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# MONTESSORI OR CONVENTIONAL: WHAT'S BEST FOR YOUR FAMILY?

You already know that Montessori is different from conventional education methods. You may have heard some folks rave about the benefits while others share their doubts. The truth is, there are a lot of differences. Montessori education is nothing like the type of schooling that most children experience - including us adults when we were children.

Understanding the differences can help you decide whether or not Montessori might be a good fit for your family. We invite you to read the comparison below, then come see for yourself. Visiting our classroom environments in person is the very best way to understand our approach.

**When viewing this chart please keep two important points in mind**

- 1** All schools are different. There is no one standard for conventional or Montessori educational settings. The statements below are generalizations, though widely considered accurate.
- 2** You may see similar charts like this floating around the internet. Ours is different in that we aim to provide factual, observational comparisons. The intention is not to convince you that Montessori is somehow better, but to assist you in your decision-making process. We do, of course, believe in the validity of our methods, but we fully acknowledge that Montessori is not the best fit for every family.



## MONTESSORI

### MIXED AGE GROUPINGS

Montessori classrooms utilize a multi-age model. Ranges are typically 3-6, 6-9, and 9-12.

### INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

Teachers are trained to guide children through a set curriculum; however each child sets their own pace and is able to more deeply explore areas of interest.

### FOCUS ON INTRINSIC

Montessori educators believe that children have an innate desire to learn and that the learning itself is a reward. Progress reports typically include teacher narratives and information on skills that have been presented, practiced, and mastered.

### PHYSICAL AUTONOMY

Montessori environments are set up so that children may safely and independently use the toilet, eat a snack, and get a drink of water when their bodies signal the need and without the permission of an adult.

### ONE TEACHER FOR THREE YEARS

As a result of multi-age class groupings, children remain with the same teacher for three years.

### VARIETY OF SEATING OPTIONS

Children may choose to sit and work alone or with others, at a table or on a carpeted floor. They may move throughout the day to seek out different seating options.

## CONVENTIONAL

### SINGLE YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL GRADE

In conventional schools, children generally move to a new grade and class each year.

### GROUP PACED INSTRUCTION WITH ELEMENTS OF DIFFERENTIATION

Teachers often teach skills to the whole class at once and pacing does not allow for extra support or challenge. In recent years efforts are being made in some settings to find ways to provide elements of differentiated instruction.

### USE OF REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

Conventional schooling typically takes the approach that external rewards are motivators. Children receive grades on their reports, stickers or stamps on papers deemed "good," and class celebrations for positive behavior

### ADULT PERMISSION REQUIRED TO FULFILL CERTAIN NEED

In order to maintain order within a class that largely does the same activities at the same time, children have scheduled snack/restroom use times, or they may ask an adult for permission.

### NEW TEACHER EACH YEAR

In typical conventional schools, children move on to a new classroom with a new teacher each school year.

### DESKS WITH CHAIRS

Most conventional classrooms utilize individual desks with chairs. There are many configurations; some teachers rely on the traditional row formation, while others use desks to form small groups, a horseshoe shape, or other setups.

### SELECT ART ON WALLS

Framed prints or artwork are hung on classroom walls. Select, specific curriculum materials (such as timelines) may be seen in elementary and adolescent environments.

### ENVIRONMENTAL TEXT

Many conventional educators hang reference materials on the walls of their classrooms, as well as motivational and/or decorative posters.

### NATURAL MATERIALS

Montessori classrooms emphasize use of wood, glass, and natural fibers. Plastic is avoided whenever possible.

### VARIETY OF MATERIALS

A variety of materials can be found in conventional classrooms, with an emphasis on paper and plastic.

### HANDS-ON MATERIALS

Specially designed hands-on materials are used in Montessori classrooms. As children get older (Throughout the elementary years), they rely increasingly on pencil and paper, typically using notebooks. There are generally no textbooks,

### TEXTBOOKS, WORKSHEETS, AND MANIPULATIVES

A variety of teaching tools are used, including textbooks, workbooks, and photocopied worksheets. In the last two decades, conventional schools are finding ways to include the use of manipulative materials, especially in math and science.

### FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Montessori teachers rely heavily on formative assessment, which entails observing a child as they work. During lessons this often means staying flexible enough to change course depending on the

### SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Teachers in conventional schools rely on a variety of assessment methods but tend to lean heavily on summative assessment. Examples include tests, quizzes, and graded assignments. Summative assessments place a value on student understanding at a particular point in time.