



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE MONTESSORI METHOD: EDUCATION FOR INDEPENDENCE

A

The Montessori Method emerged from an unusual point of origin for a school system: clinical work. Maria Montessori trained as a physician in Italy and brought to education a habit of close observation, an interest in developmental variation, and a suspicion of one-size-fits-all instruction. In 1907, when she was invited to organise a day-care setting for children in a poor district of Rome, she opened the first *Casa dei Bambini* and began refining what she later framed as a pedagogical alternative to conventional schooling. Whereas traditional classrooms typically treat learning as a sequence of teacher-led explanations delivered to a whole group, Montessori proposed that cognitive growth is facilitated when learners act upon their surroundings, repeat purposeful tasks, and monitor their own progress. In her view, education should not merely transmit information; it should cultivate autonomy—children’s capacity to choose, persist, and regulate their behaviour—through environments designed to invite concentration rather than to demand compliance.

B

A core concept shaping Montessori practice is that development unfolds in “sensitive periods”: phases during which particular abilities are acquired with unusual ease and intensity. Montessori did not claim that learning stops outside these periods, but she argued that a well-timed experience can produce rapid mastery because motivation and attention align naturally with the skill being formed. These sensitive periods were described for language, movement, order, and social conduct, among other domains. The teacher, therefore, is not primarily a lecturer but a trained observer and facilitator—often termed “the guide”—whose task is to notice readiness, introduce a material with a brief and precise demonstration, and then withdraw. This withdrawal is not neglect; it is a deliberate protection of deep focus. Interrupting a child who has entered sustained concentration is treated as pedagogically counterproductive because it can break the very mental state in which learning becomes self-propelling.

C

The idea that children educate themselves does not mean Montessori classrooms are unstructured. They are organised as a *prepared environment* in which order, accessibility, and purpose are engineered into the physical layout. Materials are displayed on low shelves, arranged from simple to complex, and selected to be handled rather than merely



viewed. Montessori called them “didactic materials” because each object is designed to isolate a single variable: one dimension of size, one phonetic sound, or one numerical relationship. The Pink Tower, for instance, offers cubes that change only in size, inviting the child to build, compare, and internalise gradation. Sandpaper letters connect tactile tracing to phonemic awareness, turning abstract symbols into bodily experience. Crucially, many materials include *error control*, meaning the object itself reveals a mismatch: a cylinder will not fit its socket, a bead chain will not align with the expected pattern, or a set will not form a complete sequence. This design shifts evaluation away from adult judgement toward self-correction, reducing fear of failure and encouraging repeated, independent practice.

D

Montessori also reshapes classroom social life through heterogeneous grouping. Mixed-age classrooms typically span three years, creating a miniature community in which younger children observe older peers, and older children consolidate knowledge by explaining procedures or modelling behaviour. Advocates argue that this arrangement normalises difference: learners progress at different speeds without being defined by grades, and competence becomes something displayed through action rather than announced through rankings. The structure is also intended to reduce competition, since the classroom contains multiple levels of work simultaneously. However, the same feature draws critique. Some educators question whether mixed-age settings always meet the needs of children who require more explicit teaching, immediate feedback, or faster academic acceleration. In other words, while peer mentorship can be a powerful mechanism, it may not substitute for *direct instruction* in every case, particularly for learners who struggle to initiate tasks or who benefit from frequent guided practice.

E

Assessment practices likewise depart from mainstream routines. Instead of frequent standardised tests, Montessori teachers build records through systematic observation: noting which materials a child has mastered, how long concentration is sustained, and whether a learner can apply a concept across contexts. Proponents argue that this form of assessment aligns with the method’s aim—mastery rather than performance—because it foregrounds process, not just results. Formal testing is not forbidden; in many systems it appears when external requirements demand it, especially as children transition to conventional settings. The Montessori concern is that constant testing can distort motivation by shifting attention from intellectual exploration to score production. Yet this creates a practical problem: observation-based progress does not always translate smoothly into the language of accountability frameworks, which prefer numerical



comparability. The tension is therefore not simply ideological but administrative—how to communicate learning in a system that often equates learning with test data.

F

A recurring controversy within Montessori discourse is the balance between freedom and structure. Outsiders sometimes imagine that Montessori means unlimited choice, but in practice choice is bounded by the environment and by expectations of purposeful work. Children may select activities, but they are expected to choose something meaningful, to complete cycles of work, and to return materials in an orderly state. Guidance is typically enacted through routines, modelling, and quiet redirection rather than frequent public correction. Supporters claim this produces self-discipline: regulation emerging from internalised habits rather than imposed authority. Critics worry that some children may repeatedly avoid challenging tasks without stronger external direction, or that the minimal adult intervention can disadvantage learners who do not readily self-organise. Empirical research reflects this debate. Some studies report benefits in executive function, social development, and academic outcomes, while others find small or inconsistent differences after controlling for family background and school quality. A central methodological difficulty is variation in what counts as “Montessori” in the first place.

G

That difficulty becomes sharper as Montessori expands globally, including into public education systems. Many schools adopt certain elements—hands-on materials or a quieter classroom culture—without fully implementing teacher training, mixed-age grouping, or the complete sequence of materials. Others aim for higher fidelity but confront logistical constraints: classrooms must be stocked and maintained, educators require specialised preparation, and institutions must negotiate local standards and inspections. Discussions of cost and funding often arise in this context because scaling any specialised programme raises resource questions; however, such discussions do not automatically settle whether Montessori is generally more expensive than conventional schooling across contexts. What is clearer is that outcomes are strongly influenced by *implementation quality*: the degree to which core principles—observation, autonomy, a prepared environment, and consistent routines—are actually sustained. In this sense, Montessori functions less like a single product and more like a demanding craft, whose effectiveness depends on how precisely it is practised rather than on how attractively it is advertised.

Questions 1–4

Select the correct answer.



1 In Montessori classrooms, learning is mainly encouraged by

- A** whole-class teaching led by the teacher
- B** children selecting activities within a prepared setting
- C** frequent testing to maintain motivation
- D** removing materials to prevent distraction

2 In Montessori theory, “sensitive periods” refer to

- A** times when children should delay language learning
- B** periods when adults should interrupt concentration
- C** stages when children are especially open to acquiring particular skills
- D** a replacement for careful adult observation

3 Many Montessori materials include “error control” in order to

- A** allow children to identify and correct mistakes independently
- B** enable teachers to grade more efficiently
- C** prevent children from repeating the same activity
- D** remove the need for assessment in all school systems

4 One concern mentioned about mixed-age classrooms is that they

- A** always discourage cooperation
- B** eliminate peer learning
- C** stop older children from supporting younger ones
- D** may not meet the needs of children requiring more direct teaching or faster acceleration

Questions 5–8

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

5 Montessori adults are expected to observe carefully and avoid breaking a child’s deep concentration.

6 Montessori education does not allow formal tests under any circumstances.

7 The passage states that Montessori schools are generally more expensive to run than conventional schools.

8 The passage indicates that some “Montessori-inspired” classrooms may not follow the method’s key principles.



Questions 9–13

Complete the notes below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

Key features and debates

- Montessori classrooms are organised as a **9** in which children select tasks and learn through hands-on work.
- The approach stresses close observation and recognises **10** when children are particularly receptive to certain abilities.
- Many learning tools contain built-in **11**, enabling self-correction without constant adult judgement.
- Critics argue that peer mentoring cannot always replace **12**
- Research results are mixed partly because **13** differs widely between schools.

Answer Key

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. D
5. TRUE
6. FALSE
7. NOT GIVEN
8. TRUE
9. prepared environment
10. sensitive periods
11. error control
12. direct instruction
13. implementation quality

