

TABLE OF contents

SEPTEMBER 2013



10



22



52



64

moms

6 **Mom Blog**
First Day of School Cookies

12 **Life By Design**
Back to School Back to You

16 **Mom Profile**
One Mom's Struggle with CMT

kids

10 **Education**
Montessori Education

30 **Education**
Classroom Connections: 12 Ways to Support Your Child's Teacher this Year

62 **Education**
Learning a Language - Earlier is Better

64 **Education**
Personal Tech Devices at School: Toys or Tools?

ages & stages

14 **First Years**
Television and Tots

24 **Early Years**
Chaos on the Kid Calendar

26 **Elementary Years**
Building Strong Study Habits

28 **Tween Years**
Can Skype Help with Studying?

life

18 **Health**
The Finish Line is Just the Beginning

20 **Health**
Helping Your Anxious Child

22 **Home**
Kid Friendly Rooms That Last!

52 **Living Green**
Keeping Interest in the Great Outdoors

adventures

66 **Calendar of Events**
Family Adventures for All Ages

directories

32 **Annual EDUCATION Guide**

54 **Discover Montessori Guide**

56 **Private School Open House Dates List**

resources

Birthday & Parties.....71

Classified Ads.....70

Enrichment & the Arts.....57

Marketplace.....29

Montessori Schools.....53

Professional Services.....23

Schools & Preschools.....35

KIDS education

Consider Montessori

BY JOHN DEMARCHI

School's in session! As we kick off the 2013-14 year, it's the perfect time to be sure your kids are getting what they need from their school. School settings vary widely from traditional classrooms to homeschooling. While most approaches to education can meet kids' needs much of the time, there are ways you can customize your children's experiences to optimize their education and encourage a love of learning.

The Montessori approach to education is built upon just that concept of making education personal to each student. Since the early 1900s when Maria Montessori created the first Montessori classrooms, Montessori has proven to be an effective way to turn kids into first-rate learners. Montessori's approach is all about meeting kids where they are and providing them opportunities to really delve into their own education.

Most people have heard of Montessori, but if you're not familiar with the approach, you may have the idea that it's weird, outdated or just for "hippies." Montessori is different from traditional American schools, but it has a pretty impressive alumni circle – to including the founders of Google, Amazon, Wikipedia and SimCity.



(Photo Credit: Evergreen Montessori School)

The beauty of Montessori is that its approach can be applied in a classroom, at home, and even in study groups where kids can increase their learning – willingly. The Montessori approach focuses on creating an environment where kids can mentor each other, learn at their own pace and develop a real internal motivation to learn.

Multi-age vs. Graded Classrooms

Most children in the United States attend graded schools. Kids are likely in a classroom with other kids the same age. Graded classrooms allow a teacher to teach the same lessons to the whole class – that grade's "curriculum." The assumption is that kids of approximately the same age will be ready to learn at a similar pace. Graded classrooms aren't structured to accommodate kids who need more help with certain subjects or to stretch for kids who have mastered a topic and are ready to move on.

Montessori classrooms are "multi-age" with kids whose ages range within three to four years. Most Montessori schools have Primary Classrooms with three to six year olds and Elementary Classrooms with six to nine year olds. The teachers give one-on-one or small group lessons to the students who are ready for the work. The same lesson can be given to kids of varied ages. The older children will

do more sophisticated work while the younger kids stay at a more basic level.

The mix of ages along with the varied levels of lessons motivate the younger children to work hard so they can advance through the subjects. Having work at different levels of complexity available in the classroom, kids can take extra time to complete a task or move on to more difficult work once they've mastered something. The older kids act as mentors to the younger ones and take their role of leader very seriously. Multi-age classrooms tend not to develop the kind of competitive culture that leads to conflict or bullying.

Time, Movement, Choice and Structure

Do you remember endlessly watching that round, black and white clock on your classroom wall? Chances are that same clock is under surveillance by your kids! Most schools break the day into discreet periods dedicated to individual subjects. Kids are expected to study math for the prescribed time and, if math isn't their top interest at that moment, they may struggle to pay attention and hold still for the entire period.

In the Montessori classroom, the work periods are flexible so the children can choose the work they will do at a given time. The kids take as long as they need to complete a task and, when they lose interest, they put the work away and return to it at a later time. Allowing students to choose their work and how long they'll stick with it actually increases their attention span over time. A child who may be labeled with an attention deficit issue in a standard classroom would be able to move and shift as needed to optimize learning.

When you think about kids managing themselves as a group, you might imagine a fair amount of noise and rambunctious behavior. In fact, Montessori classrooms are known for their peacefulness. Everyone – teachers included – keeps their voices down and the kids soon follow that example. The freedom given to students in the classroom is actually what drives them to work and develop independent work habits.

External Rewards and Internal Motivation

Another key difference between traditional schools and Montessori schools is their approach to motivation. We're used to rewarding children with copious praise, good grades, gold stars, stickers and other extrinsic rewards. While praising children can be helpful, too much external motivation can reinforce the idea learning is something children are told to do versus WANT to do.



(Photo Credit: Evergreen Montessori School)

The Montessori philosophy is based on the understanding that children are naturally curious and inquisitive. Classrooms should be set up to encourage a child's natural desire to learn. Montessori work offers the right degree of challenge so children feel successful at the end of their day. In the multi-age classroom, children are not competing against one another to "be the best." They are working to "do their best."

Integrating Montessori's approach

Many Montessori schools start with toddler classes starting at eighteen months. The focus at that age is to expose the littlest learners to varieties of subjects and to teach them the process of making choices and focusing their curiosity. Montessori for toddlers is very much about learning to cooperate and completing a task – including clean up. Skills every mom appreciates!


You can establish a Montessori approach around the home for your littlest ones. Put their toys and activities away in an easy to reach, organized fashion. Show them how to take out one activity at a time, play with it until they're tired of it, then put it away. It can be just one corner of the home or shelf dedicated to "work." You'll be surprised at how differently the kids manage themselves in that setting.

For older kids, some traditional schools have multi-age groups such as tutoring programs with teens and younger students or reading "buddy" programs where elementary students adopt a younger class and they read together. If your school doesn't have

mentoring opportunities, talk to your teachers to see about implementing a buddy program. At home, gather the neighborhood kids of different ages and create an after school study group or an interest group. They'll motivate each other to master long division or investigate a new area of interest – think rebuilding computers, cleaning up a local green area -- anything that makes them want to learn!

To encourage kids to be willing (even excited learners) pay close attention to what they're interested in. We tend to focus on a student's weakest subject and push him to work more on that subject – often meeting some serious resistance from the kid! If your student is showing an interest for a subject or skill, offer her opportunities to explore it further - dinosaurs, soccer, woodworking – whatever it may be. Your kids will experience how fun learning can be and end up willing to tackle the subjects that challenge them.

There is no such thing as one size fits all for our kids' educations. The more we know about different approaches, the more options we have when working with our kids and ensuring they'll become lifelong, avid learners! [wfm](http://www.wfm.com)

John DeMarchi is the Head of School at Evergreen School in Silver Spring, MD. Evergreen has programs for children aged two through third grade. You can learn more at www.evergreenschool.com.