



What Every Family Should Know about Montessori

By Julie Bragdon, MEd

If you're a parent of a child who attends a Montessori school, how many times have you been asked to explain (by a friend, family member, or another acquaintance) what exactly Montessori is? How many times have you panicked, wondering if it's possible to give a quick definition? As an educator and parent, I get asked this question, too. Here are a few responses I use, which I hope will help you convert another parent to the wonders of Montessori!

1. The Montessori approach to education is child-centered. Children are free to choose materials that appeal to them. We know students learn effortlessly if they are engaged and interested. Montessori teachers tailor lessons to capitalize on each student's ability and demonstrated interest.

2. Each child is encouraged to reach his or her full potential in all areas of classroom life; there is no ceiling on the curriculum. Each child works independently, able to maintain momentum without having to keep pace with any other child.

3. Montessori teachers do not dominate the classroom but rather act as gentle guides. They are encouraging and give students personal, meaningful feedback. False praise and extrinsic rewards are damaging to children and have no place in a Montessori classroom.

4. Montessori classrooms use special materials that are beautiful, hands-on, and designed to help children develop concentration and work through the process of learning. These materials introduce concepts in concrete terms, which then enable abstract learning and reasoning when developmentally appropriate. Dr. Montessori deliberately designed her materials so

that children can spot their own errors, self-assess, and complete tasks on their own, gaining self-sufficiency and independence. Errors are viewed as part of the learning process rather than things to be ashamed of (Montessori, 1967). We believe that mistakes are critical to learning and often highlight our own mistakes in the classroom for students to see.

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5. Montessori students work in a variety of settings and contexts (from working alone in a quiet classroom to applying lessons learned out in the field with peers), which encourages social and academic growth. It is important that students be exposed to a variety of learning situations; this keeps negotiation and leadership skills sharp and requires students to exercise flexible thinking strategies, a skill we know they will need for future success.

6. A fundamental belief of the Montessori Method is that children learn best within a social environment that supports and respects each child's unique development—a comfortable setting filled with developmentally appropriate materials and experiences that contribute to the growth of self-motivated, independent learners. We are social creatures and want to teach others what we know (Lieberman, 2013).

7. Immersion learning, independent investigation, and multisensory

instruction are all part of the Montessori classroom. Montessori students learn in a variety of ways so that new information can be stored in multiple ways.

8. Montessori students are free to move about the classroom at will, to walk to get a drink when they need it, to talk to a friend about an exciting new idea, or maybe even to do a math lesson graphing how far each first-year Elementary student can jump. Dr. Montessori believed that movement and learning were rooted together, a concept backed up by current brain research on what is called "embodied cognition" (Bennett, 2008).

What matters most when you speak about Montessori education is that you speak from your heart. Your passion and the principles that make Montessori meaningful to you and your family are what will help spread the good word about Montessori education and motivate your listener to want to learn more.

References

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JULIE BRAGDON, MEd, is assistant head of school at Montessori School of Denver in Denver, CO. She is member-at-large and family representative to the AMS Board of Directors. She is AMS-credentialed (Early Childhood). Contact her at jbragdon@msd-co.org.