

What is Montessori Anyway?

Are you trying to decide if the Montessori method of teaching is right for your preschooler, and for you? If you are unclear about how Montessori schools differ from other preschools and daycare facilities, read this.



Three year old Kiran is stirring the batter for a microwave biscuit, which is part of the practical life area of the Montessori classroom.

Montessori is a calm, encouraging, and respectful approach to teaching young children. It will give you new hope on how you can help your child lay the ground work for a life time of success.

The founder, Dr. Maria Montessori was the first woman doctor in Italy and an education pioneer. Montessori's approach, developed over a century ago, was based on the simple concept of tailoring education to a child's natural tendencies. She observed that children are extraordinarily curious and that they love to work, so she looked for way to implement these qualities into a teaching method. Montessori teachers believe that if a child is properly guided to enjoy learning, he becomes at ease with himself and his surroundings, and he continues to be confident and curious throughout the school years. The Montessori method demonstrates that the simplest and most natural principles will lead to the most happy and well-adjusted young students.

Rather than completely unstructured play or a totally controlled environment with a teacher and silent, listening students, Montessori schools strike a balance. For the child's comfort, furniture and tools are all child sized and everything is accessible to them. The teacher gives each child individual lessons on how to do a specific work or task, and then the materials are placed on open shelves at the child's eye level. Children are then free to choose what they want to work with and master the skill with guidance from a teacher or assistant if needed.

To build independence and confidence, children are not forced to participate in activities that do not interest them. While one child may be very interested in sorting and stringing beads,

another might be much happier looking at books or painting. With fewer struggles for control between the students and teachers, the children have fewer reasons to act out, and become proud of their accomplishments.

Far from being an unsupervised free-for-all, a Montessori education is well rounded, including not only math, art, and geography, but also housework and social skills. Children will be guided to clean up their own messes with child-sized tools, and learn the powerful effect of polite phrases like "please," "thank-you," and "excuse me."

When conflict occur between students they are taught that anger is a natural emotion, and they are guided to learn the words to express their feelings instead of being afraid of them or resorting to physical violence. Students are expected to put each project away before they chose another, so that other children may find it easily. In the Montessori method then, children are closely supervised, but treated with respect. In turn, the students are respectful and busy, uninterrupted by the usual frustrations and power struggles.

The learning tools themselves are ideal for the preschool and kindergarten age groups because they are all interactive with the children's senses. Instead of having to grasp mathematical or language concepts with their minds alone, children are presented with different sized blocks to line up and letters made of sandpaper. This physical interaction with their surroundings keeps the children interested, and delivers information in a form that they are naturally programmed to consume. Imagine a child outdoors planting a garden, examining fall leaves, making biscuits or washing their dishes after lunch. This is the kind of activity a Montessori classroom combines with academics so that children consume knowledge like candy.

Children who are labeled Attention Deficit or have other learning disabilities do extremely well with this hands on approach to learning. Because children work at their own pace and skill level children are accepted for enrollment all year.

Do not be discouraged by the lofty ideals, thinking that these must be expensive private schools. Montessori is only a method of teaching that any preschool can employ, so there are always Montessori school at all level of tuition costs. Teachers also go through intensive and ongoing training in the method, so parents can be confident that these are professionals are passionate about nurturing their children. Still, quality care depends on the individual, so be sure to visit a few schools before you choose one. A good Montessori school will have a calm and busy atmosphere. You should not hear teachers shouting or see any bored or outcast children in the comers. Montessori schools care for your family, and for your child's future.

Decide if a Montessori school is right for your family by visiting one of our schools today:

**Oconomowoc Montessori
Preschool & Kindergarten**

N60W35980 Lake Dr., Oconomowoc

262-443-8445 or

www.oconomowocmontessori.org

Located in Lord of Life Church

**Pewaukee Lake
Montessori Academy**

W287N3700 N. Shore Dr., Pewaukee

262-290-0595 or

www.pewaukeelakemontessori.org

Located in Church of the Resurrection