

Montessori education is a whole and cannot be fully understood by dissecting it into component parts, no list of elements will fully describe Montessori programs. However, this list may give a general picture of Montessori. The ten essentials are:

# Montessori

## CHARACTERISTICS

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### 1. Mixed Age Classes

All Montessori programs are predicted upon a mixed age grouping of children. There are no single grades. Multi age grouping is applied in all authentic Montessori classrooms. Dr. Montessori observed that children learn best in a mixed age classroom while developing uniquely human social experiences.

### 2. Prepared Environment

The prepared environment of Montessori's term for a carefully readied and organized setting for children. It is especially organized with logical groupings of material sequenced from left to right. Each of these groupings represents a specialized typical area such as language arts, mathematics, or other such curricular subjects. The room or environment is furnished with shelves to contain and organize the materials, child size furniture, and a variety of interesting workspaces for the children. There may be no teacher's desk or area, just a specially designed chair.

### 3. Montessori Materials

The Montessori materials are a set of scientifically designed hands-on learning devices. The materials for young children are generally made of hard wood or of metal. Each of the specialized materials is unique to Montessori and designed with particular purposes in mind. These materials are not the same as conventional materials found in regular Kindergartens and nursery schools.

### 4. Repetition

Repetition is not only allowed in the Montessori setting, it is encouraged. In a Montessori school, this means that the child may continue working with a piece of material as long as he or she desires to do so.

### 5. Movement

Children may move about the classroom, if that movement has a purpose that serves learning and education. All of the work in the Montessori class should involve purposeful movement.

### 6. Freedom of Choice

Children are to have the freedom to make choices regarding their seating spaces, work choices, work partners, and timing. In Montessori schools, freedom brings with it responsibility. As a result, children bear the responsibility for the consequences of their choices.

### 7. Independence

The development of independence is seen as a core value in Montessori education. Beginning with the youngest children, a curriculum area called *practical life* exists, which has, as a main purpose, growth in independence. For the young child, this may mean learning to tie shoes or pour liquids. For older children it includes money management and traveling in other countries.

### 8. Respect

The Montessori Method is based on a profound respect for humanity and human beings in all stages of development. Montessori offered the insight that children are too often disrespected, indicating a basic prejudice toward children on the part of some adults. The unique spiritual needs of children demand a nurturing loving adult who can demonstrate respect toward the child and childhood.

### 9. The Montessori View of the Child

Montessori saw children as having a special role or significance to humanity as well as to society. Furthermore, the state of childhood is defining for each individual. Children create the adult that they become. "We cannot with our efforts, create a man. That is the task of the child himself, and it is the most important side of the whole educational question: what the child himself accomplishes of his own power and not what adult man can do for him" (Maria Montessori).

Montessori also saw children as being the preservers of culture and claimed that without children we would have neither civilization nor culture. Thus, it becomes critical that the education provided to them be rich in culture to offer the opportunity to carry it forward.

### 10. The Trained Adult

The Montessori adult is the designer of the environment, an observer, a presenter, a role model, a resource person, and a facilitator. He or she creates the Montessori classroom's prepared environment, which includes the learning materials and the representation of each learning curriculum. The preparation of this Montessori adult requires five elements or components. These five elements are physical, intellectual, didactic, moral, and spiritual.

## Traditional Method

- ✗ Curriculum structured with emphasis on state mandated requirements
- ✗ Teacher-driven curriculum
- ✗ Emphasis on rote knowledge, social development
- ✗ Often few materials for sensory, concrete manipulation
- ✗ Single-age grouping
- ✗ Child usually given specific time for work
- ✗ Instruction pace set by group norm or teacher
- ✗ Errors corrected by teacher Learning reinforced externally by rewards, discouragements
- ✗ Little emphasis or instruction on maintenance of classroom environment
- ✗ Child's seat often assigned; encouraged to sit still during group sessions
- ✗ Teacher is primary enforcer of discipline
- ✗ Teacher's role is dominant, active; child is passive participant
- ✗ Individual and group instruction conforms to the adults' teaching style rather than the individual child's learning style
- ✗ Most teaching done by teacher

## Montessori Method

- ✓ Child's work is self-paced from own interests, abilities
- ✓ Child formulates concepts from exploration of materials
- ✓ Emphasis on cognitive structure, social development
- ✓ Multi-sensory materials for physical exploration, development as concept base
- ✓ Mixed-age grouping
- ✓ Child works as long as desired on chosen project
- ✓ Child sets own learning pace to internalize information
- ✓ Child spots own errors through feedback from material or help from teacher
- ✓ Learning reinforced internally through child's repetition of activity, feelings of success
- ✓ Organized program for learning care of self and classroom environment
- ✓ Child can work where comfortable; move and talk at will (while not disturbing others); group work is voluntary and negotiable
- ✓ Environment, method encourage self-discipline
- ✓ Teacher's role unobtrusive; child actively participates in learning
- ✓ Individual and group instruction adapted to each child's learning style
- ✓ Children encouraged to teach, collaborate, and help each other



A shared learning experience between two CDSA students using the "teen board"; typical of the freedom & self-inspired learning at CDSA.