

Montessori Myth Busting

The name Montessori means different things to different people. In fact, there are many misconceptions about Montessori that are represented as fact, especially on the internet. Some of the misinformation about Montessori can even dissuade parents from looking into a Montessori program for their child. So, in order to set the record straight, we've rounded up some of the most prevalent myths to uncover the truth about the Montessori method.

Myth #1: Montessori is for preschoolers

While the program for 3-6 year olds (called Casa dei Bambini, or Children's House) is the most popular, and the age group of the children for whom Maria Montessori originally developed her curriculum, there is a Montessori program available for all ages. All children can benefit from the methodology whether they are three months old or seventeen years old.

Myth #2: Children can do whatever they want

It's true that in comparison with a traditional classroom, a Montessori environment offers a lot of freedom. Children aren't sitting in rows, silently listening to the teacher. They're moving about the room, choosing work, eating a snack, and chatting with a friend. Of course, with freedom comes responsibility, and the more children can demonstrate that they are responsible, the more freedoms they are allowed. And while it's true that children are allowed to choose their own work, there is a difference between choosing your work and doing whatever you want.

Myth #3: Montessori is not academically rigorous

A Montessori program is just as academically challenging as traditional programs, oftentimes even more challenging! Maria Montessori understood that very young children can learn abstract concepts if they are introduced in a concrete manner. Children are also encouraged to follow their interests, through free choice of work, and through special lessons presented by the teachers. Montessori teachers are keen observers, and can recognize when children are interested in a particular subject or skill. They take advantage of this interest by presenting related materials. So if, for instance, a child is showing a lot of interest in letter sounds, beginning sounds in words, etc, the teacher can capitalize on this by presenting the child with the sandpaper letters, for example. When children are presented with a lesson at the moment that they are expressing interest (or going through what Montessori deemed a "sensitive period" for learning a particular skill), they will learn more easily and with more joy. As a result, when Montessori students transition to traditional schools they tend to be more academically advanced than the other children.

According to neuroscientist and Montessori proponent, Dr. Steven Hughes, "If we decided that the purpose of education should be to help every child's brain reach its highest developmental potential...Montessori education presents a radically different – and radically effective – educational approach that may be the best method we've got to ensure the optimal cognitive, social, and emotional development of every child."

Myth #4: Montessori stifles creativity

Montessori actually encourages more creativity than traditional programs. In a traditional school, children are fed information by the teacher, and then are expected to regurgitate that information correctly on a test. There is little opportunity to think outside the box. Montessori teachers, on the other hand, encourage students to follow their interests and ask questions. But rather than providing all of the answers, they are more likely to ask the child, "What do you think?" Children then have the opportunity to explore, experiment and come to their own conclusions. Some of today's most innovative companies (Google, Amazon, etc) were founded by Montessori alums.

A Montessori education is designed to help children reach their full potential, develop a lifelong love of learning, and make a difference in their community, even the world. And that's one piece of information that's not a myth- that's a fact!