

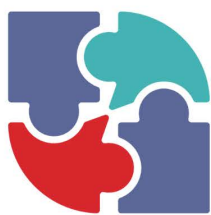


MONTESSORI
SCHOOLS & CENTRES AUSTRALIA



MONTESSORI PARENT GUIDE

Ages 3 – 6



MONTESSORI

SCHOOLS & CENTRES AUSTRALIA

MSCA Montessori Parent Guide for Ages 3–6

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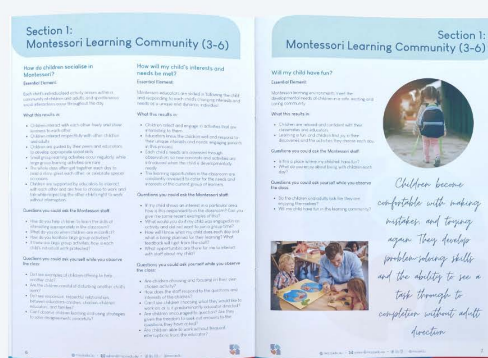
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We envision a sustainable, just and peaceful world where custodians of tomorrow engage, contribute, and thrive.

DIGITAL VERSION. Please consider the environment before printing.

You can order high-quality, professionally printed copies of our Parent Guides from our website. These are printed in Melbourne, Australia, on 100% recycled paper using environmentally friendly, sustainable printing practices and sent with carbon-neutral postal services.



What do you need to know?

How to Find the Answers to Your Questions

You will know what questions are important for you as you make choices for your child. Montessori Schools and Centres Australia (MSCA) suggests visiting and observing more than one Montessori early childhood school or centre. Take time to observe the community of children. Visit the school/centre more than once. Deepen your understanding of what each Montessori early childhood school/centre has to offer your child. You could also visit other early childhood schools/centres to understand how Montessori early childhood communities offer a different experience for children in the early childhood years. If possible, visit a Montessori primary class in your area and see where Montessori can take primary-aged children.

WITH
DEEPEST
GRATITUDE...

Montessori
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND



Thank you to Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand (MANZ)

We are incredibly grateful to MANZ for allowing Montessori Schools and Centres Australia (MSCA) to use, edit, and rebrand these Parent Guides for an Australian audience. This spirit of collaboration and support between the two national Montessori organisations is indicative of the values embedded within our Montessori community.

Montessori Schools and Centres Australia (MSCA) has edited this version to cater to an Australian audience. We have also included a Glossary of Montessori Terms.

More Parent Guides are available on our website.



What do you need to know?



Choosing an education for your child is one of the most important decisions you may make as a parent.

Being informed about your choices helps you to make good decisions for your family, your child and their future. Montessori is a philosophy. There is diversity within the Montessori community worldwide, and each school and centre is unique, reflecting its interpretation and practice of Montessori philosophy, the staff and parent-family community, the facilities and resources available and the vision of the centre or school.

Parents frequently ask: 'So, how do I know it is really Montessori?'

What are the essential elements of Montessori education? What should you be looking for when you are considering a Montessori education for your young child?

Your Parent Guide will help you better understand Montessori education and find answers to your questions about Montessori for three to six-year-olds.

Your Parent Guide is in three sections:

1. The Montessori Learning Community
2. The Montessori Learning Environment
3. Montessori Adults

In each section, we have identified the following:

- Essential Elements...are provided to help you better understand what Montessori can offer your child.
- What it looks like...examples are given of how the essential element may 'look' in practice.
- Questions to ask Montessori staff...some questions that you could ask the Montessori staff are provided.
- Questions to ask yourself...by observing in a Montessori early childhood school/centre, you can answer some of your own questions.

This parent guide may help you answer the question 'Can Montessori early childhood establish a profound emotional, spiritual and academic base for my child's future?'



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Section 1:

Montessori Learning Community (3–6)

What age are children in Montessori early childhood schools and centres?

Essential Element:

All Montessori learning communities are characterised by multi-aged groupings of three years.

What this results in:

- In Montessori early childhood schools/centres, children start around three years of age and stay until they are six.
- The children in the class are a mix of ages – e.g. not just three-year-olds or just four-year-olds.
- There is no division by age into separate morning and afternoon classes or different rooms/areas during the day.
- The mixed age group allows the children to develop socially, intellectually and emotionally – it is an essential part of any Montessori school/centre.
- The mixed-age offers the opportunity for a child to grow into a teaching role and inspire the younger children through their learning; this gives immense satisfaction to the older child and provides a way to internalise their learning. The best educator of a child is often another child.
- Younger children are not separated into 'new entrant' classes; they benefit from learning from the older children and seeing what comes next in their learning.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How does your school/centre decide when my child is ready to start in the Montessori classroom?
- What is the optimal age to start? Why?
- How will my three-year-old get on with the bigger five-year-olds?
- How are older children encouraged to 'teach' the younger children – how do they help?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Can I see children of all ages in the class from three to over five years?
- Do I see children separated by age groupings, or can I see children interacting across the age groups?
- Can I see older children 'teaching' younger children and being encouraged by the adults to take on this inspirational mentoring role?

How often does my child need to attend?

Essential Element:

Children attend their Montessori learning community and interact with the same group of children and educators each day, ideally attending five half or full days, or two to three consistent days.

What this results in:

- The Montessori learning community develops when children regularly experience safe and secure relationships with familiar adults, socialise with other well-known children, and experience predictable, established daily routines.
- Regular attendance enables the development of a Montessori culture of empowerment and consistency.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- Would my child come in the mornings, and how many mornings are preferable for my child to attend?
- Is there an expected routine pattern of attendance required?
- When could my child start staying in Montessori all day?
- Is there a settling in period or trial period when my child first begins?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Does the learning community feel peaceful, and do the children appear secure, engaged, and well connected to each other and the educators?

The Montessori learning community reaches its full potential when the number of adults is kept to the minimum, since the real work of learning belongs to the child.



Section 1:

Montessori Learning Community (3–6)

Why is a respectful community important in Montessori?

Essential Element:

The Montessori classroom is a community where everyone learns from one another, and everyone's contribution is valued and respected.

What this results in:

- The children will feel at home with their peers and in the learning environment.
- Children will understand classroom routines and ask for help, find what they need and choose their activities confidently.
- The classroom functions as a community, with each child playing their part and contributing to the daily life and functioning of the class positively.
- The children will interact with kindness and support, celebrating each other's progress.
- Children will seek and offer feedback, ask, and offer help with their educators and with each other.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How is my child going to be helped to learn the routines of the environment?
- What other daily routines or expectations are there to build a community of kind, supportive children?
- Why is there only one of each activity available in the classroom? How does this help them to learn?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Can I see children confidently asking adults and older children for help?
- Do the educators respond respectfully, modelling the behaviour expected of the children?
- Do I see the children interacting with each other in nurturing and respectful ways?
- How do I see conflicts being resolved?
- Is respect, social graces and teamwork evident in the learning community?

How long do children attend a Montessori early childhood school/centre?

Essential Element:

The most optimal experience is gained when the child experiences a three-year Montessori early childhood programme, from around three until six years of age.

What this results in:

- The importance of this three-year programme is to enable the child to integrate all the experiences of the earlier years and develop social maturity.
- Children starting later or finishing Montessori earlier will not optimise the learning opportunities from an entire three-year Montessori programme.
- In Australia, children might leave Montessori at five years of age to enrol in the local primary school's first formal year of schooling. However, a growing number of parents are opting to keep their child in a Montessori program to gain the full benefit of this critical final year.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- What is the school/centre's policy about the age at which children start and leave the Montessori classroom?
- Do you start children in Montessori after their fourth birthday, or is the preference to start at three-year-olds?
- How many five-year-olds do you have in the classroom, and what leadership roles do they have?
- How will my child benefit from this Montessori classroom after five years of age?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Are there children in the classroom spanning all the ages from three to over five years?
- Are the five-year-olds engaged meaningfully in their work?

Each state and territory has a different name for the first formal year of schooling, such as 'Reception', 'Kindergarten', 'Pre-Primary' or 'Prep'. This year is usually included in the third year of the Montessori 3–6 program.



Section 1:

Montessori Learning Community (3–6)

How do children socialise in Montessori?

Essential Element:

Each child's individualised activity occurs within a community of children and adults, and spontaneous social interactions occur throughout the day.

What this results in:

- Children interact with each other freely and show kindness to each other.
- Children interact respectfully with other children and adults.
- Children are guided by their peers and educators to develop appropriate social skills.
- Small group learning activities occur regularly, while large group learning activities are rare.
- The whole class often get together each day to read a story, greet each other, or celebrate special occasions.
- Children are supported by educators to interact with each other and are free to choose to work and talk while respecting the other child's right to work without interruption.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How do you help children to learn the skills of interacting appropriately in the classroom?
- What do you do when children are in conflict?
- How do you facilitate large group activities?
- If there are large group activities, how is each child's individual work protected?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Do I see examples of children offering to help another child?
- Are the children careful of disturbing another child's work?
- Do I see responsive, respectful relationships between educators–children, children–children, educators, and families?
- Can I observe children learning and using strategies to solve disagreements peacefully?

How will my child's interests and needs be met?

Essential Element:

Montessori educators are skilled in 'following the child' and responding to each child's changing interests and needs as a unique and dynamic individual.

What this results in:

- Children select and engage in activities that are interesting to them.
- Educators know the children well and respond to their unique interests and needs, engaging parents in this process.
- Each child's needs are assessed through observation, so new concepts and activities are introduced when the child is developmentally ready.
- The learning opportunities in the classroom are constantly reviewed to cater for the needs and interests of the current group of learners.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- If my child shows an interest in a particular area, how is this responded to in the classroom? Can you give me some recent examples of this?
- What would you do if my child was engaged in an activity and did not want to join a group time?
- How will I know what my child does each day and what is being planned for their learning? What feedback will I get from the staff?
- What opportunities are there for me to interact with staff about my child?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Are children choosing and focusing on their own chosen activity?
- How does the staff respond to the questions and interests of the children?
- Can I see children choosing what they would like to work on, or is it predominantly educator directed?
- Are children encouraged to question? Are they given the freedom to seek out answers to the questions they have asked?
- Are children able to work without frequent interruptions from the educator?



Section 1: Montessori Learning Community (3-6)

Will my child have fun?

Essential Element:

Montessori learning environments meet the developmental needs of children in a safe, exciting and caring community.

What this results in:

- Children are relaxed and confident with their classmates and educators.
- Learning is fun, and children find joy in their discoveries and the activities they choose each day.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- Is this a place where my child will have fun?
- What do you enjoy about being with children each day?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Do the children and adults look like they are enjoying themselves?
- Will my child have fun in this learning community?



Children become comfortable with making mistakes, and trying again. They develop problem-solving skills and the ability to see a task through to completion without adult direction.



Section 2:

Montessori Learning Environment (3–6)

What are Montessori materials?

Essential Element:

Learners in Montessori are exposed to many complex concepts at an early age through the specially designed Montessori materials. These hands-on learning materials enable the learner to see and explore abstract concepts literally and physically.

What this results in:

- The focus of a Montessori classroom is on the creative exploration by the child of new concepts and learning through the use of Montessori materials and activities, not on things such as plastic toys, puzzles or workbooks.
- Children are free and encouraged to explore using the Montessori materials – the educator encourages the children's open-ended exploration and experimentation while encouraging respect for the materials.
- Montessori activities are purposeful, real, and exploratory and have a cycle of activity for the child to follow.
- All Montessori materials are limited in number, with only one of each activity in the environment so that children come to respect each item as a special and unique piece of equipment. They learn to develop patience as they wait for a turn. The children have many options available to them in the classroom, so they learn to make alternative activity choices rather than watching and waiting.
- The Montessori materials have an inbuilt 'control of error', so the child discovers for themselves when they need to keep problem-solving; no adult assistance is required.
- Children become comfortable with making mistakes, trying again, developing problem-solving skills and the ability to see a task through to completion without adult direction.
- Montessori learning materials are beautifully created and presented to appeal to the child.
- The Montessori materials are developed to create opportunities for success rather than failure.

Is there a Montessori curriculum?

Essential Element:

The daily practice of Montessori philosophy is made possible by a clearly defined Montessori curricular framework.

What this results in:

The Montessori curriculum includes practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, botany, geography, art, music, drama, environmental studies and more! When you look around a Montessori classroom, you see the Montessori curriculum in all the activities and materials on the shelves.

Note:

- *Practical Life activities include skills that young children enjoy learning and love to repeat, such as sweeping, polishing, tying bows, dusting, and preparing food. Engagement in these activities builds executive function skills like concentration, organisation, and coordination. These activities also encourage greater fine-motor development, which in turn leads to writing skills.*
- *Montessori sensorial materials are unique and enable young children to explore shapes, sizes, colours, textures, weights, sounds, tastes, and smells. This leads to highly skilled differentiation and categorisation.*

THESE QUESTIONS APPLY TO BOTH THE MATERIALS AND CURRICULUM.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How does the Montessori philosophy define the daily activities and routines of the classroom?
- Can you describe to me what the Montessori curriculum is and how it supports my child's learning?
- What if my child spends all day with one thing or is interested in only one thing – how do you get them to engage in other aspects of the curriculum?
- Do children always get to choose what they do, or are they guided to broaden their horizons?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Can I see children engaged with different activities from across all curriculum areas?
- If a child is wandering about, how are the educators/other children interacting with them?
- How does the educator guide and support the children to choose an activity?



Section 2: Montessori Learning Environment (3-6)

How does Montessori promote my child's learning?

Essential Element:

Montessori focuses on children's learning and self-discovery, not on educators 'teaching'. Fostering independence is an integral part of Montessori philosophy.

What this results in:

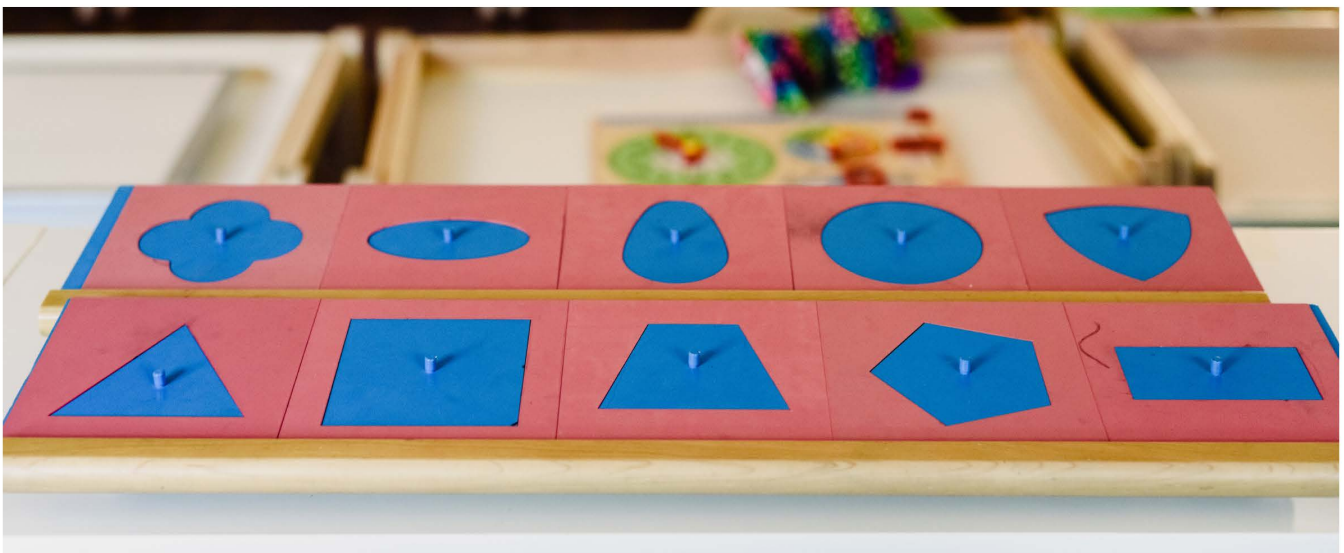
- Children work individually or in small, self-selected groups.
- Self-directed children are encouraged to work independently with minimal educator direction once they have been introduced to a range of new concepts or learning activities.
- The children can access all activities independently or with the help of a peer without relying on constant adult assistance or direction.
- The child is left to choose their own work but is presented with new, developmentally appropriate work regularly to increase their repertoire of choice and provide more opportunities for them to uncover their interests.
- The Montessori child is put in charge of their learning through their exploration; this may seem a subtle distinction, but it is a crucial part of the Montessori approach.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- What activities will my child be able to do when they first start in the class?
- How does my child know what to choose each day and how do you guide his choice?
- What do you do if my child always avoids particular activities?
- What kind of expectations do you have of children at different ages?
- What will the educator do if my child chooses the same activity day after day?
- What kind of work and activities will my child be introduced to as a three-year-old, four-year-old, and five-year-old?
- How will I know what my child has been doing and what learning has been taking place – how do you communicate with parents?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Are the majority of children making constructive independent choices, or are the educators constantly directing and correcting?
- Are children being given time to engage, observe, and chill; are the children given the freedom to work things out for themselves?
- Is the educator giving individual children 'lessons' with minimal talking or interruption?
- Is the educator focused on the child they are giving the lesson to while maintaining awareness of the class?



Section 2:

Montessori Learning Environment (3–6)

How will my child develop concentration?

Essential Element:

Dr Montessori discovered that young children desire to be active for long periods in concentrated activity. If interrupted by group work or whole class activities, children cannot reach a state of deep focus and choose work that needs only superficial involvement.

What this results in:

- The class has uninterrupted daily work/activity time, with the ideal being a three-hour period.
- This work/activity period should be free from interruption for whole group activities such as snack or mat time or group learning where all children must join in.
- This work/activity time does not include whole group outdoor playtime or communal celebrations – these activities should be in addition to the three-hour work cycle.
- The class has an atmosphere of calm with young children concentrating for periods that may surprise you.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How long is your work/activity cycle?
- Why is a long uninterrupted period necessary for my child's learning?
- Do you have any additional activities happening, and how do you ensure this does not interrupt the long work/activity cycle?
- When my child needs to rest, what will he do?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Do the children have a long uninterrupted time, or are there frequent interruptions for set activities or whole group times?
- Are most of the children able to complete a cycle of activity – from choosing an activity, engaging with concentration, finishing when they feel satisfied, cleaning the work and returning it to the shelves for another child to use?

Does Montessori happen only at specific times?

Essential Element:

Montessori is a way of being – it does not stop and start at specific times or only occur indoors!

What this results in:

- The whole Montessori learning environment is available to all children – there should be no restriction by age to certain curriculum areas.
- The Montessori learning environment should not be limited to specific shelves or areas, or rooms within the school/centre.
- The child has access to quality Montessori environments and programmes throughout the day; if the school/centre offers before/after-school care or holiday care, it should follow the same principles as the Montessori classroom.
- Outdoor environments are used as rich learning experiences for the children in the same way as the indoors – activities are purposeful, real, explorative and have a cycle of activity.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- Can you explain how my child will access the whole indoor and outdoor learning environment?
- I am worried my child will be too tired to 'do Montessori' for long periods – can you explain how this will work for my child?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Are the outdoor environments being used as rich learning experiences for the children in the same manner as indoors – purposeful, real, explorative activities and have a cycle of activity?
- Are children moving freely from the indoor to the outdoor environment during the session?



Section 2:

Montessori Learning Environment (3-6)

How does the environment make learning accessible?

Essential Element:

The Montessori environment is orderly and structured to facilitate the child to make independent choices for their learning.

What this results in:

- The learning opportunities in the classroom are constantly reviewed to cater for the needs and interests of the current group of learners.
- Learning materials are arranged in curriculum areas, e.g. practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, and environmental studies.
- The classroom is structured so that children can find anything they are interested in and quickly learn where things are.
- All learning materials are attractive, so the child is enticed to use them – aesthetically pleasing, clean, complete and in good repair.
- The children have real opportunities to develop motor control and to perfect their movements – the classroom has child-sized furniture that is light and can be moved, floors that do not deaden noise or prevent breakages, and activities that use breakable materials such as glass and china. There should be little plastic!
- Everything in the classroom is size appropriate for the child – from furniture to crockery to woodwork tools. The colour of the furnishings, floors, and walls should be soft and muted with limited wall displays so that the brightly coloured Montessori materials attract the children and focus their attention.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- Can you explain how the classroom is structured to help my child become independent?
- Why is it essential that the classroom is orderly and beautiful? How does this help my child's learning?
- What will happen if my child does not put something back in the 'right place'?
- My child is very messy at home – how will they cope in this orderly environment?
- How does the orderly environment promote creativity in my child? Can my child still be spontaneous and inventive?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Do the children return their activities to their proper place – ready for the next child to use?
- Can I see children confidently using real implements to do 'real' tasks?
- Can I see children of all ages using lots of china and glass – plates, cups, dishes etc.?
- Can the children access everything they need without adult help?

What is practical life?

Essential Element:

Children have daily opportunities to learn and use practical life skills, which enable them to develop concentration and specific skills which lead to enhanced educational outcomes as well as the life skills of caring for their environment, themselves, and others in the community.

What this results in:

- The young child is provided with real implements and given real responsibilities in caring for the environment and the self.
- Children prepare morning tea or lunch, water the plants, feed and care for the animals, clean and polish materials, sweep the floor and work in the garden.
- Practical life materials have an observable application in the classroom. If Montessori children cook, they prepare food to share with their classmates.
- The children arrange flowers to beautify the room. Windows are cleaned, shoes polished, gardens dug, peas picked.
- Children take the initiative to actively care for each other and their environment.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How are the children encouraged to care for their class each day? What kind of cooking and food preparation do the children do each day?
- Do you have animals, and how do the children help care for them?
- How are the older children involved in taking responsibility for the class and other children?
- How does doing 'practical Life' prepare my child for more academic work?



Section 2:

Montessori Learning Environment (3–6)

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Can I see children taking real responsibility for their classroom?
- Are the children encouraged and assisted in developing a sense of ownership for their class and classroom routines?
- Do the children spontaneously show care for each other?

How is Montessori a holistic approach to children's learning?

Essential Element:

The Montessori environment is rich with learning opportunities for the young child to explore their culture and the world.

What this results in:

- Social, emotional and spiritual learning experiences are valued as highly as intellectual learning experiences.
- Rich cultural experiences, including music, art, singing, drama, celebrations from other cultures, plant and animal studies, are a classroom feature.
- The children have opportunities to garden, care for animals and observe nature as part of their daily programme.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How are the cultures of the world celebrated in this class?
- What opportunities does my child have to explore the community beyond the school/centre?
- Can you show me some examples of how my child will learn about his and other cultures?
- How are the rhythms of nature acknowledged in the programme?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- How will this philosophy of education fit with my family's values and beliefs?
- Do I think this style of education will enrich my child's emotional, spiritual and intellectual experiences?

How does Montessori respond to my child's curiosity?

Essential Element:

Montessori educators know that children are creative and curious and will use the interests and discoveries of all children to enrich the classroom curriculum.

What this results in:

- The learning environment is prepared with each community of children in mind, and the selection of activities is modified constantly to meet the children's ever-changing needs, interests, and abilities.
- Children progress at their own pace and select work that captures their interest and attention while the educator strives to draw their attention and capture their interest in new challenges.
- Individual planning is completed for each child based on ongoing and systematic observations by educators.
- A variety of assessment processes are used to record student development and progress and to share with parents.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How do you know when my child is ready for new challenges?
- If my child shows a particular interest in an area of discovery – how will this be responded to?
- How do you change the classroom during the year to respond to the needs of the new children that arrive?
- Can you tell me what assessment is used to assess my child's progress and how this will be shared with me?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Do you see children using the Montessori materials to explore?
- Do you see educators inviting children to try new activities?
- Do you see the educators standing back and observing the class, making notes to use in planning for each child?



Section 2:

Montessori Learning Environment (3–6)

How is the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) incorporated?

Essential Element:

The Australian government's Early Years Learning Framework was designed as a descriptive rather than prescriptive curriculum to integrate all philosophical approaches. This enables different early childhood services to implement the curriculum in different ways according to their philosophy.

What this results in:

The Early Years Learning Framework is woven into the Montessori curriculum presenting as an integrated curriculum.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How do you integrate the Early Years Learning Framework and Montessori as a cohesive whole?
- How does the school/centre report on the requirements of the EYLF?

Are there Montessori schools for older children?

Essential Element:

Montessori learning environments are offered for primary and secondary school children in many areas of Australia. As the number of children entering Montessori primary environments increases, so does the necessity for providing high school environments.

What this results in:

- The school/centre provides information about the Montessori curriculum and classes for primary and high school-aged children.
- The school/centre offers support for transition to state primary school for you and your child.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- Do you have any information about Montessori primary in our area?
- How do you support my child to transition to state primary school?
- Will my child have covered the required curriculum before they enter the local school?
- Are there plans to establish a Montessori primary school or a secondary school in this area?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Would I want my child to continue to experience Montessori when they are older in the future?

Why is membership of Montessori Schools and Centres Australia important?

Essential Element:

MSCA has played a key role in supporting the growth and sustainability of Montessori in Australia since 2019. MSCA provides high-quality Montessori professional development and publications for educators and parents and represents Montessori at national levels.

What this results in:

- The school or centre is a member of MSCA, and a membership certificate is on display.
- Information from the national association is on display or available to parents, including our magazine: Collaborations.
- Educators attend MSCA professional development and other events regularly.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- Does the Montessori school/centre support MSCA by being a member of the organisation?
- What information will I receive from the national organisation?
- Do you have copies of Collaborations in your parent library?



Section 3:

Montessori Adults (3–6)

How do Montessori educators develop respectful communities of children?

Essential Element:

The Montessori educator deliberately models the behaviours and attitudes that they wish the children to learn.

What this results in:

- When you visit a Montessori class, it should be hard to see or hear the educators. Look for adults who are engaged with children, who do not intrude on children, who lower themselves to the child's level to communicate and talk in a quiet speaking voice.
- Educators give children frequent 'grace and courtesy' lessons – gently modelling and showing what behaviour is desirable.
- Adults model careful, respectful handling of learning materials and children are also encouraged to take care of materials.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- What grace and courtesy lessons do you give, and what is the purpose of these lessons?
- How do you help children to understand the behaviour that is acceptable in the classroom?
- How do you manage extreme behaviour events from the children?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Are the educators very obvious in the classroom, or are they calm, quiet and engaged respectfully with the children one on one or in small groups?
- Can I see educators who show that they are enjoying the children?
- Is the relationship between the educators and children warm and interactive?

Why do Montessori educators spend so much time watching the children?

Essential Element:

The Montessori educator is a trained observer of children. Educators use these careful observations and their knowledge of the whole child to guide the child's learning.

What this results in:

- For the approach to be genuinely child-centred and child-initiated, educators constantly observe the children's interests, strengths, and dispositions.
- Montessori educators are hard to spot in a classroom. They will be quietly working with children, presenting new lessons or quietly observing.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- When you observe my child, what kinds of things are you looking for?
- How does this support your planning for my child?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Do the educators take time to stand back and observe, or are they constantly engaged with children?



Section 3:

Montessori Adults (3–6)

What qualifications do Montessori educators have?

Essential Element:

Montessori educators need specialist Montessori qualifications for the age group they teach and appropriate Australian early childhood teaching qualifications.

What this results in:

- There is a diversity of Montessori organisations offering Montessori qualifications in Australia, and Montessori schools and centres decide individually which Montessori qualifications they will accept.
- MSCA recommend Montessori courses that provide face to face components supervised practice hours, observation hours and practicums in classroom settings under the mentorship of a qualified Montessori educator. Maria Montessori highlighted the preparation of the adult as a critical component to being a Montessori educator and that time for this transformation must be provided.
- Currently, in Australia, Sydney Montessori Training Centre (SMTTC) and Montessori Institute (MI) provide training of high quality that is well respected within the Montessori community.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- What qualifications do the educators hold?
- How many Montessori-trained staff are employed in the school/centre or classroom?
- What Montessori training and experience do they have?
- What other qualifications do staff have?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Does the educator speak knowledgeably and confidently about Montessori philosophy and practice, and can they answer my questions?
- Is the educator implementing Montessori in a way that is consistent with these guidelines?

How many adults should be in a Montessori early childhood classroom?

Essential Element:

The Montessori learning community reaches its full potential when the number of adults is kept to a minimum since the real work of learning belongs to the child.

What this results in:

- Only necessary adults are present in the Montessori early childhood classroom. There is a requirement for approximately one adult per 10 early childhood children over three years of age in Australia (please check your individual state/territory requirement on the ACECQA website).
- Children develop the ability to concentrate and to become absorbed in their chosen activity or work when interruptions by adults or whole group times are minimised.
- Parent involvement in the classroom is welcomed for specified times and community activities. Still, the Montessori classroom focuses on the children becoming independent, which is only possible when adults are scarce!

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- What is the school/centre's educator-child ratio?
- What do you need me to do to respect the children's learning space?
- How does your adult to child ratio encourage/foster independence?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- How many adults are in the classroom? What are they doing?
- What can I see the Montessori educators doing to protect the children's concentration?



Section 3:

Montessori Adults (3–6)

What educators will be in the class with my child each day?

Essential Element:

The child needs to experience the same Montessori educators in the classroom every day.

What this results in:

- A safe, caring community is built between familiar adults and children.
- Ideally, the lead educator needs to be the same person every day.
- Ideally, the other classroom educators will be the same from day to day, although this may not be possible when a staff member is training or on professional development.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- Who are the educators my child will interact with each day?
- How will I know if my child's educator is going to be absent?
- What staff turnover does the school/centre have?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Do the children seem to be familiar and confident with all the adults in the classroom?

What is the role of parents in Montessori schools/centres?

Essential Element:

Montessori staff work in partnership with parents.

What this results in:

- Montessori schools/centres foster a dialogue with parents to promote understanding of Montessori philosophy and values.
- There is an orientation process for both the parent and child to the Montessori learning environment.
- There are opportunities for parents to be involved in the Montessori community.
- There are opportunities for parents to learn about Montessori philosophy and practice.
- There are Montessori books, magazines and resources available to borrow.
- Regular dialogue with staff and written feedback provides parents with information about their child's learning and experiences.
- Montessori schools and centres offer suggestions about what you can do at home to support the work that happens at Montessori.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How can I be involved with my children's learning in the Montessori environment?
- What support do educators need?
- What kinds of parent information evenings are offered, and how will I know when these are being run?
- Are there any books and resources I can borrow that will help me understand more about Montessori?
- What kind of parent support networks operate in the school/centre, and how will I get to know other parents?
- What other opportunities are there for my family to be involved in the Montessori school or centre?
- Can I talk to other parents about their involvement in the Montessori community?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Look at the notice boards in the school/centre – what information is there for parents?
- What parent community activities are promoted?



Section 3:

Montessori Adults (3–6)

How do Montessori educators keep up to date?

Essential Element:

Montessori educators need professional development to enable them to be reflective practitioners and lifelong learners.

What this results in:

MSCA suggests educators attend 10 to 12 hours of Montessori-focused professional development each year, in addition to other professional development.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How do you stay current with what is happening in Montessori and general education in Australia and the wider world?

What is the vision for Montessori at the school/centre?

Essential Element:

The Montessori school/centre has a clear vision for how it delivers Montessori education.

What this results in:

- The school/centre provides written information about its philosophy and vision for its students and ongoing growth.
- The school/centre's operations manual, policies and procedures are available to parents at all times.

Questions you could ask the Montessori staff:

- How can I access the school/centre's Operation Manual and ACECQA Quality Rating?
- How does the school promote Montessori to the broader community?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class:

- Does the vision of the school/centre seem alive in the daily life of the school/centre?

Everything in the classroom is size appropriate for the child, from furniture to crockery. The colour of the furnishings, floors, and walls should be soft and muted with limited wall displays so that the brightly-coloured Montessori materials attract the children and focus their attention.



Glossary of Montessori Terms

The Montessori approach, much like any science, has its own set of vocabulary and terminology. Montessorians share a very specific set of brief references that evoke the world of the child as described by Maria Montessori. The Glossary of Montessori Terms relates to the theory and practice for the Primary (3–6) level. It was prepared by the late Annette Haines (Montessori Training Centre of St. Louis) at the request of Molly O'Shaughnessy (Montessori Centre of Minnesota) to accompany her lecture at the Joint Annual Refresher Course, held in Tampa, Florida in February 2001.

This glossary has been reproduced from the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) website, accessible here: <https://montessori-ami.org/resource-library/facts/glossary-montessori-terms>

ABSORBENT MIND

A mind able to absorb knowledge quickly and effortlessly. Montessori said the child from birth to six years has an absorbent mind.

ADAPTATION

Related to the idea of an absorbent mind (Haines, 1993) is a special power of the young child that can be called the power of adaptation. This power is a process whereby the young child uses the environment to develop and, in so doing, becomes a part of that environment. The young child absorbs the culture of her time and place, taking in all the spirit, the customs, the ambitions/aspirations and attitudes of a society simply by living in that society.

ANALYSIS OF MOVEMENT

A technique used by Montessori teachers. The adult, when showing a complex action to a child, breaks it down into its parts and shows one step at a time, executing each movement slowly and exactly. The action thus becomes a sequence of simple movements and the child has a greater chance of success when 'given the liberty to make use of them.' (Montessori, 1966, p. 108)

CHILDREN'S HOUSE

The English name for Montessori's Casa dei Bambini (Italian). A place for children from 3–6 years to live and grow. Everything necessary for optimal human development is included in a safe and secure environment.

CLASSIFICATION

Sorting. Allocating or distributing according to common characteristics. The young child engages in classification activities because the process is essential for the construction of the intellect. The Montessori classroom offers many opportunities for classification.



Glossary of Montessori Terms

CONCENTRATION

Recognising that 'the longer one does attend to a topic the more mastery of it one has,' the great American psychologist William James remarked, 'An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.' (1892/1985, p. 95) Montessori, who knew of James, set out to do just that. She believed that if environments could be prepared with 'objects which correspond to...formative tendencies' (1949/1967, p. 169) the child's energy and interest would become focused on that aspect of the environment which corresponded to the developmental need.

CONCRETE TO ABSTRACT

A progression both logical and developmentally appropriate. The child is introduced first to a concrete material that embodies an abstract idea such as size or colour. Given hands-on experience, the child's mind grasps the idea inherent in the material and forms an abstraction. Only as the child develops, is she gradually able to comprehend the same idea in symbolic form.

CONTROL OF ERROR

A way of providing instant feedback. Every Montessori activity provides the child with some way of assessing his own progress. This puts the control in the hands of the learner and protects the young child's self-esteem and self-motivation. Control of error is an essential aspect of auto-education.

COORDINATION OF MOVEMENT

One of the major accomplishments of early childhood. Through the child's own effort, she wills herself to refine her muscular coordination and consequently acquires increasingly higher levels of independent functioning. Because of this developmental need, children are drawn to activities that involve movement and especially to those which demand a certain level of exactitude and precision.

CREATIVITY/IMAGINATION

Imagination involves the forming of a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses. Creativity is a product of the imagination and results from the mental recombining of imagined ideas in new and inventive ways. Both are dependent on mental imagery formed through sensorial experience.

CYCLE OF ACTIVITY

Little children, when engaged in an activity which interests them, will repeat it many times and for no apparent reason, stopping suddenly only when the inner need which compelled the child to activity has been satisfied. To allow for the possibility of long and concentrated work cycles, Montessori advocates a three-hour uninterrupted work period.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WILL

The ability to will, or choose to do something with conscious intent, develops gradually during the first phase of life and is strengthened through practice. The Montessori environment offers many opportunities for the child to choose. Willpower, or self-control, results from the many little choices of daily life in a Montessori school.



Glossary of Montessori Terms

DEVIATIONS

Behaviour commonly seen in children that is the result of some obstacle to normal development. Such behaviour may be commonly understood as negative (a timid child, a destructive child, etc.) or positive (a passive, quiet child). Both positive and negative deviations disappear once the child begins to concentrate on a piece of work freely chosen.

DISCIPLINE FROM WITHIN

Self-discipline. The discipline in a well-run Montessori classroom is not a result of the teacher's control or of rewards or punishments. Its source comes from within each individual child, who can control his or her own actions and make positive choices regarding personal behaviour. Self-discipline is directly related to development of the will.

EXERCISES OF PRACTICAL LIFE

One of the four areas of activities of the Montessori prepared environment. The exercises of Practical Life resemble the simple work of life in the home: sweeping, dusting, washing dishes, etc. These purposeful activities help the child adapt to his new community, learn self-control and begin to see himself as a contributing party of the social unit. His intellect grows as he works with his hands; his personality becomes integrated as body and mind function as a unit.

FALSE FATIGUE

A phenomenon observed in Children's Houses around the world—often at approximately 10 a.m. The children seem to lose interest in work, their behaviour becomes disorderly and the noise level rises. It may appear as if the children are tired. However, if the Montessori Educator understands this is simply false fatigue, they will return to work on their own and their work will be at an even higher level than before.

GRACE AND COURTESY

An aspect of Practical Life. Little lessons which demonstrate positive social behaviour help the young child adapt to life in a group and arm her with knowledge of socially acceptable behaviour: practical information, useful both in and out of school.

HELP FROM PERIPHERY

The periphery is that part of the child that comes into contact with external reality. The child takes in impressions through the senses and through movement. Help from the periphery means presenting objects and activities in such a way so as to evoke purposeful movement on the part of the child. 'We never give to the eye more than we give to the hand.' (Standing, 1957, p. 237)

HUMAN TENDENCIES

A central tenet of Montessori philosophy is that human beings exhibit certain predispositions that are universal, spanning age, cultural and racial barriers; they have existed since the dawn of the species and are probably evolutionary in origin. 'Montessori stresses the need to serve those special traits that have proved to be tendencies of Man throughout his history.' (Mario Montessori, 1966, p. 21)



Glossary of Montessori Terms

INDEPENDENCE

Normal developmental milestones such as weaning, walking, and talking, can be seen as a series of events that enable the child to achieve increased individuation, autonomy and self-regulation. Throughout the four planes of development, the child and young adult continuously seek to become more independent. It is as if the child says, "Help me to help myself!".

INDIRECT PREPARATION

The way nature has of preparing the intelligence. In every action, there is a conscious interest. Through this interest, the mind is being prepared for something in the future. For example, a young child will enjoy the putting together of various triangular shapes, totally unaware that his mind will later be more accepting of geometry because of this work. Also called remote preparation. The deeper educational purpose of many Montessori activities is remote in time.

INDIRECT PRESENTATION

Because of the absorbent nature of the young child's mind, every action or event can be seen as a lesson. It is understood that children learn by watching other children work or overseeing a lesson given to another. In the same way, they quickly absorb the behaviour patterns and the language used by the family, the neighbourhood children and even TV.

ISOLATION OF A DIFFICULTY

Before giving a presentation, the Montessori teacher analyses the activity she wants to show the child. Procedures or movements that might prove troublesome are isolated and taught to the child separately. For example, simple actions like holding and snipping with scissors are shown before cutting curved or zigzag lines; folding cloths is shown before table washing, an activity that requires folding. A task should neither be so hard that it is overwhelming nor so easy that it is boring.

LANGUAGE APPRECIATION

From the first days in the Montessori classroom, children are given the opportunity to listen to true stories about known subjects, told with great expression. Songs, poems and rhymes are a part of the daily life of the class. The teacher models the art of conversation and respectfully listens to her young students. Looking at beautiful books with lovely, realistic pictures is also a part of language appreciation.

LEARNING EXPLOSIONS

Human development is often not slow and steady; acquisitions seem to arrive suddenly, almost overnight, and with explosive impact. Such learning explosions are the sudden outward manifestation of a long internal growth process. For example, the explosion of spoken language around two years of age results from many months of inner preparation and mental development.



Glossary of Montessori Terms

MATHEMATICAL MIND

All babies are born with mathematical minds, that is, they have a propensity to learn things that enhance their ability to be exact and orderly, to observe, compare, and classify. Humans naturally tend to calculate, measure, reason, abstract, imagine and create. But this vital part of intelligence must be given help and direction for it to develop and function. If mathematics is not part of the young child's experience, his subconscious mind will not be accepting of it at a later date.

MAXIMUM EFFORT

Children seem to enjoy difficult work, work which tests their abilities and provides a sense of their growing power. They exult in giving their maximum effort. For example, a tiny child will struggle to carry a tray with juice glasses or push a heavy wheelbarrow whereas school-age children, if allowed to make up their own problems will prefer to sink their teeth into a challenging equation ($1 + 2 + 3 + 4... + 10$) rather than drill on $3 + 5 = ...$ and $6 + 2 = ...$

MIXED AGES

One of the hallmarks of the Montessori method is that children of mixed ages work together in the same class. Age groupings are based on developmental planes. Children from 3–6 years of age are together in the Children's House; 6–9 year olds share the lower elementary and the upper elementary is made up of 9–12 year olds. Because the work is individual, children progress at their own pace; there is cooperation rather than competition between the ages.

NORMALISATION

If young children are repeatedly able to experience periods of spontaneous concentration on a piece of work freely chosen, they will begin to display the characteristics of normal development such as a love of work, an attachment to reality, and a love of silence and working alone. Normalised children are happier children: enthusiastic, generous, and helpful to others. They make constructive work choices and their work reflects their level of development.

OBEDIENCE

Obedience is an act of will and develops gradually, showing itself 'unexpectedly at the end of a long process of maturation.' (Montessori, 1967, p. 257) While this inner development is going on, little children may obey occasionally, but be completely unable to obey consistently. As their will develops through the exercise of free choice, children begin to have the self-discipline or self-control necessary for obedience.

POINTS OF INTEREST

Montessori realised that if children spent too long a time on a complex task or failed to master the necessary details, the exercise would cease to interest them. Therefore she suggested that points of interest be interspersed throughout each activity. These points guide the child toward his or her goal and stimulate repetition and interest by offering immediate feedback, or what Montessori called control of error. The child's performance becomes refined through trial and error, the points of interest acting as signposts along the path to success.



Glossary of Montessori Terms

PREPARED ENVIRONMENT

The Montessori classroom is an environment prepared by the adult for children. It contains all the essentials for optimal development but nothing superfluous. Attributes of a prepared environment include order and reality, beauty and simplicity. Everything is child-sized to enhance the children's independent functioning. A trained adult and a large enough group of children of mixed ages make up a vital part of the prepared environment.

PRESENTATION

The adult in a Montessori environment does not teach in the traditional sense. Rather she shows the child how to use the various objects and then leaves her free to explore and experiment. This act of showing is called a presentation. To be effective, it must be done slowly and exactly, step by step, and with a minimum of words.

PSYCHIC EMBRYO

The first three years of life is a period of mental creation, just as the 9 months in utero is a period of physical creation. The brain awaits experience in the environment to flesh out the genetic blueprint. Since so much mental development occurs after birth, Montessori called the human infant a psychic embryo.

REPETITION

The young child's work is very different from the adult's. When an adult works, he sets out to accomplish some goal and stops working when the object has been achieved. A child, however, does not work to accomplish an external goal but rather an internal one. Consequently, she will repeat an activity until the inner goal is accomplished. The unconscious urge to repeat helps the child to coordinate a movement or acquire some ability.

SENSITIVE PERIODS

Young children experience transient periods of sensibility, and are intrinsically motivated or urged to activity by specific sensitivities. A child in a sensitive period is believed to exhibit spontaneous concentration when engaged in an activity that matches a particular sensitivity. For example, children in a sensitive period for order will be drawn to activities that involve ordering. They will be observed choosing such activities and becoming deeply concentrated, sometimes repeating the activity over and over, without external reward or encouragement. Young children are naturally drawn towards those specific aspects of the environment which meet their developmental needs.

SENSORIAL MATERIALS

The sensorial materials were created to help young children in the process of creating and organising their intelligence. Each scientifically designed material isolates a quality found in the world such as colour, size, shape, etc. and this isolation focuses the attention on this one aspect. The child, through repeated manipulation of these objects, comes to form clear ideas or abstractions. What could not be explained by words, the child learns by experience working with the sensorial materials.



Glossary of Montessori Terms

SIMPLE TO COMPLEX

A principle used in the sequence of presentations in a Montessori classroom. Children are first introduced to a concept or idea in its simplest form. As they progress and become capable of making more complex connections, they are eventually able to handle information that is less isolated.

SOCIALISATION

'The process by which the individual acquires the knowledge and dispositions that enable him to participate as an effective member of a social group and a given social order.' (Osterkorn, 1980, p. 12)
'Optimal social learning takes place when the children are at different ages.' (Hellbrügge, 1979, p. 14)

SOUND GAMES

Many children know the alphabet but have not analysed the sounds in words nor are they aware that words are made up of separate sounds (phonemic awareness). From the age of two (or as soon as the child is speaking fluently), sound games can make them aware of the sounds in words. In England, they use the nursery game "I Spy." The sound of the letter and not the letter name is pronounced.

THREE-HOUR WORK CYCLE

Through years of observation around the world, Montessori came to understand that children, when left in freedom, displayed a distinct work cycle which was so predictable it could even be graphed. This cycle, with two peaks and one valley, lasted approximately three hours. In Montessori schools children have three hours of open, uninterrupted time to choose independent work, become deeply engaged, and repeat to their own satisfaction.

VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT

The young child's vocabulary increases exponentially in the years from 3–6. To feed this natural hunger for words, vocabulary is given: the names of biology, geometry, geography, and so forth, can be learned as well as the names of qualities found in the Sensorial Material. The child's absorbent mind takes in all these new words 'rapidly and brilliantly.' (Montessori, 1946, p. 10)

WORK

From an evolutionary perspective, the long period of childhood exists so children can learn and experiment in a relatively pressure-free environment. Most social scientists refer to this pressure-free experimentation as play (e.g., see Groos, 1901), although Montessori preferred to call this activity the work of childhood. Children certainly are serious when engaged in the kind of play that meets developmental needs and, given freedom and time, will choose purposeful activities over frivolous make-believe ones.

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