3 year mixed age groups based on stages of development and students stay with the same teacher and classmates, deepening relationships over 3 years.
Social interaction and conflict are separated from learning.	Social interaction and working through conflict are integrated learning opportunities.
Children are encouraged to sit still and quiet at length.	Children have the freedom to move and communicate.
Exposure to nature is separate from curriculum.	Learning often includes nature. The curriculum has an emphasis on connection to nature.
Classrooms filled with busy decorations and vibrant colors.	Uncluttered spaces with soft colors and natural materials.
There is very little emphasis on practical life skills.	Opportunities designed for practice of practical life skills.
The curriculum is structured and fixed.	The curriculum is spiral and has fluidity to follow the child.
Children are regularly assessed by formal tests.	Children are regularly assessed by observation and meaningful work.



# CORE ELEMENTS OF A MONTESSORI CLASSROOM

## INDEPENDENCE

Montessori education believes that **every child is naturally curious and capable** and that all children have the desire to participate in the world in a meaningful way. The understanding that children are eager for a sense of purpose guides the Montessori approach to teaching independence.

### *THE CHILD'S INNER NEED: HELP ME TO DO IT MYSELF.*

When we follow the child's pursuit to be able to do things for themselves from the youngest age, we give the child a sense of agency and the chance to contribute purposefully to their world. This is why Early Childhood Montessori children learn to take care of themselves and the classroom. When a very young child is empowered to clean up their own spill, set their place for a meal, or hang their own coat, they feel self-satisfied and fulfilled. Montessori teachers are aware that when adults overhelp a child or interrupt an attempt to try something, even though done with loving intention, a golden growing moment is lost.



Independence is an ongoing, organic process. With growing capabilities, the Montessori child is motivated and able to manage autonomy with responsibility and care. They are given the freedom to decide where they want to put their energy and concentration. They choose what to work on, where to work and how long to work with a “work” or material. They feel enthusiastic because they have an active role in their learning and the teacher is present and nurturing, encouraging freedom with limits, holding a sense of order and support.

This respects the child's needs and pace. Every child is honored as an individual with unique gifts that will unfold naturally in a supportive and well-prepared environment.

## A PREPARED ENVIRONMENT

The Montessori classroom is designed to be a nourishing, beautiful place for children. It is a carefully “**prepared environment**” to facilitate **movement and choice** along with a grounding sense of **order and beauty**. The space is intentionally simple and uncluttered with natural light.

Materials and supplies are neatly arranged on open shelves to be welcoming for children to access easily. There are thoughtfully considered areas for Language Arts, Geography, or Math and quiet, cozy corners for individual work, reflection, or

reading. The furniture is child-sized, comfortable, and moveable. The available supplies and tools are particularly selected for children to be able to use independently which gives an invitation for them to actively participate in caring for themselves and the classroom space.



# MONTESSORI MATERIALS

Montessori materials are specialized learning supplies that foster deep concentration and curiosity. They are beautiful, **hands-on tools** made of a variety of textures to **appeal to all five senses**. They move children from **concrete to abstract learning**.

The materials sit on open shelves and correspond with skills and lessons. The top shelf has the simplest concept and the bottom is more challenging. Children receive a lesson from the teacher and then can **work self-sufficiently on the skill** with the sensory materials. To advance, they show the teacher how they worked through the task and often they model it to another student to solidify their comprehension. They may not jump to the more difficult activity until they master the preceding concepts.

Each material was **developed with a scientific approach to isolate a specific concept** or learning experience for the child to derive. Materials progress from simple to great complexity over the grade levels. The materials **follow a sequence** and build one skill onto the last, leading to mastering educational standards and objectives. Children begin to work on the trinomial theory of cubing a concrete level at age four so that they can discover independently the algebraic formula around age nine.

Dr. Maria Montessori intended for students to work with autonomy so she designed materials to self-correct, meaning if it doesn't fit or something is left over then a child is easily able to spot their own error. For example, the Pink Tower, Number Rods, and Cylinder Blocks if not ordered correctly, do not fit.



## HANDS-ON LEARNING

Today, in many classrooms, passive screen use has increased dramatically. While a Montessori teacher may use tech as a tool, a **Montessori classroom is not screen-dependent for learning or for behavior management**.

Children learn when they are engaged. In the Montessori approach, learning is embodied. Action is integrated into the curriculum. **Work is hands-on and experiential** with an **emphasis on logic, critical thinking, and problem-solving** rather than passive or busy work, and screen-based interaction.

Montessori lessons **align and often go beyond state learning standards** because of the depth of understanding and connection-making that hands-on learning provides.

## MISTAKES AND CONFLICT

In a Montessori classroom children are not shamed for the mistakes they make. Whether it is a spill as they pour, a math error, or an unkind action to a classmate, the Montessori approach values children's freedom to **make, recognize,**





**understand, put right and learn from mistakes.** This is called “control of error,” and it is built into all Montessori work. The processes in place do not rely on adult judgment or criticism but instead, **build a child’s capacity to use their inner wisdom** and **expand their empathy, problem-solving, accountability, and resilience.** Uninterrupted, Daily Work Period

The value of an uninterrupted work period is greater than ever before. In a culture where distraction and hurried activity pull at children, it is important to intentionally **cultivate deep concentration and focused attention.** In the Montessori classroom, large chunks of unhurried time (normally 3 hours) are dedicated to uninterrupted work. In these longer periods, children can sink into deep work, enter a state of flow and expand their skill of concentration and dedication to a task.

During work time the teacher is attentively observing to unfold learning experiences without interrupting.

## **3-YEAR MIXED AGE GROUPS**

Montessori classrooms place children together in three-year age groups. Dr. Maria Montessori distinguished six stages of child development.

birth to age 3 | age 3 to 6 | age 6 to 9 | age 9 to 12 | age 12 to 15 | age 15 to 18

She found children share characteristics through these stages and that learning progresses in these stages rather than by grade level. **In this three-year system, a family structure is created.** Younger children are cared for, learn from, and feel motivated by their older peers and older children develop leadership, and compassion and have skills reinforced as they mentor and assist their younger classmates.

A spirit of respect, cooperation, and caring develops in a 3-year classroom as children experience different roles and rites of passage. There becomes an authentic sense of belonging which is necessary for optimal learning.



***A DEEPENING OF RELATIONSHIPS OCCURS  
WHEN CHILDREN ARE TOGETHER WITH  
ONE ANOTHER AND WITH THEIR TEACHER  
OVER MULTIPLE YEARS. A STRONG  
COMMUNITY IS FORGED.***



# ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Like a gardener, the Montessori teacher watches closely to guide children to grow at their own pace, cultivating independence, freedom within limits, and a sense of order. Instead of dominating the classroom, the Montessori teacher works in a triangle with the children and the environment. In a dynamic learning environment, while multiple activities happen at once, the teacher is trained to move in collaboration with the learning process, observing to “**follow the child**”; **giving support, connection, and nurturing where needed, individualizing the curriculum, anticipating what each child needs next and monitoring progress.** The Montessori teacher is not at the center of controlling or managing every question or problem. The **children are equipped and trusted to problem solve** and to support one another. Montessori teachers don't rely on behavior management or punishment to control a child's focus or activity. Instead, they curate plans that draw on a child's curiosity, pride, joy, and inner drive.



## FREEDOM AND LIMITS

When imagining a classroom where young children have freedom and choice, adults might envision chaos, turmoil, and ruckus behavior, but the Montessori classroom is **harmonious and orderly**. While the children do explore and move freely, they are not permitted to run wild or behave disrespectfully. There are limits in a Montessori classroom based on three essential ground rules.

1. **Respect for oneself**
2. **Respect for others**
3. **Respect for the environment**

Teachers guide children to hold these three layers of respect as their freedom grows. Within the rhythm and routine of the Montessori classroom, the **ability to self-regulate emerges** in the child.

“Freedom within limits” also applies to the child's work. While they have the spaciousness to make choices and prioritize for themselves, the teacher ensures that children engage with all subject materials and acquire the full sequence of logically ordered lessons, activities, and skills.

# SPECIAL AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM

## PRACTICAL LIFE SKILLS

Dr. Montessori built “Practical Life” skills and lessons into the curriculum because she recognized that **children take ownership and meaning when they can manage real responsibility**. The Montessori child finds great joy and satisfaction in being taught how to care of themselves, others, and the environment.

The teacher builds these abilities by offering the child a **clear step-by-step procedure that readies them to master the full cycle of the task independently**. Tools like tongs, pitchers, rakes, and shovels are child-sized to fit a child’s grip and height which makes the work possible to be completed properly. From the youngest age, Montessori children become prepared to dress themselves, keep things tidy, sweep, wipe down tables, pour from a pitcher, clean up spills, help others, organize shelves, and arrange flowers. **As they participate in real-life activities they feel like an important part of a meaningful community.**



## GRACE AND COURTESY

In practicing “Grace and Courtesy” children extend **kindness, gratitude, goodwill, consideration, and respect**. All interdependent communities rely on these ideals to function harmoniously. In the Montessori classroom community, **moments to model, guide, and practice grace and courtesy are embraced** and help children expand empathy.

In the early years, teaching **complex constructs like gratitude and consideration are taught with clear language and simple elements**, like nurturing the habit to say “please” and “thank you, or walking around a mat where a friend is walking instead of across it. These basics grow into **organic, experiential lessons on how to communicate needs and emotions while holding care and consideration for the needs and emotions of others**.

Over time children become able to call upon their practice of grace and courtesy when emotions run high and situations are difficult. They become adept at managing problems with self-respect and respect for others.

## PEACE EDUCATION & GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

***“AVERTING WAR IS THE WORK OF POLITICIANS; ESTABLISHING LASTING PEACE IS THE WORK OF EDUCATION.”  
MARIA MONTESSORI***



Far beyond academic success, **the purpose of Montessori education is to positively impact the world.** Montessori schools are intentional about cultivating peace within each child and students learn the essential human skills of empathy, leadership, and collaboration so that they are equipped and inspired to contribute to finding solutions to our world's most complex problems.

Peace education looks like a calm, harmonious classroom where **healthy ways to resolve conflict are modeled regularly.** Often there is a dedicated space like a peace corner or table for reflection and processing emotions. Sensorial materials like a peace stone/rose or kindness jar are used throughout the grades to develop practice resolving conflict. Through a service learning curriculum **students study and participate in the work of meaningful causes.** As young changemakers, they **lead actionable ways to make the world a better place.** In their capstone year, students have the opportunity to **participate in the Montessori Model United Nations where they prepare to come together with children from around the globe to tackle real-world geopolitical issues.**

In Montessori philosophy, **differences are met with honor, respect and value.** Within the classroom, the uniqueness of each person and their perspectives and culture is honored. This honor extends beyond the classroom community to all people and perspectives in the larger world. **The Montessori classroom is a culturally responsive environment including literature, perspectives, and celebrations from diverse cultures, parts of the world, and voices.**

## CONNECTION TO THE NATURAL WORLD

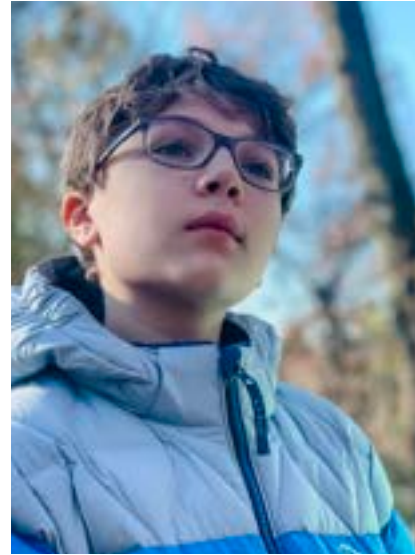


The Montessori approach has a deep reverence for nature. A Montessori education believes that **connection to nature is part of our humanity** and that **a nature-rich life is a happier and healthier life.** Removal from nature deprives children of a human right.

Montessori education connects children to the natural world with a **focus on the natural sciences, exploration of the outdoors, and learning set in nature.** Children work outdoors and they explore and interact with the ecology around them. In the classroom, learning with materials made from nature like real wood, cotton and glass serve as a counterbalance to a digital world.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MONTESSORI CHILD

The Montessori approach, which is over 100 years old, is more relevant now than ever in preparing students for today's world and tomorrow's challenges. **As educational practices go in and out of fashion, Montessori education has not wavered in its emphasis on centering the development of essential human skills.**



## SELF-ASSURED

The Montessori child has a well-developed inner compass. The experience of being valued and trusted to assume meaningful responsibility from a young age builds comfort in one's own skin; confidence in their abilities and solid faith in their own judgment.

## CAPABLE

Having worked on skills from concrete to abstract and from simple to greatly complex, the Montessori child has a deep understanding of many concepts. By being involved in real work they've developed real competence. Perhaps the most significant ability the Montessori child has developed is **the ability to learn**. It is not possible to teach everything that a child may need to know but **by nurturing a willingness to ask questions, engage with new strategies, take risks, and recover and grow from mistakes a Montessori education expands a child's learning agility.**

## SELF-DIRECTED

With freedom, the Montessori child has had practice taking responsibility for their choices and learning. In doing deep uninterrupted work they've expanded their capacity for focus and concentration. By having autonomy over their work plan and the time and support to finish a cycle of work, they now know how to see challenges through to completion and they understand how to prioritize and manage their time.

## KIND

In a peaceful environment of belonging, where grace and courtesy have been modeled and encouraged, the Montessori child has had conditions where compassion, empathy, and kindness thrive.



## **COLLABORATIVE**

In an environment that recognizes interdependence, where group work and socialization are central to the curriculum, the Montessori child has been encouraged to exchange ideas, value perspectives, come to mutual agreements and communicate effectively with others.

## **CURIOUS**

As the Montessori method follows the child, allowing children to pursue interests, curiosities, and passions, the student has learned that the world is a place of awe and magic. The Montessori child is an inquisitive learner on a lifelong quest for discovery.

## **RESILIENT**

Having the opportunity to take risks and work through challenges without an adult rushing to the rescue prepares the Montessori child with the grit and mindset to take chances, work through frustration, and recover from difficult situations.

## **FUTURE-MAKERS**



With these traits, children coming from a Montessori background are prepared to thrive academically and interpersonally and are positioned to contribute greatly to the larger world. Montessori education prepares the future makers, leaders, creators, and caretakers of our world.