

Why Montessori Education?

Montessori education integrates the interaction between a child and an environment that is conducive to developing a resilient mind-set that encourages the child "...to come to an understanding of himself and the limits of his universe and thus achieve an integration of his personality" (Montessori, 1948).

Listed below are typical components of a Montessori education that relate to its strengths in practice and procedure:

Opportunity for the Learner: *Each student is given an opportunity to express strengths in a prepared environment that is full of opportunities. The materials, the furniture, and the architecture are all designed to provide maximum opportunities to release potential. "Leave the child free to make use of his powers and he will show himself capable of success," Montessori wrote (1948). Montessori teachers look, through individualized observations, for unique strengths in students as a basis for further achievements.*

Developing a sense of community: *Our specifically designed Montessori classrooms provide children with an inherent feeling of ownership. Order is maintained with everyone's cooperation. Each student plays an active role in keeping the classroom neat and presentable. Individual work spaces are often designated with the intention that each individual is responsible for its accessibility. Not only is this fostered in the classroom, but in our school community as well. Each month, the PTA offers an activity that brings the community together in a social-type setting.*

Development of success: *Our students learn that not everyone succeeds in a universal fashion. They can see that some of their peers pick up new concepts with ease, while others struggle and may need follow-up lessons. In our Montessori classrooms, the pace at which a student completes a task is often irrelevant because the class is a heterogeneous mix of learning styles and age groups. Children's individual needs are carefully calculated in daily expectations orchestrated by the teacher. Collaboration between two or slightly more students is fostered. Throughout the day, students are encouraged to ask their peers for assistance in figuring out a problem. Classroom demands can be adjusted for children with learning differences without others noticing; and students will still meet the same objectives. Our students feel free to gravitate toward the activities with which they are most comfortable. Successive approximations to a larger goal can easily be built while encouraging a child to take the risks necessary for success. In teaching a child how to write a paragraph, for example, focus begins at the sentence level where attention is paid to the mechanics as well as to the content. Writing sentences can begin at the most basic level with a minimal number of words and can be increased to include a more complex structure over time. As soon as the student demonstrates competence at the sentence level, the notion of building a paragraph can be introduced. Failure and humiliation*

are minimized in a classroom where children learn through peer collaboration or private tutorial and feel no different from anyone else.

Learning from mistakes: *Because our Montessori classrooms are set up to support the development of competence for students, it is easy for teachers to help them learn from their mistakes. Most lessons have a built in "control of error," brilliantly designed by Dr. Montessori to ". . . lead the child to apply his reasoning power to his work" (Montessori, 1948). Children who go to Montessori schools learn over time that mistakes are not to be feared; they are not criticized or ridiculed by others when they do something wrong. Mistakes may often go unnoticed by others or might even be corrected quietly by peers in collaborative engagement. Montessori saw the prepared environment as a key to reaching potential in children. With an abundance of opportunities available for students to pursue their interests, the path to competence is a broad one, accommodating different approaches.*

Disciplining in ways that promote self-discipline: *Each classroom is seen as community where children are taught to respect others' needs. Circle time affords teachers opportunities to discuss conflicts and model problem-solving techniques. The development of a sense of ownership and responsibility for one's behavior is the ultimate goal. As each year progresses, children learn to reflect on their actions and foresee likely consequences of their behavior through group meetings and classroom discussions. Our Student Code of Conduct has detailed components that enable the children to develop independence toward problem solving. From peer mediation to teacher and parent arbitration techniques, it is always the intent to enable the children to develop mediation strategies on their own.*

Teachers as facilitators: *Because students in a Montessori classroom are actively engaged in different ways all day long, the teacher has an opportunity to witness growth in several areas. Often, students are asked to join in on a conference, which allows the parent-teacher team to demystify the alliance and send a message of consistency to the student. Armed with an abundance of information about students, coupled with an empathetic response, our Montessori teachers are equip to handle parental concerns in a proactive manner. It is exactly this positive, respectful relationship between parents and schools that sets the stage for success in developing a resilient mind-set.*

Traditional vs. Montessori Education:

Sometimes, it is easier to relate the differences between traditional forms of education and that of Montessori pedagogy when the two ideologies are placed in a side by side comparison. Below is a chart that juxtaposes both with regard to the method of instruction, environment and the role of the teacher.

<i>Traditional Classroom</i>	<i>Montessori Environment</i>
<p><i>Textbook driven; pencil and paper, worksheets and dittos primary source instructional material(environment)</i></p> <p><i>*Child is led toward dependence from adult(s); adults are the main providers of learning, discipline, social problem solving</i></p>	<p><i>Prepared kinesthetic materials with emphasis on conceptual understanding; incorporated control of error; specially developed reference materials</i></p> <p><i>*Goal is to lead child toward independence, academically as well as through social problem solving</i></p>
<p><i>Working and learning without emphasis on social development</i></p>	<p><i>Working and learning matched to the social development of the child</i></p>
<p><i>Narrow, unit-driven curriculum</i></p>	<p><i>Unified, internationally developed curriculum</i></p>
<p><i>Blanket approach to teaching – everyone doing the same thing at the same time</i></p>	<p><i>Education is set to each child’s academic level; subject choices made by the student</i></p>
<p><i>Block time, period lessons</i></p>	<p><i>Uninterrupted work cycles that allow the child to complete tasks before moving on to the next</i></p>
<p><i>Single-graded classrooms</i></p>	<p><i>Multi-age classrooms</i></p>
<p><i>Students passive, limited to desks; problematic transition times</i></p>	<p><i>Students active, softly conversing, with periods of spontaneous quiet; freedom to move</i></p>

<p><i>Students fit mold of school, primarily designed for middle level achieving students</i></p>	<p><i>School meets needs of all students, from the academically gifted to the challenged</i></p>
<p><i>Limitation on cooperative learning – students in direct competition with each other</i></p>	<p><i>Cooperative learning is encouraged; students willing to aid one another</i></p>
<p><i>Product-focused report cards</i></p> <p><i>*Environment is prepared for the teacher to be the sole and center of attention</i></p> <p><i>Teacher acts as dispenser of knowledge</i> <i>Greater part of learning is presented, in auditory fashion, from teacher; or read from text books</i></p> <p><i>Instruction primarily dealt with in units; no particular order, later to be tied into a whole concept</i></p>	<p><i>Process-focused assessments, skills checklists, mastery benchmarks</i></p> <p><i>*Environment is prepared for the child; apparatus is systematically placed in accordance by the progression [difficulty] of the material(s)</i></p> <p><i>Teacher acts a facilitator of knowledge</i> <i>Greater part of learning comes from child’s own discovery and work with the materials</i></p> <p><i>Instruction presented in the whole, in chronological fashion, then broken into parts</i></p>