

Montessori 101 eBook

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Montessori 101 *(An Introduction to Montessori for the 21st Century)*

Montessori..... When you hear the name, what do you think of first? Do you envision an environment in which children run rampant in a school house, telling their teachers which lessons they will do that day? Do you see a strict directress who makes a child complete an activity over and over again until he does it correctly. Or, do you see a calm yet energized environment in which each child is happily engaged in an activity that will foster learning.

The myths continue to abound, even though Montessorians try to set the record straight. After thoroughly reading this eBook, you should have the information needed to separate fact from fiction. You will also be provided with the resources and other references designed to assist in selecting the best option for your child.

The name Maria Montessori has been associated with schools, specialized apparatus and a unique learning environment. Montessori education was first recognized in Europe and abroad but never really started to be recognized in the United States until the early 1970s.

Maria Montessori began her work in earnest in 1901 where she was commissioned by the University of Rome to work with underprivileged children who lived in poverty and were deemed unteachable. Her method, with its universal appeal, has a presence in every continent. Interestingly enough, the last place her method gained the recognition it so richly deserved was in her homeland of Italy.

Montessori had a deep respect for children. She felt that each child was unique and that the learning process varied accordingly. An environment which encourages exploration in a relaxed setting is one of the key elements of what has come to be known as the Montessori method. The presenter, be it parent or teacher acts as a companion and a confidant. Her role is simply to explain and illustrate a learning activity. The child, then, attempts the exercise. Because the child feels relaxed, he can signal when he is ready for further guidance.

Maria Montessori was perceptive enough to realize that children need to manipulate objects in their environment. Consequently, in most Montessori schools you will see surroundings which fit the child. Many educators are unaware that Maria Montessori was the first educator to both implement child-sized furniture, and to ensure that each piece of equipment needed by the child throughout the course of the day was easily accessible to him.

By selecting one room in the home for specialized learning, parents can somewhat duplicate the environment found in a Montessori school. In fact, some of the apparatus and other materials needed for presentations can easily be made using marking pens, scraps of wood, cardboard and other odds and ends found in and around the house.

Lessons are never presented in a vacuum; they are always integrated. For example, observation exercises help the preschooler learn more about his environment through smell, sight and taste. The Montessori classified reading cards are used for environmental presentations. The child sees, for example, how each different part of a tree, contributes to the formation and growth of whole tree. Land form exercises provide hours of fun and stimulate an interest in geography. The Montessori spindle box exercise helps the young child to see the relationship of a given number to its quantity.

Lessons in phonics, spelling, vocabulary building and beginning creative writing help children ages six or seven see the relationship of reading to

sentence structure and paragraph formation. By using these language exercises as a foundation, older children discover, for example, how Greek and Latin suffixes, roots and prefixes are transformed into medical terms used in the fields of health and medicine.

The 1960s was an iconoclastic era resulting in some growing pains within the United States educational system. During the 1970s and 1980s, Maria Montessori's method gained momentum as educators were looking for alternative learning environments to reach all children. However, it was not until another decade had passed that other segments of the U.S. population would embrace this methodology.

During the 1980s, immigrants from Asia, Mexico and Central America came to the United States. Educators started searching for different inclusive methods that would assist these children with mainstreaming into Americana. Again, the name Montessori was bantered about. Many were unsure as to whether American society was really ready to embrace the Montessori methodology.

Some educators were definitely open to exploring how Montessori could be used in a traditional classroom environment. In fact, an accelerated resurgence of interest in the methodology began in the mid to late 1980s when a second crop of baby boomers neared kindergarten age. During this time frame, as well, homeschooling became an alternative to traditional school and home schooling.

I had been teaching in both traditional and homeschooling environments and was also involved in tutoring many of the new young immigrants that had come to the U.S. from Asia and Central America. I was keenly aware that our population of preschoolers was indeed mushrooming at that time; consequently, I decided, in 1988 to write my first book entitled

Montessori at Home: A Complete Guide to Teaching Your Preschooler Using the Montessori Method.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, many librarians were perusing through reference materials trying to help mothers who were interested in making comparisons as to how Montessori could be used in both school and home environments. Librarians, at that point in time, were unable to dispense much information on the subject, let alone know where to search to help parents discover how Montessori could be used in such an environment. Homeschooling, was in its infancy, and many resources were scarce or nonexistent.

In February of 1995, Library Journal published an article entitled ***An Educated Collection for Homeschoolers. Finally***, librarians had the information needed to point the prospective homeschooler to relevant homeschooling journals, books and other publications. In this article, three of the books that I have authored - *Montessori at Home: A Complete Guide to Teaching Your Preschooler at Home Using the Montessori Method*, *Modern Montessori at Home: A Creative Teaching Guide for Parents of Children Six through Nine Years of Age* and *Modern Montessori at Home II: A Creative Teaching Guide for Parents of Children*

10 through 12 Years of Age. were mentioned as recommended books for parents contemplating Montessori homeschooling. Please see:

http://www.amonco.org/mont_titles2.html and

<http://www.amonco.org/montessoriathome.html>

Parents primarily interested in enrolling their children in a traditional Montessori school setting, also found it difficult to make comparisons. Maria Montessori's books were available to be read, and indeed they were read by many, many parents. However, with the emergence of technology, especially with the advent of computers, parents wanted to learn more about how the method was currently used in the United States. Many questions arose in the minds of parents. Could this method be used to develop integrated systematic Montessori style lessons completed via the computer? Was that really acceptable? How could a Montessori purist reconcile using the Montessori method in this manner without defacing the integrity of the name ***Montessori?***

Other factors needed to be taken into consideration. Many parents, who were initially in favor of using the Montessori method of teaching at home, found that they were encountering some obstacles. Many lacked funds to purchase expensive apparatus. Other parents found they lacked the training to be able to effectively present the lessons to their children.

In the 1990s, the Internet began to serve a much needed purpose in helping to open up dialogue about Montessori related issues. American Montessori Consulting,, led the way in 1994, helping to oversee the

Montessori discussion board on Apple's eWorld.. (eWorld was very similar to AOL, only smaller.) American Montessori Consulting (AMC) was one of the pioneers in establishing and promoting the Montessori online newsletter and hosting several live Internet Montessori chats.

AMC continues to keep Montessorians abreast as to what is new and relevant in Montessori education by offering online chats, a new discussion list and a new AMC eBook Library. To receive additional information about Montessori education and resources, I encourage you to join the new Montessori for the 21st Century online discussion group. by visiting http://groups.yahoo.com/group/montessori_twenty_first_century Please also visit <http://www.amonco.org> for additional details.

Let's now explore some of the ways you can use Montessori to supplement your homeschooling curriculum as well as examine the criteria a Montessori school must have to insure that your child has a genuine Montessori experience.

You probably have seen the acronyms AMS, AMI, NAMTA, and NCME. You may have wondered what they stand for and how they relate to credentialing. To this day, the acronyms continue to be misunderstood and their relevance is still debated by some Montessorians.

AMS or American Montessori Society is one of the oldest, most visually recognizable U.S. Montessori organization in the United States. Recently, the National Center for Montessori Education, or NCME, merged with

AMS. The finalization of this now mega Montessori organization took place this past June. AMI, the acronym for Association Montessori Internationale, based in the Netherlands, is yet another highly recognized name throughout the world.

Some schools prominently list their school affiliations, i.e. AMS, AMI, NAMTA, MATCE, etc. Others do not. Take time to decide which acronyms are important to you. I have not provided a listing of all Montessori acronyms, as the significance of each will be different depending upon your personal standards.

I encourage you to fully research any school you visit before actually beginning the enrollment process. Keep in mind that any school can hang up a shingle stating that it is indeed a Montessori learning facility. Ultimately, you must discern which schools possess proper accreditation and which do not.

Other essential criteria must be met before you make a final decision. Spend ample time reading time some of Maria Montessori's books. I highly recommend the following titles: *The Secret of Childhood*, *The Absorbent Mind* and *The Discovery of the Child*. Then, read my *Montessori at Home* books for a detailed description of what a typical Montessori setting should look like.

Next, plan to visit at least three appropriately credentialed Maria Montessori schools in your vicinity. You may want to type and print out

the following questions on a sheet of paper. Be sure to glance at the questions before you enter the school, and complete the answers shortly after your visit.

Ask yourself the following questions on this outline.

Do the children seem relaxed and happy?

How do they interact with the teacher?

Are they intimidated?

How do the children interact with one another?

Is the atmosphere calm and reassuring?

Is it warm and inviting?

Do the children appear confident moving about and selecting the materials they need?

Do they hesitate to ask the directress for assistance?

Did you feel welcomed by the directress?

Did the directress answer all of your questions?

Your experience at the school should mirror the tenets stated in Maria Montessori's books. You want to place your child in an environment where he will feel safe and secure so that he can comfortably engage in the set of Montessori activities and exercises that he will be invited to learn.

As you may already know, Montessori allows the child the opportunity to explore concepts at his own pace independently. Perhaps this is one reason why the Montessori method has been used successfully with a variety of children independent of their I.Q. Children across the board, i.e. those especially gifted and talented, physically challenged and those with learning disabilities have all thrived in such an environment. If you came away from two of the three schools feeling unsure or with additional questions, you may need to visit additional schools in which to contrast and make comparisons.

Homeschooling parents face different challenges. First, as a prospective homeschooling parent, know that you will need to study the guidelines put forth by the (HSLDA) Home School Legal Defense Association. This organization provides detailed homeschooling information about each state requirements in the United States. For example, the State of California provides four options for parents homeschooling their children in the compulsory educational age range. California defines compulsory education as *"between the ages of 6" by December 2nd and "under 18 years of age"*.

The HSLDA California Homeschooling Chart listed at <http://www.hslda.org/laws/default.asp?State=CA> details the four options as they relate to legal issues, keeping attendance, subjects taught, qualifications of the teacher presenting the lessons to the child, recordkeeping and testing. *The following information will be of particular interest to those residing in California.*

Let's suppose that you are trying to decide whether to use Option 1 or 2. With Option 1, you, as the teacher, must just prove that you are capable of teaching; but, it is not mandatory that you possess a teaching credential. However, if you elect to homeschool using Option 2, ***you must be certified to teach.***

As you can see by perusing through the other criteria listed in this chart on the web page <http://www.hslda.org/laws/default.asp?State=CA>, there are more similarities in requirements than there are differences. In order to ultimately decide which option you would like to consider, you will need to have a series of family discussions to determine which option will work best with your learning style, home environment, teaching preferences and goals. For example, if your family agrees that Option 2 would work best, but you don't have a teaching credential, you will need to factor in the additional expense of hiring a private tutor.

Some homeschoolers find it very difficult to set up their own private schools. The A to Z Home's Cool Homeschooling website <http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/articles/090802.htm> will be a boon for

those needing detailed information on private schools and other homeschooling considerations. In California, keep in mind that in order to homeschool you must complete the affidavit process. **The Private School (R4) Affidavit** must be filed with the California Department of Education which transforms a homeschool into a private school. This is mandatory based upon the Education Codes. 48222 & 33190. Please visit <http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/regional/CaliforniaR4.htm> for additional detailed information.

If you wish to integrate Montessori with other existing homeschooling curricula, I strongly suggest that you contact Bayshore Schools <http://www.bayshoreeducational.com>. The staff is very knowledgeable about all aspects of homeschooling and can help walk you through the steps needed to either set up your own private school or provide you with the option to homeschool under the Bayshore umbrella.

Keep in mind that you will not be able to homeschool without plenty of support. Look to your peers who can empathize with some of the challenges you will or are currently facing. Connecting with other homeschool families, particularly other Montessori homeschoolers, will be one of your top priorities. Visit <http://www.homeschool.com/supportgroups/> to locate groups in your locale, and contact your local library and community center for additional homeschool support information.

Congratulations! You have just finished Montessori 101. You now possess the tools you need to further research which Montessori schooling option is best for your child. This new odyssey on which you and your child will traverse together will be one of the most exciting adventures that the two of you will ever share.

If you select traditional schooling, take time to talk with your child about his experiences at the Montessori school. Plan extension activities that will serve to reinforce material presented in the classroom. If you plan to homeschool using the Montessori method, you and your child will be given invaluable opportunities to both reflect and soak up these precious learning experiences.

In order for a child to reach his potential, he needs to be in an environment which will allow him to fully develop his own tendencies. This environment, wherever it may be, should include encouragement of expression rather than discouragement. The child should feel a sense of security, coupled with love and approval.

Take the information you received in this eBook and thoughtfully contemplate which option will best suit your family's needs. Prior to reading this eBook, you may have been leaning toward homeschooling but may now feel unsure. Take some time right now out of your busy schedule to fully investigate both schooling options before making any decision.

No matter which option you ultimately select, remember that you are your child's ultimate mentor. He looks to you to place him in environments that will foster learning and understanding of the world around him. By being sensitive to his needs now, you will be rewarded in future years, with a child and later an adult who is confident, able to meet challenges and eager to learn.

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Serving School and Home Educators Since 1988
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