

# Montessori Q & A

**“Education is a natural process carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words, but by experiences in the environment.” – Maria Montessori**

## **Question 1: What makes Montessori different from other programs? Why Montessori?**

The aim of Montessori education is to foster competent, responsible, adaptive citizens who are lifelong learners and problem solvers. Montessori education provides children with skills for today's society.

They learn to:

- Think critically
- Solve problems, and
- Work collaboratively

The blend of social and academic learning promotes respect, confidence and self-motivation in children.

“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

Three components that comprise the Montessori approach:

- 1 The classroom is considered either a Prepared environment (Primary) or a Designed environment (Intermediate). Both learning environments encourage students to pull from what they need in their surroundings. Teachers act as guides or directors of learning.
  - a) Typically, there are not whole class lessons with this approach.
  - b) Students are self-directed. They have individualized work plans.
  - c) Students are self-directed and have the ability for choice. Students are intrinsically motivated to learn. They are allowed to explore their own learning with the guidance of the teacher who directs the next steps in the child's learning which is embedded in the learning environment. Teachers find the balance between choice and teacher guided learning.
- 2 Cosmic education is an overall Montessori approach to education that involves helping children develop an awareness that everything in the universe is connected and interdependent and forms a harmonious whole and that they themselves are part of and contribute to that whole.
  - a) Cosmic Education embraces students learning and knowing where they come from and where they are going to. This allows them to know that they have a place in the universe and that who they are and what they contribute, matters.

- b) The 'Timeline of Life' is learned in this process so students know where they fit in the great world timeline of life. Uninterrupted work time/teacher as director not lecturer or presenter are also provided during this time.
- 3 Students are able to continue with their work uninterrupted which creates a learning flow in the classroom. The teacher is there to guide the learning. Students are encouraged to be curious about what they want to learn and are asked about how they will figure out their line of inquiry.
- a) Students use control charts to self-correct their own work. This is encouraged so that students can learn from their work and it gives them a deeper understanding of the concepts being learned.
  - b) A fundamental belief is that a child's intrinsic motivation is compromised when they are given external reward or motivation. As a result, Montessori teachers never mark up a child's work and try to avoid subjective comments such as 'good job or nice try'.

**Question 2: I hear the Montessori program uses different kinds of materials in their teaching. Can you describe some and how you use them and why there is a need for different materials?**

Montessori classrooms use special materials that are 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.

The diversity of learning activities recognizes and allows for the unique interests and learning styles of each child. Immersion learning, independent investigation and multi-sensory 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.

For a view of the materials, please watch the Montessori School of Choice video as some of the materials are observable in this video.

**Question 3: How does the multi-grade approach benefit students? Is there a reason why the 3 grades are grouped the way they are? i.e. K, 1/2/3, 4/5/6**

Classrooms and materials are designed for 3-year age groups, a structure that enhances academic learning opportunities for younger children while developing the leadership skills of older children. Within this environment the child drives the pace of learning, choosing materials that excite and interest them.

These 3-year groupings are built on developmental stages that occur in life naturally. Children in these stages respond to different materials at different ages.

The final year of a 3-year grouping is referred to as the 'crowning year' which provides the oldest students to take on even more leadership opportunities and to understand their internal abilities to lead and add to their community around them.

Younger children look up to older children and want to learn from them. This in turn places the older child in a leadership position, which inspires self-respect and confidence. Children that are advanced don't feel held back and children that are struggling to grasp a concept don't feel left behind. Everyone feels like they belong.

The multi-grade approach allows students with experience to teach others while allowing it to solidify for themselves the concept being taught.

**Question 4: Why do classes stay together for 3 years?**

A three-year learning cycle in a classroom allows the teacher to really know your child's needs academically, emotionally and socially. Over the three years all of the three grade topics get discovered in ways that integrate into the Montessori curriculum.

**Question 5: Will my child have the same teacher for the 3-year cycle?**

Yes! Then at the end of the primary years, the Montessori teachers meet to discuss the best fit for the next 3 years of learning.

**Question 6: What happens after grade 6? Would my child have to return to their neighbourhood/catchment school or can they stay at Aberdeen?**

When students in the Montessori program finish grade 6, they then can stay on at Aberdeen. At that time, all grade 6 students (Montessori & Neighbourhood) funnel into mixed grade 7 groupings. Your child may end up in a straight grade 7 class or a multi-age grade 6/7 class.

**Question 7: How do you know if Montessori is the right fit for your child?**

You know your child best. Are they able to work with others and also work independently in a self-directed learning environment? Do you as the parent, believe in the philosophical approach that is Montessori?

**Question 8: What if my child struggles with learning or has other challenges? Will Montessori still be a good fit?**

It depends. Again, you know your child best. A strong sense of community is formed over the three year period.

**Question 9: If the Montessori approach doesn't work for my child, can they then enter the neighbourhood portion of the school (even if we don't live in the catchment area?)**

It depends. It is first and foremost dependent on space availability in the neighbourhood portion of Aberdeen Elementary. You are not guaranteed a space if changing programs.

**Question 10: Does the Montessori program still adhere to the BC Curriculum and have to follow the assessment and reporting guidelines outlined by the BC Ministry of Education?**

YES! However, there are also some key elements of the Montessori program that need to be adhered to as well (include link).

**Question 11: What is the class size?**

Multi-age classrooms class size is 22 for primary grades and 27 for intermediate grades. These are Ministry of Education class size limits.

**Question 12: Who determines which class my child enters?**

At Aberdeen, we work as a team to find the best fit for each student so that they can be as successful as possible.

**Question 13: Is there any time that my child could be the only student at a particular grade level?**

Yes. As in all learning environments, students move, change direction and come and go from classrooms for a variety of reasons.