

Frequently Asked Questions about Montessori

Who is Maria Montessori?

Maria Montessori was a physician, professor, writer, speaker, and advocate for the education of young children. She graduated from medical school in 1870, becoming the first woman in Italy to become a medical doctor. In 1906 she gave up her medical practice and her position as professor of anthropology to open a “Children’s House” in Rome for children of working parents. Having few preconceived notions of her own as to how children learn she based her developing methods for education on her observations of the children themselves. She came to realize that given the proper resources at the developmentally appropriate time in their lives children learn naturally. Her success with the “Children’s House” led to international acclaim. She first came to the United States in 1913 and was well received by such supporters as Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, and Helen Keller. She went on to establish schools and teacher training centers in Europe and India.

What is the Montessori Method?

The Montessori Method is an approach to education which emphasizes the importance of developing the potential of each young child. It is based on recognizing the universal developmental characteristics of all children yet focusing on the individuality of each child’s emotional, social, and cognitive needs. It places importance on specialized training of teachers, a prepared environment, and concrete, self correcting materials that enable a child to explore independently. It recognizes that children can direct their own learning, that they need freedom of movement to do so, that they need to be able to work at their own pace and that by working within their own time framework they develop deeper concentration which enables them to internalize their work rather than just memorize it.

What is the range of ages in a Montessori classroom at CMS?

Infants - 6 weeks – 18 months
Toddlers – 18 months – 36 months
Preprimary – 3 years – 6 years (includes kindergarten)
Elementary – 6 years – 9 years (Level 1)

How does a Montessori school differ from a traditional school?

Maria Montessori observed that children learn differently in terms of the way they use their senses, how they concentrate, and the time it takes for them to learn new material. In order to accommodate these differences a Montessori school is child centered rather than teacher or curriculum centered. Each child learns at his or her own pace using the materials in the classroom that best suit the child’s learning style. Children have the time they need to work on a lesson until it is mastered. They are also encouraged to move ahead whenever they are ready for new lessons. The children are free to move about the classroom, so a Montessori environment is a busy place with many children doing many different activities.

There is a focus in a Montessori classroom on acquiring habits that facilitate good learning skills. The children are encouraged to ask questions, to do independent research, to repeat work until the child is satisfied.

What is the function of the teacher in the Montessori classroom?

A Montessori teacher understands the importance of preparing an environment rich in materials that encourage a child to explore – first through the senses and on a concrete level, later through symbols and abstraction.. As a constant observer of each child the teacher knows the critical time when the child is ready to move on to the next lesson. She is able to “direct” the child to the appropriate resources – hence the term “directress”.

How does the teacher know when my child is ready for more challenging work?

The directress in a Montessori classroom spends much of the time observing each child, noting the work choices the child makes and how often the child chooses a given activity, the time spent on an activity, and the level of mastery and enthusiasm.

Sometimes the child asks for a new lesson or begins to show an interest in what an older child is doing. The Montessori materials are designed so that once a child has mastered one level he or she is able to move smoothly to the next.

What is the best way to choose a Montessori school?

The name “Montessori” is not protected by copyright or trademark; therefore, anyone can call their school a Montessori school. Parents need to do careful research to determine whether or not a school truly follows the Montessori Method. Observe the schools that you are interested in. Ask what kind of training and experience the teachers have and if the school is associated with any professional Montessori organizations. Most directresses in the United States have at least a bachelor’s degree and have received their Montessori training from the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) or from the American Montessori Society (AMS). Observe the interaction between teacher and child. Ask about the school’s philosophy of child development and determine if it fits with your own views about children and their development. Talk to parents who have already sent their children to the school you are interested in. At Canton Montessori School we encourage you to take a tour of our school and to sign up for an observation of a classroom.

Are Montessori children successful later in life?

The purpose of a Montessori education is to prepare a child to live in the world as a purposeful, happy, reality based individual fulfilling his or her potential. A Montessori education focus on *how* to learn, not just *what* to learn, so a Montessori student develops good work habits and life skills such as good listening skills, asking questions, doing individual research, and completing tasks. Montessori children tend to score well on standardized tests and to be well adapted socially and emotionally with an enthusiasm for life and an ability to adapt to new situations.