

Frequently Asked Questions about the Montessori Elementary Program

What long term goals will the Montessori approach afford my child? What do I really want for my child?

Each of us wants our children to be happy and, for most of us, how our child behaves and treats other people is extremely important. We need only then to decide how to make this happen. We believe that the early grades can determine how a child approaches future school experiences and even the rest of his life. If we can give our children meaningful work that they can accomplish on their own they will develop a joy of learning and a positive self-image. Children will learn to cooperate and to treat each other with love and respect. This is the greatest gift we can give them.

Will my child cover the same subject matter as in traditional education? How will I know he is getting the necessary skills?

Each child develops at his own rate. The old adage, "You can't push the river," was never truer—nor should it be. As trained Montessorians we look at the whole child and we recognize that he has emotional and behavioral needs as well as academic ones. We also realize that we have responsibilities to the child and his parents to see that he is prepared for his next educational experience, be it the following year of Montessori, public or private school. Often, our children are significantly advanced because the Montessori materials, individualized curriculum, and one-on-one attention allow them to progress at a rapid, thorough, pace.

How much individual attention does my child receive? What are the benefits of this one-on-one attention?

Whereas we believe it is extremely important for each child to become an independent worker, we also believe that we must be available for each child when he needs help. The value of one-on-one time is extremely critical and there is no substitute for it. Each child needs to learn to ask for help when he needs it and to be able to accept help when offered. Each child knows that the teacher is available and willing to help or to show him something new. Because the class knows how to function without constant direction by the teacher, virtually all of the teacher's time is devoted to individual and small group lessons with the children.

How does Montessori develop concentration, order and independence in the 6 to 9-year-old child?

Maria Montessori believed that if you order a child's environment he will order his mind. Therefore, if we provide the child with a place to work that is purposeful and orderly and allows the child to see where he's been and where he's going, he will create within himself an order that will help him with all his academic pursuits. The young elementary child needs to exert his independence. Freedom in his environment and the opportunity to exercise his own will are the keys to each child's development.

Is self-esteem really stressed in a Montessori program?

The single most important thing we can give a child is a well-developed sense of self-worth. This comes from meaningful work to do and successes he himself realizes. Everything we do later in life depends on how we feel about ourselves. This is something that comes from within at an early age,

not something that can be learned when we're older. We encourage children to work, gently directing them toward material that is appropriate to their development.

Why is it so important that my child become self-directed? What motivates him to learn?

All meaningful work comes from within. We can impose discipline or work on a child and sometimes we see results—however temporary. Each of us has to learn to prioritize, to choose our life's work, and to discipline ourselves for our life to have true purpose. We do children a great disservice not to encourage them in these endeavors at an early age. If by the teenage years the child has not learned to make wise choices, he can fall prey to peer pressure and become a victim of temptations that often confront young people.

What type of child can benefit from a Montessori Elementary program?

Because Montessori is an individualized program, all children benefit. Children who are academically advanced can be continually challenged. The child who may be slower to develop in one or more areas has the advantage of a great deal one-on-one direction by the teacher. All children, regardless of their level of development, need encouragement, unconditional love and a positive self-image. Occasionally, a child who is not motivated to learn and who needs constant direction cannot take advantage of the Montessori environment and may do better in a traditional program.

Montessori has been criticized for not being "real life." Why is it more like real life than traditional school?

Where else, other than school, are we separated by age? And worse yet, we are compared to one another because of our age. As we grow older, age becomes less important when we talk of our abilities and accomplishments. Why then, do we subject young children (the being that can handle it least) to continual comparisons, forces competition, and social approval? Real life is how we want our children to live. Insisting that they "fit in" does not guarantee that they will.

I am concerned that my child needs more children his age.

Developmental differences in children are not dictated by age. Even among children who are the same age there are marked differences in ability and maturity. Whereas a child may need to read with the older children because he is well-advanced in that area, he may need the company of younger children in social situations. The mixed age group affords each child the opportunity to be a leader and a follower without any pressure to be "like someone else." The idea of having older children around challenges younger children to think, thereby bringing about more creativity. Being the oldest, or one of the oldest, in the class gives this child the opportunity to impart his knowledge on the younger children. This not only gives him a great sense of self-worth, it also reinforces that knowledge in his own mind.

How can I get my child involved with neighborhood children if he doesn't go to school with them?

Children do not discriminate against other children because they go to a different school unless they are taught to by an adult. Children are accepted on the basis of their own merit if left alone. We encourage relationships for all children both in and out of school. Brownies, Cub Scouts, soccer,

swim team, etc., all encourage children to have friends visit their home. They are proud of their room, their toys and their mom's cooking.

My child is dying to ride the bus, eat in the cafeteria, and enjoy all the "perks" of going to public school.

Anyone who has had a child attend traditional school knows these passions are short-lived. Eventually children will ride a bus to school and eat in a cafeteria. A child usually accepts this without much argument—"When you go there you will ride the bus." Whereas we recognize that being "part of the crowd" is important at this age, we should also understand that these are certainly not the most important aspects of a child's education and that our children are not capable of making a decision of what school to attend based on these desires.