

THE OBJECTIVIST FORUM

VOL. 5 NO. 3

JUNE 1984

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT MONTESSORI EDUCATION

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Q: What is the basic goal of Montessori education?

A: In a word: independence. Montessori education teaches a child self-reliance and prepares him for independent living as an adult. The independent individual, said Maria Montessori, is one who “through his own efforts is able to perform the actions necessary for his own comfort and development in life, conquers himself, and in so doing, multiplies his abilities and perfects himself as an individual.”

Q: How does the Montessori method promote independence?

A: Montessori wrote that an independent person is one who has within himself “the means of existence.” Since man’s basic tool of survival is his mind, independence is primarily an issue of intellectual independence. To be equipped for independent living means to be able to rely on one’s own thinking. Consequently, Montessori education is directed toward developing the child’s capacity for rational thought, his reason.

Rational thinking, in the Montessori view, is not idle speculation severed from the real world. Nor, on the other hand, is reason restricted to solving immediate, practical problems. Reason is man's faculty for understanding reality, and for guiding his actions on the basis of that understanding. Reason makes possible the distinctively human level of existence. "It is the light of reason that makes the difference between man and other animals."

Montessori education offers a child cognitive guidance, so that he may strengthen and develop his reasoning capacity. The Montessori method helps a child develop "an ordered mind," a mind with a system for organizing facts. "The same physical acts which, performed blindly and without order, led to disease and death, when ordered rationally were the means of life." An ordered mind is like a file cabinet whose papers are arranged logically; or, to use Maria Montessori's favorite analogy, it is like a library, as opposed to a mass of books piled up at random. Helping a child build an ordered mind is the main business of a Montessori classroom.

Q: How do Montessori schools develop a child's mind?

A: The ability to reason is developed by basically the same means as any other ability. To learn the piano, for instance, one begins by learning to play three or four keys, then adds more keys, then builds combinations of keys into chords, etc. In Montessori schools, a child's intellect is developed by a similar method. Intellectual tasks are broken down into simple steps so that a child can concentrate on these steps one at a time and master them. After integrating what he has learned, he is ready to advance to more difficult tasks that will use and build upon the earlier knowledge.

The first and most basic intellectual task is concept-formation. (All thinking involves identifying things in terms of concepts and of grasping conceptual relationships.) One's first concepts are simple abstractions, like "table," "blue," and "large," based on sensory perception. Thus to build an ordered mind, Montessori primary education begins with "sensory education" to guide the young child in forming exact and logically ordered concepts from sensory information.

Q: What does sensory education consist of?

A: Sensory education is the "refinement" of a young child's sensory powers so that he becomes more observant and more sensitive to similarities and differences in the objects he perceives. By means of special activities and materials, a three to five year old child is led to focus on one sense modality at a time and to identify subtle differences in what he sees, hears, and touches.

To accomplish this, the teacher limits the child's field of awareness. For example, in teaching the concepts "large" and "small," the teacher presents objects which vary in size only; the child is then asked to arrange the objects in order of increasing size. In "the silence exercise," the class-

room is darkened and the children remain as quiet as possible, listening intently while the teacher asks them to identify particular sounds. In another exercise, the child is asked to identify types of cloth by touch only, so that he learns to “see with his hands.”

In sensory education the young child learns to “distinguish the degrees of various attributes,” and becomes increasingly aware of the nature of the objects he observes and how they compare to other objects. The knowledge of colors, shapes, sounds, and textures he gradually acquires becomes an automatized part of his mental order, and forms the foundation for intellectual or conceptual education. “To collect facts and to distinguish between them is the initial process in intellectual construction.” The teacher, writes Montessori, “must intervene to lead the child from sensation to ideas—from the concrete to the abstract, and to the association of ideas.”

By mastering such exercises, “the child has not only developed in himself special qualities of observation and of judgment, but the objects which he observes may be said to go into their place, according to the order established in his mind, and they are placed under their appropriate name and in an exact classification.”

Montessori stressed the importance of learning the proper word for each kind of thing: “In every exercise, when the child has recognized the differences between the qualities of objects, the teacher fixes the idea of this quality with a word.” Because man holds his concepts in the form of words, a child needs to use words precisely in order to think clearly.

Q: How does Montessori schooling differ from traditional education?

A: “Traditional education” means the kind of education that was almost universal thirty or forty years ago, and which still dominates public (and private) education today. Traditional education has no explicit philosophy or definite program; it can be characterized only by listing its features: standard subjects taught in distinct class periods, students seated at their desks listening to the teacher or filling in workbooks, tests requiring regurgitation of textbook material, etc.

Traditional education and Montessori education do bear some superficial similarities—both maintain classroom order and stress “basic” subjects. But the differences between the two approaches are many and profound.

In the primary years (ages 2 1/2 to 5), traditional education offers nothing comparable to Montessori primary education—only “nursery school,” an institution whose main function is baby-sitting. While the four-year-old in a traditional nursery school is finger-painting or playing with toys, his Montessori peer is mastering the shapes and sounds of the letters of the alphabet and learning how to add.

More generally, the two systems differ radically in overall philosophy and approach. Montessori education has a specific goal: the development of independence. Traditional education has no specific goal, only a con-

glomeration of concrete policies and objectives that change from season to season and teacher to teacher. The Montessori method teaches children to form abstractions on the basis of their own observation. Traditional education substitutes rote memorization for concept-formation and conceptual understanding. Thus while the Montessori child learns to identify reality firsthand, traditional education encourages the child to absorb passively a collection of unintegrated facts, often with the teacher's say-so taking the place of a rational explanation. The Montessori child is treated as an "active and intelligent explorer," not as a passive receptacle. The Montessori curriculum is purposefully organized and integrated to achieve the Montessori goals. The traditional curriculum is a haphazard collection of topics with no consistent structure or methodology.

Even with respect to details, Montessori education differs markedly from traditional education: instead of sitting quietly and speaking only when spoken to, Montessori children are free to move about the room and to choose among a variety of activities according to their own interests. Instead of establishing achievement levels for the class as a whole, the Montessori curriculum is individualized. Instead of receiving letter grades based on standardized tests (often using implicit grading "curves"), each Montessori child is evaluated on the basis of his individual work.

Q: How does Montessori education differ from progressive education?

A: As traditional education encourages children to be mentally passive and obedient, so progressive education encourages a different form of the same mental passivity: it teaches the child to let his feelings substitute for his thinking and to let his actions be directed by his emotions. This subjectivism is inherent in the philosophy behind progressive education: the pragmatist philosophy of William James and of John Dewey (the father of progressive education). Pragmatism, as a philosophic movement, scorns all absolutes, principles, and abstract thought. While traditional education dispenses with conceptual understanding in favor of rote memorization, progressive education dispenses with conceptual understanding in favor of "trial-and-error" groping and "playing it by ear." In practice, this means doing whatever one feels like at the moment.

As in the case of traditional education, progressive education bears some outward, superficial similarities to Montessori education. Both lack grades and class periods. Both allow freedom of movement and de-emphasize memorization. But, again, the differences are profound. Progressive education advocates unrestrained "self-expression" (i.e., acting on the whim of the moment). Montessori advocates cognitive development, holding that the essence of one's "self" is one's reasoning mind. The progressives hold Dewey's view that education should "socialize" the child by submerging him in the group. Montessori education is based on individualism.

Progressive education relies on free play as the means of learning. The Montessori method stresses work within the “prepared environment.” Because progressives don’t believe in the “transfer of learning,” i.e., the ability to form abstractions and generalize, they equate thinking with the solving of immediate, concrete problems. Montessori education, in contrast, views thinking as a conceptual activity, directed toward grasping and applying principles, and teaches children a general *method* for understanding and dealing with reality.

The curriculum in a progressive school is defiantly random or whim-based: “I’ll start talking and see what happens,” wrote Herbert Kohl in *The Open Classroom*. If a bird flies into the classroom, then the students may suddenly find themselves studying birds; if a fire truck’s siren is heard, fire-fighting may become the topic of discussion. This militantly anti-integrative, unstructured approach is the opposite of the Montessori method.

Q: Doesn’t Montessori education ignore social development?

A: To see what prompts this question, consider the progress of a typical day in a Montessori primary classroom. When the morning begins, between 20 and 40 children, aged three to five, come into the room, greet the teacher, hang up their coats, and proceed to work. That is, they walk to the shelves, take, perhaps, some math or reading materials to their tables or place them on floor mats and busily engage in their learning activities. Occasionally they help other children or converse with the teacher. The work day is broken by recess and lunch time, and sometimes by short group lessons, perhaps in music or a foreign language.

One aspect of this daily routine startles many observers: there is little or no group activity in the traditional sense—no group projects, no enforced sharing, no activities that require cooperative learning and group grades. Many people conclude from this that Montessori education does not foster “social development,” that there is no concern with helping children learn to live with others—surely a legitimate concern of parents. No parent would want his child prepared for the life of a hermit.

But it is an error to equate social *development* with social *conformity*. There is a crucial difference between learning how to relate to other individuals and the kind of herd-mentality that is often promoted under the label of “social development.” Montessori children do not become “socialized” into a collective, but they do develop socially into independent individuals. By strengthening the child’s thinking capacity, by letting him see that he can think for himself and succeed, Montessori education helps the child build a solid sense of his own identity. This sense of personal identity is the necessary foundation for forming healthy social relationships, rather than the neurotically dependent ties of the conformist.

The Montessori method does, in fact, encourage social development,

but *individualistic* social development. “Childlife,” wrote Maria Montessori, “is not an abstraction, it is the life of individual children.”

A child does need to learn how to make friends, cooperate, and deal rationally with others. But group activities are not the best or exclusive means of accomplishing this. Social interaction on an individual basis occurs in the normal fashion among Montessori children: recess and lunch periods at a Montessori school are no different from those at other schools, and children do work together, and even teach each other, within the Montessori curriculum. But the underlying principle is voluntarism. A child may seek assistance or solicit help, but no one is forced or browbeaten into working with others. Each Montessori child is considered to be in the classroom to pursue his own individual benefit.

Individualism is also manifested in a respect for property rights, which Montessori considered to be among the most important social principles. In a Montessori classroom, when a child uses materials he has selected from the shelf, he need not share them with others, but he is responsible for their care and for returning them to their assigned place when he is done.

Under the Montessori system, children develop a respect for the rights and the individuality of others. The classroom fosters a feeling of benevolence rather than hostility to others. This benevolence can be observed when visiting a classroom of three to five-year-olds: children and teachers politely greet each other in the morning; the children help each other remove snow boots, carefully serve snacks and pour drinks for their classmates; and the conflicts and fighting so common in the public schools are virtually non-existent. These examples of *civilized* social behavior are an expression of the Montessori approach to social development.

Q: Doesn't the Montessori emphasis on reason and order discourage imagination and creativity?

A: On the contrary, reason and order are the *preconditions* of imagination and creativity. As Ayn Rand stated, “Far from inhibiting imagination, the Montessori method fosters it by feeding its source: understanding. Imagination is not a faculty for escaping reality but for rearranging the elements of reality to achieve human values; it requires and presupposes some knowledge of the elements one chooses to rearrange.”

For Montessori, creativity, whether scientific or artistic, is not the same as unstructured “self-expression” or fantasy. “The scientist who has developed special qualities of observation and who ‘possesses’ an order in which to classify external objects will be the man to make scientific discoveries. It will never be he who, without preparation and order, wanders dreaming among plants or under the starlit sky.” Artistic creativity also requires pre-existent knowledge and mental order, according to Montessori:

No one can say that man *creates* artistic products out of nothing.

What is called creation is in reality a composition, a construction

raised upon *primitive material* of the mind, which must be collected from the environment by means of the senses. This is the general principle summed up in the axiom: *Nihil est in intellectu quod prius non ferret in sensu* (there is nothing in the intellect which was not first in the senses).

Central to the Montessori method of developing creativity are the “prepared environment” and the “ordered mind.” The “prepared environment” is Maria Montessori’s term for the planned, sequential use of the didactic materials. The ultimate goal is the “ordered mind,” the mind that can conceptualize and organize concepts into rational thoughts. It is only such a mind that can become creative. The child, wrote Montessori, will soon find himself “facing the world with psychic qualities refined and quickened.” As his powers of observation increase, he will begin to make discoveries. “He will look through the same telescope as the curious visitor or the dilettante, but he will see much more clearly.”

In contrast to the progressives’ idea that “fantasy play” is the road to creativity, Montessori likened pure fantasy to a savage, pre-rational stage of development and argued that education should help children *overcome* the desire to live in a world of myth and superstition. While “pretending” is fine as a form of recreation, it is not a synonym for creativity, and Montessori schools do not encourage pretending as a way to develop creativity. In fact, that would detract from the true basis of creativity: observing and understanding the external world. “The mind that works by itself, independently of truth, works in a void, and the result is an unreal world full of error destroying the possibility of creating in reality.”

Q: What is the role of competition in the Montessori classroom?

A: The Montessori environment is non-competitive. Children do not compete for high grades (teachers give no grades), nor are they evaluated on a comparative basis. Each child proceeds at a pace determined by his own level of development and progress with the materials, as evaluated by his teacher. This non-competitive atmosphere is a reflection of the individualism of the Montessori method: children are encouraged to work for their own self-development and to look to their own progress, not that of others, in evaluating themselves.

Some parents question the realism of this non-competitive atmosphere. After all, they observe, we live in a competitive society. Shouldn’t children be prepared for that, they ask, rather than be sheltered in some ideal world?

But turning the classroom into a miniature version of adult society is not a realistic way of preparing a child for adult life. School is a place for developing the child’s knowledge and abilities, not for adult performance.

Moreover, making children compete for a static number of “A’s” teaches him that one person’s achievement is diminished by another’s greater

achievement, and that one profits by another's failure. That is not true to adult life; life is not essentially a competition, nor does economic competition in a free society work that way.

Montessori education helps develop the kind of person who has the knowledge, confidence, and self-respect that leads him to feel a sense of good will toward others, to value rather than fear their ability. Such an individual is concerned with what *he* can achieve, not with beating out others. This is the sort of person who thrives in a free society.

Q: Does the Montessori method employ rewards and punishments?

A: No. The use of artificial rewards and punishments to motivate children is contrary to the nature of children, Maria Montessori found. What best motivates children is their own self-development, not externally assigned rewards. The child who accomplishes "truly human work," she wrote, "is not spurred by prizes or the fear of punishment." On the contrary, "the prize and the punishment are incentives toward unnatural and forced effort."

In the Montessori classroom, success and failure do confront the child, but not in the form of grades or the teacher's approval or disapproval. Rather, there is natural success and failure *built into* the Montessori materials. When a child learns what the materials are constructed to teach him, he achieves his reward: a sense of his own efficacy. The standard of his success is neither external authority ("I'm capable because my teacher says so") nor arbitrary, subjective feelings ("I'm capable because I feel I am"), but *objective* ("I'm capable because I built a tower of blocks" or learned to read, solved this addition problem, etc.).

The desire to learn, Montessori held, comes from within the child. "He himself must observe, understand, form judgments." The teacher's role is as a "guide," who uses the "prepared environment" to facilitate learning. The ultimate cause of learning is and must be the child's own natural curiosity and initiative, not the external environment.

Q: What is the Montessori view of discipline?

A: "We call an individual disciplined when he is master of himself." If he is merely silent and immobile, he is "annihilated," wrote Montessori, not disciplined.

Because Montessori understood the nature and needs of children, she was able to design an educational program that eliminates most disciplinary problems before they start. (Consequently, she encountered so few problems in her own classroom that she wrote little about discipline.) In Montessori classrooms, students are gaining the tools of survival, building self-confidence, and making new discoveries each day. A child who is goal-directed and absorbed in his work does not need external discipline.

In contrast to the chaos and constant disruption found in many public classrooms, the most common behavior problem in the Montessori school is a child's inability to concentrate and apply himself to the teaching

materials. When actual disruption does occur, it is met with *isolation*—i.e., the teacher separates the disruptive child from his work or from the rest of the class. As a consequence of his behavior, the child is temporarily isolated from his *values* and thus has a strong incentive to stop being disruptive.

Q: Does the structured Montessori environment inhibit the child's freedom?

A: The Montessori classroom is indeed structured, rather than free-floating. Materials are introduced sequentially and are to be used in certain ways only. The room is orderly and generally quiet.

It is difficult to see how this could be called an infringement of the child's freedom. In a political context, "freedom" means the absence of physical coercion. But the classroom is not adult society, and the fact that the curriculum is structured does not represent coercion or tyranny. The children value and enjoy the structured Montessori environment: it provides a peaceful, orderly atmosphere for working on well-defined problems which they take great pleasure in solving.

The only "freedom" that a structured classroom environment might be said to inhibit is the "freedom" to be purposeless or to attempt to defy reality. The Montessori method teaches obedience to the law of cause and effect (Johnny finds that a square peg will not fit into a round hole) and to the facts of reality (two plus two equals four, even if Johnny assumes otherwise). The Montessori method is premised on Francis Bacon's dictum, "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed." This "obedience" to nature (i.e., reality) is the exact opposite of obedience to the arbitrary commands of other people.

For Montessori, freedom meant the ability to achieve one's goals without being hampered by fear, ignorance, or incapacity. In this sense, Montessori observed that a free individual is one possessing the knowledge and confidence to direct his own life, rather than one who, lacking these traits, is at the mercy of chance circumstances. A child who is left completely alone to wander aimlessly in an unstructured environment is not "free," says Montessori; he is "abandoned." Self-reliance is an achievement, something the child has to earn by making himself capable and knowledgeable. Thus the prepared environment, being designed to assist in developing the child's mind, is a necessary foundation for freedom in this sense.

THE OBJECTIVIST FORUM

VOL. 5 NO. 4

AUGUST 1984

Q: Doesn't Montessori's emphasis on work rob children of their childhood?

A: In most cases this question is based on a misunderstanding of what Montessori means by work.

Montessori "work" embraces all those activities, intellectual and physical, by which the child learns about the world and how to fulfill his own needs. The work in a Montessori classroom is not adult-type labor but the work of learning and of self-development.

In the case of intellectual work, such as learning to read, to multiply, or to classify living organisms, we are hardly dealing with "child labor" or any sort of cruel imposition from which a parent would want to protect his child. And the same is true of the "practical life exercises" which aim at building a child's physical skills. For example, the purpose of having a child practice the steps of cleaning a table is not to save the school the expense of hiring a maid; the purpose is to perfect his concentration and physical self-control—and to do so by having him master not a game but a practical activity, one which he *wants* to learn because it gives him control of his own world. The widest lesson he learns is that by following a systematic process he can learn to take care of himself. This principle holds for all Montessori physical "work"—whether it's building a tower

of blocks, pouring beans into pitchers, or balancing while walking along a thin chalk line. This is work but not drudgery—fun but not mere play.

There are some educational critics of Montessori who do understand the nature of Montessori work, but still view it as “robbing children of their childhood.” Apparently their attitude is that any serious, purposeful activity—anything other than carefree play—goes against the nature of childhood.

The essence of childhood, however, is not play but growth. Children enjoy their play, but as every parent knows, they also want very much to “grow up”—i.e., to be able to care for themselves and do the exciting “grown-up” things that adults do. Children, particularly young children, are very serious and earnest about their interests, and the Montessori method is designed to provide them with precisely the sort of skill-building activities that are most appropriate, meaningful, and rewarding to them at any given stage in their development. As a result, the work does not have to be “assigned,” but merely made available, for the children seek it out.

Montessori’s own experience as a teacher confirmed the principle that purposeful activity is natural to children. She reported that when given a choice, her students opted for using the teaching materials over playing with toys, which they came to believe were a “waste of time.” “Work,” she observed, “has become the habitual attitude, and the children can no longer bear to be idle. . . . A phenomenon of constant occurrence when the children begin to be interested in work and to develop themselves is the lively joy which seems to possess them.”

One incident that dramatically illustrates the meaning that work has for the children themselves occurred at Montessori’s own experimental school in Rome. A young girl had attended the school for some time, had studied and learned, but remained “passive and weary.” But one day the girl broke off from her work and, looking at Montessori with beaming eyes, said, “Here it is now! I *do* understand!” Then, relates Montessori, the girl ran to her father, calling: “Father! Father! My mind has opened!”

In the widest sense, then, the issue is whether we adopt a patronizing attitude and view children as little more than our pets, or whether we take them seriously as developing *persons*. One who respects a child as a human being would hardly argue that activities which bring a child the joy of learning and growing “rob him of his childhood.”

Q: Is transferring to public schools difficult for a child who begins his education in a Montessori school?

A: The purpose of Montessori education is to prepare children to live independently and rationally in the real world, not to prepare them for public schools. Because of the differences in these school environments, some difficulty can be expected when Montessori children transfer to public schools. Usually, the public schools have larger classes, offer less personal

attention, and above all, apply a radically different educational philosophy. But if a child has learned what the Montessori school has sought to teach him, he will possess the cognitive skills and the self-esteem that will enable him to deal successfully with new and difficult situations.

If a Montessori child transfers to public school in the first grade, then despite the minor difficulties he may encounter, he will have a great head start over his classmates. While they, most likely, have spent the previous years playing, he has been learning about the world and how to use his mind.

Of course it may not be necessary for him to transfer so early. Although most Montessori schools stop before grade one, many do not. Maria Montessori developed her teaching materials and methods for children from ages 2 1/2 to 12—i.e., for the equivalent of pre-school through grade six. (Many Montessori primary schools have expanded to the elementary level at the urging of parents who wanted their children to have more years of Montessori education.) The 13 year-old who transfers has an inestimable advantage over his new classmates who came up through the public schools, for he now possesses the foundation provided by ten years of Montessori education, while they may have suffered through years of mediocre education or even mind-crippling mis-education. Having never had the benefit of a Montessori education, his classmates will, of course, have no problem “adjusting” to the public school seventh grade—unfortunately for them.

To withhold Montessori education from a child because of anticipated difficulties when transferring is to deprive him of an irreplaceable value. One must consider what the alternatives actually are. The choice is not between, on the one hand, a Montessori education followed by minor difficulties in transferring and, on the other, a good public-school education without those difficulties. The actual alternative was best expressed by the mother of a child attending a Los Angeles Montessori school. This woman, a single mother, drove her daughter 20 miles every day from their home in the slums to a Montessori school on which she spent much of her meager salary. Since it was clear that she couldn't afford this policy for very long, she was asked why she was doing it. Her reply: “The longer I can keep her out of the jungle the better!”

Q: Can the Montessori method be implemented in the public schools?

A: Historically, Montessori schools arose as an alternative to the education provided by the public schools. Montessori education is a “grass-roots” movement independent of and opposed to the educational establishment. The pro-reason, pro-individualism philosophy of Montessori conflicts with the philosophies of the educational bureaucracies in charge of the public school system and their intellectual leaders.

But the unavailability of Montessori education in the public schools stems also from a basic political cause. A Montessori school or classroom can remain true to Montessori only so long as it uses the Montessori method

and correctly applies basic Montessori principles. This can be ensured only if the educational program is controlled by those knowledgeable about and committed to Montessori. Since the public schools are public, they are owned and controlled by everyone. The public at large sets the policies and goals of public schools. This fact guarantees the sabotaging of any attempt at a Montessori public school.

The public schools are built on political compromise. They reflect the belief that not only does every member of the public have a right to participate as an “owner,” but that truth and value will somehow emerge from the conflicting interests and contradictory philosophies. It has never happened and will never happen. No unified, integrated educational program, be it Montessori, Catholic, or progressive, can survive in that political environment. So it is no coincidence that consistent educational programs are found only in private schools, while the public schools are a hodge-podge of conflicting and ever-changing goals, policies, and methods.

Q: Is Montessori education right for every child?

A: Every child needs to become independent, rational, self-confident, benevolent. Those are the traits fostered by the Montessori method.

It is true that some children do not operate smoothly in a Montessori environment. For example, a dependent three-year-old may initially find it impossible to cope with the amount of independence Montessori allows. This child might be temporarily more comfortable being told what to do, but that would only increase his dependence and inhibit his psychological development. This is the kind of child most in need of what Montessori offers.

There are those who claim that different kinds of education are right for different children. Some children, it is argued, are inherently rational, others emotional; some are productive and some are lazy; some will benefit from cognitive instruction, while others will benefit from an “anything goes” approach. It is true that some children do operate more rationally than others, but this is a matter of their current state, not of their inherent nature. No children are irrational by nature. All children have minds, and the mind’s basic needs do not vary with personality types or individual psychologies. No child can *benefit* from absorbing the idea that “anything goes”—it doesn’t, not in real life. To pretend otherwise is to make the child’s school years into an extended lie.

So, given the nature of education and the nature of children, Montessori *is* right for every child. And, except for those children who reject what Montessori offers or those who because of age or psychological problems may not be accepted, a Montessori school is the right place for every child.

But not all “Montessori schools” actually offer a Montessori education. Any school may legally call itself a “Montessori school,” and, in fact, some allegedly “Montessori” schools do not even use the Montessori method

and materials. Even affiliation with national or international Montessori organizations does not guarantee the philosophy or the quality of the schools or its teachers.

The Montessori method, unfortunately, lacks an explicit, consistent philosophic base. The Montessori method is the most rational educational system now known, in that it generally presupposes rational principles: objective reality, reason, causality, and individualism. But most Montessori schools have no philosophy. Although Maria Montessori had profound insight into the base of her method, her explicit philosophical ideas were often inconsistent and even mystical.

The moral to parents is: carefully investigate any school before enrolling a child; *do not* assume that a school calling itself "Montessori" is better than other private schools or even than the local public school. Even when the school itself is authentically Montessori in its program, individual teachers may be inept or may depart from the Montessori approach.

The Montessori method does work, it does help develop eager, bright, confident students, but only in the hands of competent teachers who apply it consistently.

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