



Reach

An introduction to the
Montessori movement
across the UK



What is Montessori?

Montessori is an approach to early education that focuses on the immense capacity of children to absorb information when given the freedom and independence to learn at their own pace. It takes its name from Dr. Maria Montessori whose scientific background and belief in the potential and uniqueness of children empowered her to develop an educational approach that appreciates how children's thought processes differ from those of adults. Her insights and approach to child development have been enormously influential all over the world, both through what has become the Montessori movement and through mainstream education, which has come to accept many of her practices. Increasingly, evidence from scientific research on how the brain develops, supports Montessori's views on how children learn and how to optimise their developmental progress.

What makes the Montessori approach different, and what makes it work so well, is that it is based on this deep understanding of the way children learn – through choosing, trying and doing themselves. When allied to the availability of specially developed materials in a prepared environment, and the close observation and guidance of a Montessori-trained teacher, this leads to an enormously powerful, confidence-building approach to learning.

*'You can always tell a Montessori child because they'll say "Mummy, can I touch that - can I smell that?" They are used to learning about things by experiencing them'.
Sarah Rowledge, teacher*



*'Little children between three and six years of age have a special psychology. They are full of love. They are only without love if they are ill-treated. If they are badly treated their real nature is altered. They are full of love themselves and need to be loved in order to grow'.
Maria Montessori.*



*'I like the colour wheel, putting the different shades in order from light to dark. I also enjoy the lands and water - making a lake and island, or isthmus and strait - and then finding them on a map.'
Tasha Bishop, 8*

concepts – gradually building to a deep and permanent understanding of what most adults take for granted.

What all these elements have in common is that they are providing the building blocks of future learning, hardwiring a child's capacity to engage with new material and information and providing the tools with which to manipulate it. Montessori is, literally, learning for life.

High quality

All Montessori nurseries and schools are assessed to the same Ofsted or HMI national standards as other settings and it is a common rule that they match and often far exceed the standards required across all fronts. In 2011 88% of the members of the Montessori Schools Association

in England were considered by Ofsted to be of 'outstanding' or 'good' quality. This very high quality had been sustained over the previous six years.

Recognising high quality Montessori practice

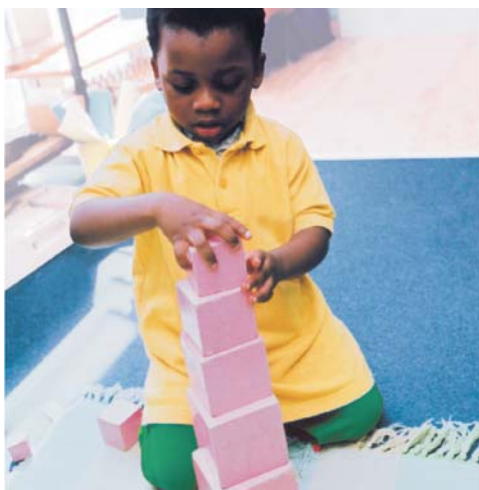
In 2008 the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board (MEAB) was established to assess how far preschools and schools provide an education which is truly Montessorian. By 2012, over 130 settings had been accredited throughout the UK and overseas. This accreditation, awarded after assessment visits made by trained and experienced Montessori practitioners, lasts for three years before being reviewed. You can visit the website (www.montessori.org.uk) and identify which schools have been accredited.

National and global reach

The Montessori approach has proved so successful that it has been adopted all over the world and it continues to influence 'mainstream' educationalists' thinking everywhere. Today there are over 700 Montessori schools around the UK and many thousands more around the globe.

Training as a Montessori teacher

The Montessori approach requires a different set of skills from 'mainstream' education and qualifying as a Montessori teacher means going through a rigorous training programme that emphasises the teacher's role as observer and learning director. Accredited training courses covering a range of levels, from infant, toddler and early childhood to primary, are available from a variety of independent and private colleges.



'Montessori gives children quiet confidence and an understanding of the things around them. It also gives them concepts that are enormous but which have been filtered down to an accessible level. It's all about supporting later learning. The atmosphere is calm and peaceful but not oppressively so - so that the children are allowed to get on with things.'
Alex Abberton, parent

Fast Facts

- Many of Maria Montessori's observations and innovations in early child development – such as the provision of child-sized furniture – are now perfectly commonplace in mainstream classrooms.
- Phonics – the approach to teaching reading and writing that focuses on the sounds and of letters and syllables – is now widely accepted as the best method for developing early literacy. Montessori schools and nurseries have been employing phonics and achieving remarkable results with it for over 100 years.
- Montessori learning materials are all carefully designed to help children understand where they may have gone wrong and to enable them to work out ways of correcting themselves without being 'told' how to do so. This helps them to develop confidence in their own abilities as problem solvers and amplifies the satisfaction they feel in their own success.
- Discipline, and in particular self-discipline, is central to the Montessori approach. Children in a Montessori setting enjoy enormous freedom to choose within the limits of the prepared environment. Poor or disruptive behaviour is discouraged through the reinforcement of positive behaviour and respect for the space, work and concentration of the other individuals in the classroom.



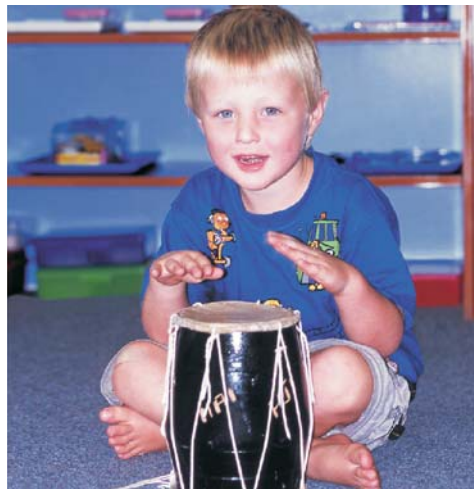
Anyone interested in Montessori training should contact Montessori St Nicholas or consult our website for further details of courses available (www.montessori.org.uk) Significant grants towards the cost of these courses are available through the Montessori St. Nicholas Charity.

Montessori and 'mainstream' education

Because Montessori focuses on the individual child, allowing them to develop at their own pace, and because it presents a broader curriculum to that which is offered by state schools, both parents and administrators often need reassurance that Montessori-educated children are making 'satisfactory progress' and will be able to cope when they later join a mainstream school. Montessori meets the

Early Learning Goals, and the Department for Education as well as Ofsted have recognised this. Indeed Montessori's play-based approach to learning has been hailed as underpinning the philosophy of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The Montessori St Nicholas Charity has been working with a number of state primary schools to develop Montessori practices. In July 2010 a case study at Gorton Mount Primary School in Manchester found that through studying and using the Montessori approach they became 'more expert in their assessment of a child's need and in providing a relevant classroom experience for all children'. In turn, the children 'are used to environments where they get to work independently. They are used to asking questions and pursuing answers'.

Just one example: The individual learning plans which are now used as standard by state and private schools in the education of children with special education needs have been a feature of the Montessori approach for decades, born out of a strong emphasis on the uniqueness of each child and the importance of individual observation. The result is that parents of Montessori children find that they are given very detailed reports on their children's development with concrete examples of their achievements and indications of the next steps. As for the children themselves it is generally the case that children coming from a Montessori background are more confident in their abilities, have a stronger sense of self and are more able to focus on tasks and complete them, than other children. Their Montessori education has given them the foundations of learning for life across a broad spectrum of topics and skills.



'The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, "the children are now working as if I did not exist".'
Maria Montessori

Montessori and St Nicholas

The Montessori St Nicholas Charity is a UK based charity aimed at facilitating the unification of the Montessori movement – through the Montessori Schools Association – sponsoring research into the effectiveness of Montessori education, and building understanding of the benefits of the Montessori approach. Montessori St Nicholas supports the Montessori School Association, the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board and the Montessori Centre International – the largest Montessori training centre in Europe.



Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori pioneered an approach to education that focuses on children's innate desire to learn and their enormous capacity to do so when provided with the right environment and the appropriate materials under the guidance of a watchful, caring teacher. Born in 1870, she was one of the first women to qualify as a medical doctor in Italy and it is her scientific background that underlies the design of the Montessori materials – many of which show quite remarkable insight into children's learning patterns – and her belief in the importance of observation. Her work with supposedly unteachable children and the poor in Rome, and later as her fame grew with psychologists and educationalists, has left a powerful legacy that has touched the lives of countless children – and the adults around them – all over the world.

Children **Reach** their potential

Inside the Montessori classroom

Inside the Children's House



Stepping into a Montessori setting for the first time you are likely to be struck by two things - the clean, ordered nature of the environment, and the calm, quiet hum of busy concentration. Looking around you may also notice that the classroom and everything in it has been designed with the children in mind. The modern Montessori classroom is based on Maria Montessori's original 'Casa dei Bambini' or Children's House and materials are freely available to the children all the time. That means all sorts of specially designed learning tools, but also paint and brushes, scissors and paper, water - even snacks. And you will see children of different ages working alongside each other, older children helping younger ones, acting as role models while also reinforcing and celebrating their own learning. For some adults, the experience can be quite breathtaking.

Everything within the Montessori setting reflects a commitment to quality and to the children's ability to do things for themselves – it is by doing things for themselves and feeling the joy of achievement that children acquire knowledge and develop new skills. The Montessori classroom will be quiet, but never silent, as children engage in a variety of activities – ranging from the academic to the purely practical – enjoying the opportunity to concentrate without interruption over extended periods of learning and play.

The Montessori classroom is a 'favourable environment' – consciously designed and prepared to support the child's developmental needs. This design is expressed in the accessibility of all materials – children rarely need to ask if they can get something – and in the Montessori learning materials themselves. These have been developed to provide children with a step-by-step understanding of complex abstract concepts through the use of concrete examples – such as the physical shape of letters to the structure of the decimal system. Montessori materials are beautifully made, simple and

pleasing to work with. They form part of a structured approach to learning and the acquisition of skills that allows the children to dictate the pace of advance as their understanding builds.

The preparation and maintenance of this environment is one of the primary responsibilities of the Montessori teacher – although the children themselves are also encouraged to take a role in replenishing supplies, correcting their own mistakes, cleaning up after themselves and maintaining the ordered setting that is the foundation of the Montessori approach.

Disclaimer: This publication is a general introduction to Montessori and is not intended to be a comprehensive or definitive guide.

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YOUR LOCAL MONTESSORI SCHOOL IS:



The Montessori philosophy



- A child's early years - from birth to six - are the period when he or she has the greatest capacity to learn and the greatest appetite for knowledge. It is what we, as adults, do during these critical years that lays the foundations for all their future learning, for their sense of themselves, their confidence, self esteem, respect and interest in the people and world around them - truly education for life. Many Montessori schools now extend Montessori teaching right through to age 11 to further reinforce these benefits.
- The Montessori approach starts from a number of fundamental beliefs - that children are all unique individuals, that they all have immense potential, that they want to learn and be busy - and that, while they may want to be like adults, they do not learn or experience life in the same way as adults do.
- Children are capable of much more than we usually believe and it is generally adults trying to impose their schedules, expectations and ambitions - on children all born out of the best intentions that leads to disharmony, dissatisfaction, irritability and poor behaviour, both in the classroom and at home. Montessori gives children the freedom to make choices and to pursue them without interruption. It encourages them to respect the choices of those around them, and to take pleasure in their own accomplishments. Ultimately, children come to understand that nothing anyone says about what they do is as important as what they themselves feel.
- Montessori teachers seek to guide rather than control. They are not there to impart knowledge but to provide opportunities to learn and an environment in which this is most easily achieved. Learning is invited rather than imposed, encouraged rather than enforced. Equally, the emphasis is on giving the child the opportunity to progress at their own speed, rather than driving towards rapid advance, early achievement or any other externally fixed goals. Free from tests, benchmarks and competitive pressures children tend to excel, driven by their own thirst for knowledge.
- Montessori addresses a range of learning and experience that is far broader than any state-prescribed curriculum. It focuses on six core areas of learning: practical life; sensorial; language; mathematics; cultural, and creative activities. Carefully structured activities in these areas, often using specially developed Montessori equipment, make it easier for the child, providing them with a broad platform of skills and knowledge that will support all their future learning.

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