

Montessori Education Program Philosophy

“In order to educate, it is essential to know those who are to be educated.”

Maria Montessori, A Pedagogical Anthropology

Maria Montessori’s philosophy of education, with all its vitality and vision, is the foundation of the District 36 Montessori Choice Program, founded in 1981. Maria Montessori viewed education as a process involving the whole child, respecting his uniqueness and ability to shape his own future.

It is the task of the teacher to create an environment which is most favourable to the enhancement of concentration, and to provide the child with the means with which to educate himself. This requires that the teacher get to know each child and assist him at his own rate of progress. For this reason children usually spend three years with the same teacher.

The specifically designed materials in the classroom enable the child to take advantage of sensitive periods for the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Classroom materials stimulate the child’s reasoning and imagination, prompting him to move beyond the concrete, sensory world to the realm of the abstract. Once the child has mastered a particular task, he is guided to a new area of learning.

The curriculum has an integrated approach, with the child learning first about the unity of the universe and then focussing on its constituent parts. The child is able to move freely about the classroom, choosing the areas that most interest him, while at the same time being guided through the basic requirements of the public school curriculum.

Although freedom and independence are cultivated, the child learns that his liberty is bounded by respect for others and responsibility towards his environment. His integration in a multi-age group enables him to communicate and cooperate with children younger and older than himself.

Parents are expected to familiarize themselves with the Montessori philosophy and play an active role in their children’s schooling. Once again a unified approach is stressed, as the child’s home and his classroom are seen as part of the Montessori community.

Program Description

Classes are not graded conventionally, but arranged according to the psychological characteristics of the elementary-age child. Dr. Montessori observed how younger children learn from older children or those at a more advanced stage of knowledge in any particular subject. At the same time, older children confirm their own newly acquired knowledge by explaining it to their juniors, as well as understanding the social qualities of leadership and respect for the growing abilities of those coming along behind them.

In the elementary as much as in the pre-school experience, each child continues to learn at their own rate according to their abilities and interests. The teacher's task is to observe this process and guide the children as individuals, while at the same time encouraging a deeply felt appreciation of both group relationship and social spirit.

"In our Montessori school we learn together peacefully and responsibly by caring for each other and the world." ~ Mountainview Montessori Mission Statement

The following are some characteristics of the Montessori Elementary Program:

- There is a multi-age group in each class, ideally a three-year age span, with 6 – 9 year-olds grouped together, and 9 – 12 year-olds in another grouping.
- Wherever possible, children stay with one teacher for three years.
- The assumption is that children are self-motivated to learn.
- It is an individualized program. The child progresses at his own rate.
- There is the use of self-correcting concrete materials which are devised to be used in a sequence matched to the child's sensitive periods beginning at an early age. Materials are limited so that the children learn to share and help one another.
- The children have freedom of movement and may work anywhere in the room, at tables or mats on the floor. They are also free to talk, help others, work in groups or with a partner – within the boundaries of respect and responsibility
- There are large unbroken time spans for work, with a minimum of interruptions that disturb the child's concentration.
- The curriculum is designed to develop in the child a cosmic or global view of mankind, stressing the interdependence of man and the care of the environment.
- There is an emphasis on the moral and spiritual development of the child as a contributing member of the world society.
- The use of technology is encouraged and integrated into the curriculum.

Instructional Style, Methods and Use of Materials The Prepared Environment

A Montessori classroom and curriculum requires thoroughly trained teachers. The teacher prepares a learning environment – classroom, materials, social setting and atmosphere – that supports children and encourages concentration, self-motivation, problem solving, and experimental learning. With the guidance of a trained adult, there is much opportunity for purposeful work, both alone and with peers. Together, the teacher and child form a relationship based on trust and respect that fosters self-confidence and a willingness to try new things. The prepared environment allows children to take responsibility for their own education, giving them the opportunity to become human beings able to function independently and also interdependently.

The classroom is rich in materials specially developed from Dr. Montessori's philosophical and practical observations of the child at work. These materials are purchased from specialized suppliers as well as made by hand by teachers and parents. The range and sequential nature of these materials permit each child to progress at their own level. The materials lead the children from the concrete to the abstract. Eventually, the child will discard the use of concrete learning apparatus when the process of mental abstraction becomes faster for her than the use of concrete materials.

Lessons are presented to the large group, small groups or individuals, depending on the subject matter and degree of skill required in their understanding and mastery. Large groups are used to make general introductions to a subject. They help awaken the child's interest and strike their imaginations. Small groups give an opportunity for the presentation of more detail, for excursions into the outside world and for sharing exact techniques in experiments, arts and research projects. Individual presentations are made by the teacher when a child chooses some work which requires some mastery of a particular aspect before she can proceed to a higher level of work.

Provincial requirements of curriculum and written reports to parents during the school year are met. Additionally, the Montessori curriculum includes studies in practical life and cultural/global studies. Learning of the curriculum often involves explorations outside of the classroom, utilizing all resources available on the school site as well as in the community. This inclusive approach fosters a feeling of connectedness to all humanity, and encourages the desire to make positive contributions to the world.

Teachers utilize a variety of assessments and record-keeping (including Montessori methods) to inform them of the child's needs in learning as well as the child's progress. These include observational notes as well as more formalized assessments. Ongoing dialogue between teachers and parents is a critical process in supporting the child and is an integral part of the Montessori Program. Additionally, the format of the written report is adjusted to reflect the Montessori curriculum in the classroom. In keeping with the philosophy of progress at their own rate, letter grades are not placed on report cards. However, parents are given indications as to the level of achievement their child has made in relation to other children of the same age level.

The child is encouraged, as in preschool, to assist in the care and maintenance of his environment. Its organization requires flexibility and the recognition that “respect for the environment” naturally follows the child’s sense of inclusion in the classroom’s care, its arrangement and maintenance.

The Montessori environment is arranged to allow for maximum independence of children. The emergence of individual talents and personalities is enjoyed and encouraged.

“If education is to profoundly touch the heart and mind of a child, he must be learning because he is curious and interested, not simply to earn the highest grade in the class.”

~ Dr. Maria Montessori