Sun and Stars Montessori School

Montessori Education Q & A

1. Are all Montessori schools religious?

Some private American Montessori schools *do* have a religious orientation, but Montessori education *itself* is not religiously oriented. It has a very clear spiritual (meaning connected to inward qualities) orientation, which encourages respect and care of living things. At Sun and Stars, we do not have a religious orientation; children come from a variety of family structures, personal and cultural beliefs. They form a wonderful basis for our cultural studies program.

2. Is Montessori primarily for preschool children?

While the majority of Montessori schools in the United States are preschools, Montessori programs exist at age levels from birth to eighteen. At Sun and Stars Montessori School, we have a Preschool Prep program from ages 2 through 3 years; a Pre-School program from ages 3 years to 6 years; and a Kindergarten program, which prepares children for a more solid academic future.

3. What is the difference between Montessori and traditional education?

Montessori education differs from traditional education in many ways but probably the most fundamental difference is that the foundation for Montessori education centers around the complete development of the child and their need for an environment which fosters multi-aged learning, self-correcting materials (to foster self esteem) and a 'living' curriculum based on peace, tolerance and appreciation for the environment.

4. Is it true that Montessori classrooms are highly structured?

Montessori is based on the principle of individual choice of *purposeful* activity. Montessori classrooms have freedom within structure and limits, where children are not only responsible for their education, but also for the care of their educational environment.

Although the teacher is careful to make clear the specific purpose of each material and to provide precise presentation of materials, the child in many Montessori environments is free to choose from an array of activities and to discover new possibilities. Children are encouraged to engage in child-centered activities and child oriented art.

5. Do teachers communicate with parents about their child?

Twice a year, teachers meet with parents for an in-depth conference. While always possible, parents are invited to observe their child in the classroom just before conference time. Parents are encouraged to ask questions about what they observed in class.

6. How do teachers deal with discipline?

Grace and Courtesy lessons are an important part of Montessori education. The balance of freedom and responsibilities found in the Montessori classroom teaches each child to have respect for self, others and the environment. Conflicts arise naturally, but children are taught solution-oriented skills for solving conflicts.

Children do learn two important things regarding their road to inner discipline: natural consequences arise from actions, and there is a village (parent and school community), which works together to assist them in their journey of development and maturity. When parents and school work in partnership consistently, the benefit is shown in a child's behavior.

7. Do Montessori environments encourage the arts, imagination and creativity?

Integral to a balanced curriculum, is the incorporation of art within a Montessori classroom. At Sun and Stars, 'the arts' is a focused part of learning, and includes art, music and drama. Fantasy play initiated by the child is viewed as healthy and purposeful.

8. What is the role of aggressive play?

The Montessori environment is non-competitive. Children do not compete for high grades (teachers don't give grades), nor are they evaluated on a comparative basis. Montessori education helps develop the kind of person who has the knowledge, confidence, and self-respect that leads him to feel a sense of good will toward others, to value rather than fear their ability.

This good will translates into personal treatment of others via language and physical connection. Parents are taught that in order to assist their child to achieve success in a Montessori classroom, they should refrain from wrestling and other aggressive play and inappropriate and hurtful language. Violence, in word or action is not tolerated at Sun and Stars Montessori School.

9. What are the advantages of three-year mixed-age groups?

Montessori materials are all encompassing for any student's individually growing intellect. No child is restricted to learn one concept at the same time as all others, but to learn in any academic area, according to their interest, ability or challenge. As one's area of challenge or giftedness is not limited to age, a multi-aged environment allows children to work with children of varying abilities, with models for emulation and peers for

reinforcement. Each child experiences the opportunity to be a leader and member of the group.

10. Why is it so important to continue my child in the kindergarten year at a Montessori school?

Studies have shown that the early years are most critical for a child's success. As Montessori is designed in three-year learning patterns, the Kindergarten year is the final critical one of the early education years.

Children learn how to think in a three year Montessori classroom. First, during the foundation year, the child learns how to establish ground rules and understanding of basic work skills. Second, they begin to master operations and methods of communication, and understand world and cultural studies. This is the depth year. And, having established critical learning habits – concentration, self-discipline, a sense of learning (invaluable preparations for life) – the child spends their third year in mastery – of the extended levels of education, their understanding of the world, and how to question, reason and draw conclusions, which serve as the greatest tools for later learning and test taking. The third year is the depth year.