

Three-Year Age Spans: An Integral Part of the Montessori Experience

Montessori education fosters a child's ability to become a fulfilled and productive adult, capable of contributing to the world—at home, at work, and in their community. Maria Montessori's observation of human development from birth to adulthood led to an educational approach that supports children's natural development, providing the skills and support to reach their full potential in life.

Unlike traditional district grade configurations, Montessori learning environments are designed to fit the specific needs of each child's stage of development. The Montessori model is uniquely designed to maximize the benefits of a PK3-6th configuration comprised of three distinct levels or developmental stages that span a three-year age range. Rather than viewing human development as linear, the Montessori approach recognizes that, within each stage of development, children exhibit different characteristics and differing educational needs.

The "Children's House" or "Primary" is the Montessori classroom for three to six year-olds (PK3-K). The approach for this age range recognizes young children as sensorial, hands-on learners with innate drives to imitate, repeat, concentrate, engage, and absorb academic and cultural knowledge from direct experience. Over the course of three years in the Children's House, children progress from simple tasks such as buttoning and counting to complex reading, writing, math, and beyond.

The next stage of development lasts from age six to age twelve. Montessori classrooms typically group children in 1st-3rd grade (Lower Elementary) and 4th-6th grade (Upper Elementary). The approach for this age group recognizes grade school children as driven by reason, imagination, curiosity, and supports their developmental needs for movement, group work, and independence. Children leave Montessori elementary after the full development cycle (through 6th grade) with solid literacy and math skills and a deep understanding of the functioning and interconnectedness of the human and natural worlds. Additionally, they typically develop strong skills in collaboration, inquiry, and communication, preparing them well for further academic and life achievement.

By design, students must remain in the same community for three years, as the youngest, then the middle, and finally as the oldest students in the class. Each year in a Montessori environment plays a different role in the student's academic and social experience. Academically, the student experiences a year of introduction, a year of practice, and a year of synthesis. Completing only a two-year cycle, the child does not have the opportunity to experience the powerful intellectual crystallization, the deep internalization of knowledge, of the third year. Socially, all children have the valuable experience of moving from the role of follower to that of

the leader during their time in the classroom. The leadership role is a crucial part of Montessori education, and the full strength of the Method is realized when the students experience all of these roles through the full three-year cycle. To stop early is to lose much of the power of the program and the full arc of learning.

In maintaining the fidelity of Dr. Montessori's observations that education is a natural process achieved by experiences in the environment, the full three-year cycle ensures the environment has time to do its intended work, which provides the following benefits to students:

- Self-Paced Learning
- Aspirational Learning
- Deep Understanding and Academic Mastery
- Stable Classroom Communities
- Social- Emotional Development

In maintaining the integrity of three-year cycles through the 6th grade, students will have completed an integrated learning experience and enter the next development shift as an empowered, skillful, natural leader and a lifelong, joyous learner.