

Montessori Program

“The goal of early education should be to activate the child’s own natural desire to learn.”



Introducing Montessori

Montessori education is a method of education that is based on hands-on learning, self-directed activity, and collaborative play and inquiry. In a Montessori classroom setting, teachers provide children with developmentally-appropriate activities based on careful observation of each unique child, and seek to include learner feedback, and voice, in the process. Learners are encouraged to be active participants in their learning and are given the freedom, and the responsibility, to make creative choices in their learning.

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Learn more about Montessori Classrooms in SD43

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COMMUNITY

The Coquitlam Montessori Society (CMS) and YOU!

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The Montessori Classroom

A Montessori classroom is commonly referred to as the **prepared environment**.

It is a space, akin to a learning laboratory, that has been created with mindfulness and intention by the Montessori educators. The space is designed to maximize learner independence; a space where learners are able to access all tools for learning without adult support. It is a space in which learners are encouraged to explore, discover, and be critically and creatively engaged. A prepared environment is one where a community of children learns social and academic skills while developing into independent beings. Maria Montessori realized the unique way in which children learn and understood the notion of a child's **absorbent mind**.



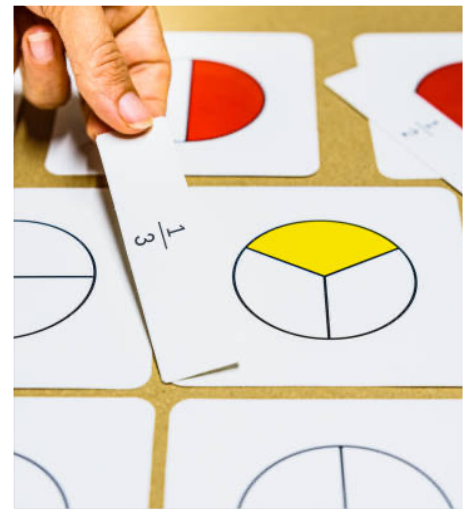
The notion of the prepared environment and its high degree of order directly correlates to the unique way in which children naturally learn and absorb information. The educator plays a vital role in the creation and maintenance of the specially prepared environment so that learners take pride in their learning space, their independence, and the bond of a community working together.

Characteristic of the prepared environment is its abundance of order, beauty, accessibility, and availability of learning materials as opposed to toys. A Montessori classroom is filled with a vast array of sequential learning activities known as **Montessori materials**. They are displayed on open shelves, in order, without clutter, and each object has a purpose and special location. Children gain independence from the prepared environment as they move about choosing their own work (with guidance from educators) and making their own decisions.

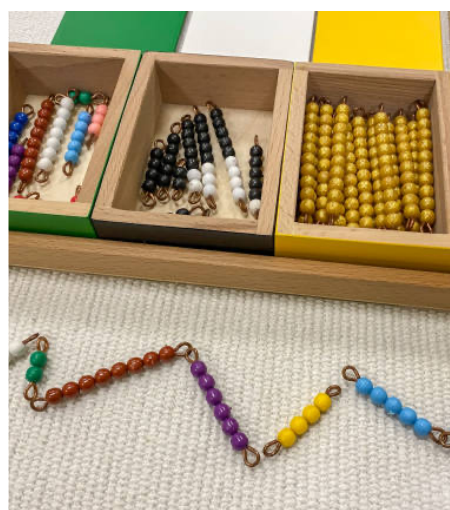
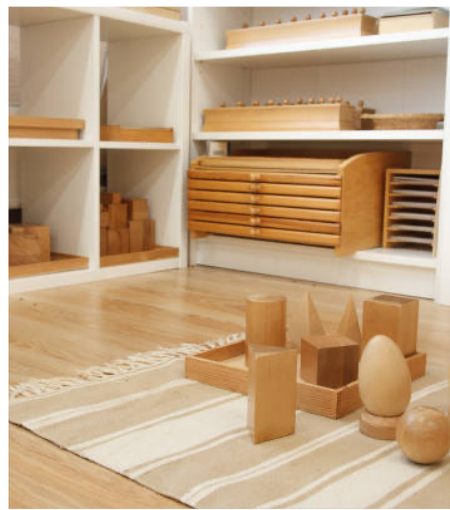
MONTESSORI MATERIALS

Montessori materials are ingenious **hands-on learning** tools that are designed to stimulate children's minds, encourage exploration, and inspire independent learning. They are enticing, simple to use, and intentionally support children's learning and development. The Montessori materials come together to form the Montessori Curriculum.

Montessori materials teach only one skill at a time to provide children with the opportunity to master key learning outcomes through repetition and practice. Doctor Montessori stated: "Nothing goes into the mind that does not first go through the hands." Children are first introduced to the Montessori materials by a trained educator, who will give a **presentation**, and then invite the child to work with the material independently. When they have finished working with the activity, the children return each material to its allocated place in the prepared environment. The Montessori materials are presented to the child by the educator in sequence, from easiest to hardest, and in accordance with their developmental needs and interests.



Every material contains a **control of error**. As the learner uses the material, the material shows the child their mistakes and, in this free path the learner can correct these errors independently. It also liberates them from the perception of outside criticism from others and develops in them a sense of independence, personal reflection, pride, and motivation to continue learning and exploring concepts.



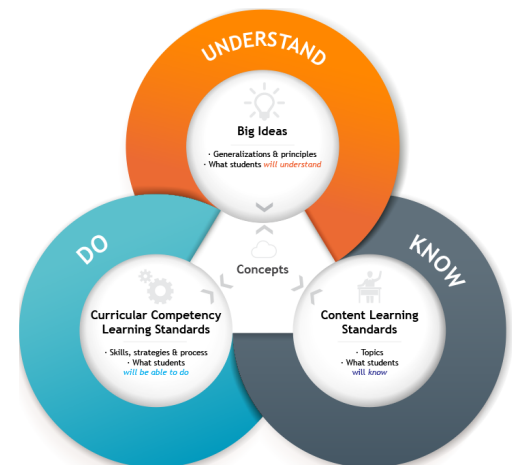
CLASS CONFIGURATION

The Montessori program strives to utilize the **three-year cycle** concept*, which helps children experience consistency with their peers, their teachers, and their environment. One of the greatest benefits of this concept is that teachers are able to learn about each of their students in considerable depth and understand their history as a learner. This helps teachers determine the best learning style for each of their students, which helps students maximize their learning potential and feelings of connection.

(*While this is the ideal configuration for Montessori classrooms, the public school system is influenced by factors such as enrolment and staffing. Therefore, this configuration is not always possible.)

INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

In a Montessori classroom, children are exposed to interrelated topics and encouraged to make-meaning through inquiry and understanding the connections between concepts. Curricular topics are repeated/ revisited over time, and new pieces of information are added during each cycle. This process helps children better understand concepts, connections, and big ideas, as well as inviting learning about specific topics in depth. In addition to the **Montessori curriculum**, all SD43 Montessori classrooms also teach content, concepts, and competencies found in **British Columbia's Provincial Curriculum** - the same curriculum as our neighbourhood classrooms. B.C.'s curriculum (revised in 2016) more closely aligns with the Montessori curriculum than ever before. So, regardless of whether a learner is in a French Immersion, neighbourhood, or Montessori classroom, ALL learners will be invited to explore the same curricular learning standards.



MONTESSORI WORK CYCLE

A **Montessori work cycle** is an uninterrupted block of time that is typically 3 hours long. During this time children are able to explore the prepared environment and engage with materials. While it looks slightly different at different levels, there is always some combination of students working independently/in small groups while teachers give individual or small group lessons. Great care is taken to not interrupt children while they are working, showing them the respect that this time and their exploration deserves. During the work cycle, teachers make detailed observations of learner strengths and areas for growth.

During the cycle children move around the classroom selecting work of their choosing (from previous teacher-guided presentations). After selecting work from the shelves, they bring it carefully to the workspace of their choosing, and use the material as they have previously been taught. Children know they are responsible for putting the materials back neatly and selecting their next work independently. At the elementary/middle school level, teachers honour the developmental need for more socialization for children of this age and lessons are more often given in small groups, and children often work with one another. While there is a great emphasis on **choice** and self-directed learning, children in elementary/middle classrooms are expected to meet certain academic guidelines. For example, a teacher may require that throughout the course of the day/week, a child must do work in all academic areas. Teachers check in with students daily to make sure they are meeting these goals, and gently guide them should the need arise. Regardless of the grade/age level, the work cycle gives children a chance to develop autonomy, make choices, and find genuine joy in their work.

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Montessori Learners

Montessori is **child centred**. Montessori education promotes a child's innate passion for learning. In this method, the role of a teacher is to support and facilitate a child's natural learning process. For this reason, teachers make sure their lessons are designed to foster each child's growth and independence. Children in this type of classroom setting enjoy the freedom to choose their lessons. This results in the development of their personal responsibility and individual initiative.

In Montessori education, we strongly believe that emotional development is just as important as academic success. In fact, we often find that the key to academic success and success in life is having the emotional tools and knowledge to make good decisions. **Self-regulation** is a combination of emotional, cognitive and social regulation. On the emotional side, it means having the ability to bring emotions under control and calm down when feeling angry or frustrated. Cognitively, it refers to the ability to problem-solve, especially in tough situations. Socially, self-regulation involves being able to filter what we say and stop ourselves from saying the first thing that pops into our heads.



The concept of Montessori education believes that every child should be given the chance to learn at their own pace. This is the reason why children are given uninterrupted time for **individualized learning** where they can discover their passion and develop their natural curiosity. This method also helps students develop inner discipline, **independence**, concentration and internalization of the learning through thoroughly prepared classroom lessons and guidance from teachers. It's important to note that collaborative and cooperative learning are also important elements of a Montessori classroom - learning

In a Montessori classroom, children of different ages are intentionally grouped together (**multi-aged groupings**) to create a dynamic multi-grade learning space. Because they get to be with students who may be younger or older than them, they naturally collaborate with and learn from one other. Montessori students are **learners AND leaders**.

The role of a Montessori teacher is special in so many ways. They thoughtfully prepare the environment to meet the unique needs of the children. They carefully observe and understand when to introduce new materials so that the children may continue to be engaged in the mastery of their work. They must observe and follow the child, giving them opportunities to explore their interests safely and productively. The teacher must recognize the fine balance between challenging the child and gently pushing them towards new material and allowing them to find it on their own. To achieve this balance the teacher must be thoroughly familiar with the **didactic** materials, the personality and temperaments of each student, and the needs each exhibits at each sensitive period in their lives. The teacher must guide the child towards independence, allowing them to become the master of their own choices and the subsequent consequences. This unique ability to guide the child helps the child gain self-confidence, self-esteem and valuable self-regulation skills that will benefit them for life. When the child makes a mistake or breaks something, the teacher must acknowledge the event free of judgement and give the child the tools to clean or fix it themselves. The teacher must possess all of the qualities they wish to impart to their students. They must be calm, patient, humble, good humoured, and inquisitive. The rationale behind the approach to Montessori teacher training is exactly the same as the rationale behind the curriculum. Foundational skills are practiced until they are mastered.

Montessori teacher training takes a hands-on approach to learning, asking teachers to use the materials and internalize the actions required to complete the activities. It is only first by doing that one can thoroughly teach an activity. If the teacher can foresee the potential difficulties in an activity, they will be more aware of when to present the right activity to the right child at the right point in their development. It is the teacher's role to set the child up for success, not to give them materials that are beyond their immediate developmental needs or abilities. Montessori teachers in training are asked to complete many practical hours, observing and participating in a Montessori environment under the mentorship of an experienced Montessori educator. Again, this requirement gives the teacher in-training the opportunity to develop their observational skills, not only watching the children work, but in watching their mentor work. Just as the Montessori classroom is unique, so is the training required by the adult in charge of these environments.

The Montessori teacher functions as a role model, guide, demonstrator, observer, recorder, and curious learner. It is through the teacher training that individuals are given the opportunity to look inward, leave behind pre-conceived notions of ability, and suspend all judgements. The Montessori teacher is kind, grounded, and compassionate, yet firm with their expectations for the care of the classroom and behaviours tolerated in the classroom. They are the epitome of the behaviours they want to see in their students. To say the least, the role of the teacher in a Montessori classroom is complex, comprehensive and vitally important to the success of the children. Therein lies the beautiful paradox of the Montessori Method. It is the fine balance and control between freedom and responsibility that allows for the full development of the child. It is only through the careful crafting of the Montessori teacher that such a complex process can be executed with grace and ease. When you walk into a Montessori classroom and have to look twice to find the teacher, you know they are doing their job.

**“THE GREATEST SIGN OF SUCCESS FOR A TEACHERS IS TO BE ABLE TO SAY
‘THE CHILDREN ARE NOW WORKING AS IF I DIDN'T EXIST’.”** – MARIA MONTESSORI

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The Montessori Community

PARENTS

As with any new community, one of the best ways to learn more about it is to get involved within that community. Parent involvement in most educational settings is not only appreciated, its encouraged, and the Montessori program is no different! Coquitlam's Montessori program unfolds at nine different school sites who are connected by administrators, educators, and parents like you. To learn more about how you can get involved, and support the program and your child, please visit the Coquitlam Montessori Society's website.



**COQUITLAM
MONTESSORI
SOCIETY**

COQUITLAM MONTESSORI SOCIETY

"The Coquitlam Montessori Society has been a registered non-profit charity since 1985. Originally formed in 1983 when a group of parents, who wanted another alternative in our public school system for their children, worked together with the School District #43 (Coquitlam) to incorporate the Montessori philosophy into the public school system. Since then, we've tried to stay true to our core beliefs—INDIVIDUAL STUDENT CHOICE—and to deliver an exceptional experience for our community and students. We owe a huge thanks to our community for joining us on this awesome journey, and we hope that you'll continue to be a part of our story." (<https://www.coquitlammontessori.ca/about-us/>)



Frequently Asked Questions

Is it true that Montessori students are free to do whatever they want, and at their own pace?

Dr. Maria Montessori observed that children are more motivated to learn when working on something of their own choosing, and at their own unique pace. A Montessori student may choose their focus of learning on any given day, but their decision is limited by the materials and activities—in each area of the curriculum—that their teacher has prepared and presented to them. Beginning around age 8 or 9 students typically set learning goals and create personal work plans under their teacher's guidance.

If children work at their own pace, don't they fall behind?

Although students are free to work at their own pace, they're not going it alone. The Montessori teacher closely observes each child and provides materials and activities that advance their learning by building on skills and knowledge already gained. This gentle guidance helps each child master the challenge at hand and protects them from moving on before they are ready, which is often what causes children to "fall behind." Each child is challenged appropriately in each area of the curriculum to ensure that skills and competencies are fully developed and that the child is able to pursue their own unique interests.

Why are Montessori schools all work and no play?

This is a common misunderstanding of Montessori education. Dr. Montessori realized that children's play *is* their work—their effort to master their own bodies and environment—and out of respect she used the term "work" to describe all their classroom activities. Montessori students work hard, but they don't experience it as drudgery; rather, it's an expression of their natural curiosity and desire to learn. They engage in these activities with joy and focus—intent on mastering new skills independently!

I've heard that Montessori teachers don't really teach. Is this true? If so, what do they do?

When you observe a Montessori teacher at work you may be surprised! You will not see them standing in front of the classroom teaching the same lesson to the entire class, because the Montessori curriculum is individualized to the needs, interests, and learning style of each child. Often you will find teachers on the floor, working with an individual child. With the older children, they may be giving a small group lesson, or demonstrating a lesson or activity that the students will then complete on their own.

One of the many roles of the Montessori teacher is to observe each child and the classroom community as a whole and make adaptations to the environment and lesson-planning as needed to support each child's development. As the Montessori teacher observes, they are determining when and how to introduce a new challenging lesson to a student, and when to review a previous lesson if a skill has not yet been mastered.

While a Montessori student may choose their activities on any given day, their decisions are limited by the materials and activities in each area of the curriculum that the teacher has prepared and presented to them. The teacher's observations inform each child's personalized learning plan and allow each child to move through the curriculum at an appropriate pace and level of challenge.

FAQ CONTINUED...

Can Montessori accommodate gifted children and/or those with diverse abilities?

An advantage of the Montessori approach—including multi-age classrooms with students of varying abilities and interests—is that it allows each child to work at his or her own pace. Students whose strengths and interests propel them to higher levels of learning can find intellectual challenge without being separated from their peers. The same is true for students who may need extra guidance and support, including students with diverse abilities. Each learner can progress through the curriculum at their own comfortable pace, without feeling pressure to “catch up.”

Do Montessori teachers assign homework?

It is unusual for the youngest students, regardless of proficiency, to receive homework. Generally, parents can expect that as students mature through the grade levels they may be given homework on occasion. Learners may be asked to read at home or complete a project that is started at school. As students progress through the Montessori program, more responsibility for completing work is expected and some learners may choose to bring home work to aid in their success.

Are the class sizes smaller for Montessori?

Class sizes for Montessori follow the same Ministry of Education guidelines for all public schools.

How do I register for Montessori?

Entrance into the Montessori program are usually done at two times: Kindergarten and Grade Six. Kindergarten registration for Montessori along with other Programs of Choice (French Immersion, Mandarin Bilingual and Reggio) occur in the month of January. Please check the district website (<http://www.sd43.bc.ca>) for specific times and instructions on how to apply.

What happens when my child reaches middle school and we want them to continue in Montessori?

Families with a child in Grade 5 may wish to continue or join Montessori in Grade 6. They must apply through the Programs of Choice process. Priority will be given to students who are currently attending Grade 5 Montessori. For more information, please check the district website. (<http://www.sd43.bc.ca>)



Glossary of Terms

Prepared environment: The Montessori classroom is referred to as the prepared environment. It is a meaningfully structured learning space where everything has a purpose and a place. Furniture is light and child-sized, learning materials are designed to fit in children's hands, and everything is designed to be open and accessible.

Absorbent mind: According to the American Montessori Society, the absorbent mind is the time from birth through approximately age of 10. During this time the young child experiences a period of intense mental activity that allows them to "absorb" learning from his or her environment without conscious effort, naturally and spontaneously.

Montessori Materials: Montessori Learning Materials are tools or resources, often sensory or skills based, that provide children with opportunities to learn independently, allowing them to practice and learn a new skill. Montessori resources will often have a specific purpose in mind, teaching a child about a particular concept or skill. This learning will also contribute to purpose, care of the self, community, and environment. Often made from natural and sustainable materials, Montessori resources are generally considered to be eco-friendly and designed in a way that a child can complete the task or activity with little guidance, working it out for themselves and correcting mistakes through their own trial and error.

Hands on learning: Hands-on learning is a form of education where children learn by doing. Instead of listening to the teacher, the student engages with the subject matter to solve a problem in this form of education.

Presentation: A presentation is basically the act of giving a lesson to a child. For Montessori work in a classroom, there is generally a specific way that materials are presented. Guides learn these presentations in their training and then work to perfect their lesson-giving skills. The same material is presented the same way (or virtually the same way) in all Montessori environments across the world.

Control of error: Montessori materials are designed so that the child receives instant feedback about her progress as she works, allowing her to recognize, correct, and learn from an error without adult assistance.

3 year cycle: The Montessori three-year cycle affords children the opportunity to reach developmental goals in the same classroom, with the same teacher, and with the same core group of mixed-age learners. While each student is unique in their own development, part of what drives that growth is due to the mix of ages. Within Public Schools, a 3 year cycle of k/1/2 and 3/4/5 are typical.

Multi-aged groupings: a system for grouping learners based on developmental need/stage instead of specific chronological parameters.

Montessori curriculum: A scope and sequence of competency and content goals supported within a Montessori Learning environment.

B.C. curriculum: <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca>

Montessori work cycle: is a period of intense, independent immersion when students have the freedom to choose what activity or activities they would like to work on based on their interests.

Child centred: An educational space where the children, their voices, and their freedom are central. Where children are trusted as capable beings who can do, be, and learn alongside an adult who's not the one to decide and judge but instead acts as a guiding support.

Self regulation: Self-regulation is the process that your child's brain goes through that gives them the ability to control their behaviours and emotions in response to a particular situation

Individualized learning: Individualized learning is a method of instruction in which there is one-to-one teaching and self-paced learning based on an outline of progressive goals leading to the curriculum objectives.

Didactic: Didaktikós is a Greek word that means "apt at teaching." It comes from didáskein, meaning "to teach." Something didactic does just that: it teaches or instructs.