

Getting Your Money's Worth

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Getting Your Money's Worth Your Investment in Christian Montessori

Congratulations! You have chosen to make the most important financial investment in your child's life – and you have chosen the best. This investment – better than stocks, real estate or gold – will pay dividends for years. Its value will become incalculable to the success and happiness of your child and his future.

To make this investment even more valuable there are three things you can do:

1. Understand what you are paying for.
2. Be involved in the investment.
3. Recognize the benefits you didn't pay for.

Understand What You Are Paying For

You are investing in one of the finest educations available for your child. It is an education that meets the intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual needs of your child. Your child will receive an educational foundation that will provide for academic success. This foundation is based on four things:

1. Your child will learn to write
2. Your child will learn to read
3. Your child will learn mathematics
4. Your child will understand the “why” behind his learning

In a Montessori classroom, your child will learn to read. But learning to read is not enough. You have to learn to read well. When you read well you will enjoy reading. When you enjoy reading, you will learn. The rest of your child's education will be spent reading.

Give the teachers time to get this foundation right. In constructing a building, every foundation is unique to both the building and to the underlying strata on which it's constructed. Your child is unique and this education is designed to build on his uniqueness.

Most everything in Montessori leads to reading. **But you don't start with reading.** All of those “cute” exercises and wonderful materials you see on the shelves have one major purpose – they will lead to reading. However, to get there successfully you start with exercises that lead to writing.

The exercises on the shelves are designed to develop small motor and large motor skills. These skills lead to writing. When your child sorts, when he picks, when he pours he is developing the small muscles that lead to successfully holding a pencil. When he washes dishes, scrubs tables, sweeps the floor he is developing the large muscles that control the movements that move the pencil. Everything has a purpose on the road to reading. A prime example is table washing. When a child washes a table he is not only developing large motor skills, he is developing order and thoroughness. When you wash a table, you always begin at the top left corner of the table – left to right, top to bottom -

because you are building memory patterns for reading and writing. There are no “frivolous” exercises in a Montessori classroom. Each exercise ultimately leads to reading.

A significant point to note: **You can learn to read without learning to write but you cannot learn to write without learning to read at the same time.** Allow your child the time to build this foundation as they enjoy the journey through writing all the way to reading.

In similar fashion, the math materials are brilliantly designed not only to make math accessible but more importantly understandable. Your child’s concepts of math will also have this strong foundation as they work through red and blue rods, spindle boxes and the golden beads. Each exercise leads to the next level of competency and understanding.

Ultimately, what sets Montessori children apart is not their brilliance (after all they have bright parents who chose this education) but their understanding of what they’ve learned, the joy in which they learn it and the ability to tackle future challenges.

Being Involved in the Investment

You pay good money for this education. You’ve picked the best school. You’ve done your homework. It is **not** time to walk away from your investment. To get the most for your child out of his school experience you need to be involved and learn as much as you can. Parent-teacher conferences are not for the teacher’s benefit – they are for your child’s benefit. The more you know about your child the better parent you can be. Teachers, because of their experience, have insights into children’s development. And because the teacher has spent quality time with your child - observing, interacting and teaching - they have insights that will help you to nurture your child even more effectively.

A Montessori education is not only for children but for parents as well. Take every advantage of Montessori parent training so your child can reap every benefit from his experience.

Benefits You Do Not Pay For

You are making a significant investment in your child’s education. In life, you don’t get something for nothing. However, in a Montessori education, you (and your child) will receive far more than you pay for.

Montessori teacher training sets up every exercise with a “direct aim” and an “indirect aim.” In our example of table washing, the direct aim is to clean the table. The indirect aim leads to reading and writing. The indirect aims (the ones that are not readily obvious) are often of greater lasting significance and importance.

It is wonderful that you want the finest education for your child – and you will receive it in Montessori – but what your child will receive is far greater than just “learning.” They will receive an education for life.

Montessori Elementary and Beyond

The benefits your child receives in the preschool gives him a tremendous foundation. The Montessori elementary program builds on this foundation and continues to enhance the life skills needed for all future success. In the elementary, your child gains not only a wider breadth of knowledge but a deeper understanding of what he has learned. Most importantly, he learns how to use this knowledge to prepare to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

A Montessori education is not just cumulative in its learning; it is exponential in its understanding. Your child's mind and character will be trained to look at problems and see challenges instead of obstacles. With that kind of attitude and training there is nothing your child will not be able to achieve.

Described below are some of the amazing benefits your child will also receive from their Montessori experience in addition to the wonderful education. We all want the best for our children and working together, we can achieve that.

The Life Benefits of a Montessori Education

Accountability

Accepting accountability is an age-old problem. Who was the first one to blame somebody else for his own actions? Adam in the Garden of Eden. Not much has changed in the millenniums that have passed. We still look to blame others for our faults and actions. That is why the old joke says: "Every man should be married because there are just some things you can't blame on the government." Some things never change.

That is why true accountability must start with accepting responsibility. One of the strengths of Montessori instruction is that each child is personally accountable for his own learning. In Montessori, we do not learn as a class but as individuals. This is a major difference in the systems of learning. In a traditional school, the class has a lesson, the class takes a test, and the class moves on. If a student has not learned the material because of difficulty or complexity, they move on with the group anyway. The accountability for that lesson is lost because that test score is mixed into an average. And the learning of that lesson is also lost.

There is a big difference in accountability when you demand mastery rather than passing or average. Accountability is squarely placed in front of the child. This kind of direct accountability fosters a lifetime of personal responsibility.

Character Building

There is nothing more important in education than character building – not reading, not writing, not math – but character building. **Character is the ability to do what is right whether I want to or not or anyone is watching or not.** Character is trained. It is an education all of its own. When you help establish character in your child's life, he will be able to accomplish all the wonderful things you hope for him. Character is the engine that joyously pulls the train of life. When spiritual training is added to character training

the child understands that he is the steward of his own gifts and talents. The child now possesses both the motivation and the capability of achieving his God given goals. You no longer have to frighten him into learning. You no longer have to punish him to learn. He learns because it is built into him.

There are two main things in a Montessori environment that enhance character building - learning to make wise choices and finishing what you start.

I'm sure you are familiar with the classic interview of the successful executive when asked about his success.

"I owe it all to making wise choices."

"How did you learn to make wise choices?"

"From experience."

"And how did you get your experience?"

"From making poor choices."

The only way to train children to make wise choices is to allow them the freedom to make choices. Most of us had a traditional education where we were not accorded the opportunity to make choices. The problem with allowing children (and people in general) to make choices is that they might make the wrong choice. What many educators and parents don't understand is that making wrong choices is an education in itself if you allow the child to deal with the consequences of choice.

Unfortunately, many parents don't want their children to have to face the consequences of their poor choices. Where Montessori classrooms excel is in the ability safely to make wrong choices. You are not allowing children to put themselves or others in danger but you are allowing children the ability to learn what a good choice is from their own experience.

The second strength of a Montessori environment is letting children finish what they start. In traditional classrooms, we were not allowed to finish what we started. If we ran out of time or messed up the first time, we were not allowed to finish. Both of those are hindrances to developing character. Character is exemplified by finishing what we start. Because we both allow **and** expect the child to finish what he starts, we help to develop character.

A significant educational difference in Montessori is - **Learning is the constant and time is the variable.** Most of us grew up in systems where time was the constant – we had a week to learn something and then we took the test. No matter what our level of accomplishment was – a hundred percent, eighty, or sixty, we moved on. Some things we never got to learn; some things we never had to learn because we moved on.

The weakness in the traditional system is we never had to confront the consequences of our actions – poor choices, failure to achieve, failure to finish. The only consequence we had to deal with was the large consequence of failing the year. Ultimately, character is made up of the small consequences and how we deal with them.

Learning to finish is learning to handle all the small details of life. When you are in an environment where you are expected (and checked on) to finish what you start you begin to develop the foundation of real character.

You can learn math, science or language without building character but you cannot build character in school without also accomplishing all the challenges of learning.