

# FAQ's

(frequently asked questions)

## General Questions

**Q. Where did Montessori come from?**

**A.** Montessori (pronounced MON-tuh-SORE-ee) education was founded in 1907 by Dr. Maria Montessori, the first woman in Italy to become a physician. She based her educational methods on scientific observation of children's learning processes. Guided by her discovery that children teach themselves, Dr. Montessori designed a "prepared environment" in which children could freely choose from a number of developmentally appropriate activities. Now, nearly a century after Maria Montessori's first casa dei bambini ("children's house") in Rome, Montessori education is found all over the world, spanning ages from birth to adolescence.

**Q. Where can I find a good, brief, introduction to Montessori from birth through the school years?**

**A.** At the Michael Olaf Montessori "text" site, which is actually an E-book of Montessori philosophy and practice:  
[www.michaelolaf.net](http://www.michaelolaf.net).

**Q. What is the difference between Montessori and traditional education?**

**A.** Montessori emphasizes learning through all five senses, not just through listening, watching, or reading. Children in Montessori classes learn at their own, individual pace and according to their own choice of activities from hundreds of possibilities. Learning is an exciting process of discovery, leading to concentration, motivation, self-discipline, and a love of learning. Montessori classes place children in three-year age groups (3-

## Some Specific Details of the Montessori Method

### The schedule - The three-hour work period

Under the age of six, there are one or two 3-hour, uninterrupted, work periods each day, not broken up by required group lessons. Older children schedule meetings or study groups with each other the teacher when necessary. Adults and children respect concentration and do not interrupt someone who is busy at a task. Groups form spontaneously or are arranged ahead by special appointment.

They almost never take precedence over self-selected work. Note: For more information on the "three-hour work period" see the chapter "My Contribution to Experimental Science" from *The Advanced Montessori Method, Volume I*, by Dr. Maria Montessori, or contact the Michael Olaf Montessori Company at [michaelola@aol.com](mailto:michaelola@aol.com) for reprint GB850

### Multi-age grouping

Children are grouped in mixed ages and abilities in three to six year spans: 0-3, 3-6, 6-12 (sometimes temporarily 6-9 and 9-12), 12-15, 15-18. There is constant interaction, problem solving, child to child

6, 6-9, 9-12, and so on), forming communities in which the older children spontaneously share their knowledge with the younger ones. Montessori represents an entirely different approach to education.

**Q. Can I do Montessori at home with my child?**

**A.** Yes, you can use Montessori principles of child development at home. Look at your home through your child's eyes. Children need a sense of belonging, and they get it by participating fully in the routines of everyday life. "Help me do it by myself" is the life theme of the preschooler. Can you find ways for your child to participate in meal preparation, cleaning, gardening, caring for clothes, shoes, and toys? Providing opportunities for independence is the surest way to build your child's self-esteem.

At the school level many homeschooling and other parents use the Montessori philosophy of following the child's interest and not interrupting concentration to educate their children.

In school only a trained Montessori teacher can properly implement Montessori education, using the specialized learning equipment of the Montessori "prepared environment." Here social development comes from being in a positive and unique environment with other children -- an integral part of Montessori education.

## Montessori Children

**Q. Is Montessori good for children with learning disabilities? What about gifted children?**

**A.** Montessori is designed to help all children reach their fullest potential at their

teaching, and socialization. Children are challenged according to their ability and never bored. The Montessori middle and high school teacher ideally has taken all three training courses plus graduate work in an academic area or areas.

### Work centers

The environment is arranged according to subject area, and children are always free to move around the room instead of staying at desks. There is no limit to how long a child can work with a piece of material. At any one time in a day all subjects -- math, language, science, history, geography, art, music, etc., will be being studied, at all levels.

### Teaching method - "Teach by teaching, not by correcting"

There are no papers turned back with red marks and corrections. Instead the child's effort and work is respected as it is. The teacher, through extensive observation and record-keeping, plans individual projects to enable each child to learn what he needs in order to improve.

### Teaching Ratio - 1:1 and 1:30+

Except for infant/toddler groups (Ratio dictated by local social service regulations), the teaching ratio is one trained Montessori teacher and one non-teaching aide to 30+ children. Rather than lecturing to large or small groups of children, the teacher is trained to teach one child at a time, and to oversee thirty or more

own unique pace. A classroom whose children have varying abilities is a community in which everyone learns from one another and everyone contributes. Moreover, multiage grouping allows each child to find his or her own pace without feeling "ahead" or "behind" in relation to peers.

**Q. What ages does Montessori serve?**

**A.** There are more Montessori programs for ages 3-6 than for any other age group, but Montessori is not limited to early childhood. Many infant/toddler programs (ages 2 months to 3 years) exist, as well as elementary (ages 6-12), adolescent (ages 12-15) and even a few Montessori high schools.

**Q. Are Montessori children successful later in life?**

**A.** Research studies show that Montessori children are well prepared for later life academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition to scoring well on standardized tests, Montessori children are ranked above average on such criteria as following directions, turning in work on time, listening attentively, using basic skills, showing responsibility, asking provocative questions, showing enthusiasm for learning, and adapting to new situations.

## Montessori Schools

**Q. I recently observed a Montessori classroom for a day. I was very very impressed, but I have three questions.**

1. **There does not seem to be an opportunity for pretend play**
2. **The materials don't seem to allow children to be creative**

children working on a broad array of tasks. She is facile in the basic lessons of math, language, the arts and sciences, and in guiding a child's research and exploration, capitalizing on his interest in and excitement about a subject. The teacher does not make assignments or dictate what to study or read, nor does she set a limit as to how far a child follows an interest.

### Basic lessons

The Montessori teacher spends a lot of time during teacher training practicing the many lessons with materials in all areas. She must pass a written and oral exam on these lessons in order to be certified. She is trained to recognize a child's readiness according to age, ability, and interest in a specific lesson, and is prepared to guide individual progress.

### Areas of study

All subjects are interwoven, not taught in isolation, the teacher modeling a "Renaissance" person of broad interests for the children. A child can work on any material he understands at any time.

### Class size

Except for infant/toddler groups, the most successful classes are of 30-35 children to one teacher (who is very well trained for the level she is teaching), with one non-teaching assistant. This is possible because the children stay in the same group for three to six years and much of the teaching comes from the children and the environment.

### 3. Children don't seem to be interacting with one another very much

Any help you give me would be appreciated. Thank you very much, BD

A. Dear BD, I can give you three very incomplete answers to your perceptive questions:

(1) When Dr. Montessori opened the first Children's House it was full of pretend play things. The children never played with them as long as they were allowed to do real things - i.e. cooking instead of pretending to cook. It is still true.

(2) the materials teach specific things and then the creativity is incredible. Like learning how to handle a good violin and then playing music. It is not considered "creative" to use a violin as a hammer, or a bridge while playing with blocks. We consider it "creative" to learn how to use the violin properly and then create music. The same goes for the materials in a Montessori classroom.

(3) there is as much interaction as the children desire, but the tasks are so satisfying that, for these few hours a day, children want to master the challenges offered by them. Then they become happier and kinder—true socialization. Also, since concentration is protected above all, as all "work" is respected, children learn early on not to interrupt someone who is concentrating.

Q. How do I find Montessori schools in my area?

A. There are thousands of Montessori schools in the world, and three " list links at this site: [www.montessori.edu/refs.html](http://www.montessori.edu/refs.html). If his doesn't help you, look in your phone book, get the literature of local schools, observe, and compare what you learn with

### Learning styles

All kinds of intelligences and styles of learning are nurtured: musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, intuitive, and the traditional linguistic and logical-mathematical (reading, writing, and math). This particular model is backed up by Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

### Assessment

There are no grades, or other forms of reward or punishment, subtle or overt. Assessment is by portfolio and the teacher's observation and record keeping. The test of whether or not the system is working lies in the accomplishment and behavior of the children, their happiness, maturity, kindness, and love of learning and level of work.

### Requirements for age 0-6

There are no academic requirements for this age, but children are exposed to amazing amounts of knowledge and often learn to read, write and calculate beyond what is usually thought interesting to a child of this age.

### Requirements for ages 6-18

The teacher remains alert to the interests of each child and facilitates individual research in following interests. There are no curriculum requirements except those set by the state, or college entrance requirements, for specific grade levels. These take a minimum amount of time. From age six on, students design contracts with the

you read on this site.

**Q. Who accredits or oversees Montessori schools?**

**A.** Unfortunately, there is no way to limit the use of the name "Montessori." Parents must carefully research, and observe a classroom in operation, in order to choose a real Montessori school for their child.

There are several Montessori organizations to which schools can belong. The two major ones operating in the United States are the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI, with a U.S. branch office called AMI-USA) and the American Montessori Society (AMS). Parents considering placing a child in a Montessori school should ask about the school's affiliation(s).

**Q. How much does Montessori cost?**

**A.** (from NAMTA figures, 2005) Because all Montessori schools are operated independently of one another, tuitions vary widely. Also the cost of living in a particular area accounts for the very wide range in tuitions. Median annual tuition by age level follow. "Median" means that they can be lower and much higher in some places, depending on the cost of living. Montessori schools almost never make a profit, and when compared to the cost-per-child in public schools are lower.

(NOTE: these figures are several years old and may not apply today.)

- Infant/toddler: \$4,200+
- Ages 3-6, 3-hour day: \$3,850+
- Ages 3-6, 4-hour day: \$4,500+
- Ages 3-6, 6-hour day: \$5,875+
- Ages 6-9: \$6,690+
- Ages 9-12: \$6,700+
- Ages 12-15 and 15-18: \$8,170+

Also keep in mind that there are many

teacher to guide their required work, to balance their general work, and to teach them to become responsible for their own time management and education. The work of the 6+ class includes subjects usually not introduced until high school or college.

**Character education:**

Education of character is considered equally with academic education, children learning to take care of themselves, their environment, each other - cooking, cleaning, building, gardening, moving gracefully, speaking politely, being considerate and helpful, doing social work in the community, etc.

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## Montessori Teachers

**Q. What special training do Montessori teachers have?**

**A.** As with the choice of a Montessori school for children, an adult must also exercise wisdom in choosing a teacher training course. Anyone can legally use the name "Montessori" in describing their teacher training organization. One must be sure the certification earned is recognized by the school where one desires to teach.

The two major organizations offering Montessori training in the United States are the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI, with a U.S. branch office called AMI-USA) and the American Montessori Society (AMS). Most training centers require a bachelor's degree for

Montessori programs in public schools, which charge no tuition at all to students within their district.

**Q. What is the best way to choose a Montessori school for my child?**

**A.** Ask if the school is affiliated with any Montessori organization. Ask what kind of training the teachers have. Visit the school, observe the classroom in action, and later ask the teacher or principal to explain the theory behind the activities you saw. Most of all, talk to your child's prospective teacher about his or her philosophy of child development and education to see if it is compatible with your own.

**Q. How many Montessori schools are there?**

**A.** We estimate that there are at least 4,000 certified Montessori schools in the United States and about 7,000 worldwide.

**Q. Are Montessori schools religious?**

**A.** Some are, but most are not. Some Montessori schools, just like other schools, operate under the auspices of a church, synagogue, or diocese, but most are independent of any religious affiliation.

**Q. Are all Montessori schools private?**

**A.** No. Approximately 200 public schools in the U.S. and Canada offer Montessori programs, and this number is growing every year.

**Q. What does it take to start a Montessori school?**

**A.** The essential element of any Montessori school is the fully-trained Montessori teacher. A good starting point is a group of parents who want Montessori for their children. The next step is to look into state and local requirements for schools, such as teacher training, facilities, class size, etc. Selecting a site and making sure it meets applicable building codes is also an early part of the process. Montessori materials

admission. Training ranges from 200 to 600 pre-service contact hours and covers principles of child development and Montessori philosophy as well as specific uses of the Montessori classroom materials. Montessori training centers can be found across North America and around the world.

There are other courses which can help one better understand Montessori theory or which can train adults to work in certain schools. It is important to balance the amount of time and money one can spend with the teaching opportunities desired.

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## Montessori Materials

**Q. What materials are used?**

**A.** It is the philosophy and the knowledge of the teacher that is essential in the success of a Montessori class.

One must be wary of the use of the words "Montessori materials" as many people today use the words as a selling point for materials that have no use in the Montessori classroom and can be distracting and impede a child's progress.

The "sensorial," math, and some of the language and cultural materials (metal insets, sandpaper letters, puzzle maps, bells, for example) are professionally manufactured according to traditional standards that have been tested over many years. However even some of these are made by newer companies that do not fully understand the reason for certain details and so produce materials that are not as successful. There is a "materials committee" in Holland that oversees the quality of materials use in AMI

and furniture must be purchased, and, unless one of the founders has taken Montessori training, a teacher must be hired.

(Association Montessori Internationale) school, for example.

Montessori, for very good reasons, make many of their own practical life and language material instead of buying them—as they learn to do in their training, depending on where in the world they live. They gather practical life materials piece by piece. This is an important process that gives a unique quality to each classroom that expresses the culture, and ideas of beauty in each community—instead of all classrooms looking alike with no personal touches.

Materials in the classroom, without being used correctly by a trained teacher, are usually worthless in creating a real Montessori class, but they can help in some ways in non-Montessori situations. For example the math materials have been used to teach a concept sensorially thus helping a child to make the abstraction. Educational materials in the Montessori method serve a very different purpose than in traditional education where the text books are ordered and the teacher learns how to use them. This difference is because in Montessori the child learns from the environment, and it is the teacher's job to put the child in touch with the environment, not to "teach" the child. Thus the creation of the environment, and selection of materials is done mostly by the teacher and is very important.

In Montessori education having too many materials is often worse than not having enough. In this country (USA) there are many materials suppliers, unfortunately, who are not Montessori trained and do not understand the purpose of materials, and who sell items that scatter the child's energy, or waste time, clutter the environment, etc. It is very important to choose carefully when selecting materials for using the Montessori method of

education in school or in the home.

**THANK YOU MICHAEL OLAF:** This information has been reprinted with permission from the Michael Olaf Montessori Company.

They publish two catalogues that are also excellent overviews of Montessori philosophy and practice. (*The Joyful Child* for birth to three years, and *Child of the World*, for three to twelve years)

The text from these publications is available free on the Internet:  
[www.michaelolaf.net](http://www.michaelolaf.net)

The teaching materials, for both homes and schools, have been selected by a Montessori teacher with 0-3, 3-6, 6-12 AMI Montessori training, years of teaching and even using Montessori to homeschool.  
They can be ordered at this site: [www.michaelolaf.com](http://www.michaelolaf.com)

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