

Family Connection

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“I have observed that the child, on condition that he is granted the freedom to work, learns, becomes cultured, absorbs knowledge and gains experiences that become embedded in his spirit.

Like seeds planted in fertile ground, they soon germinate and bear fruit.”

— Maria Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, page 96



Ten Reasons Your Child Should Stay for the Third Year of Montessori Early Childhood

BY MARTHA TEIEN, EdD

The Montessori Early Childhood program is designed as a continuous three-year journey for children ages three to six. Each year builds upon the previous one, culminating in a final year where everything comes together. However, families often leave before that final year, drawn by a new school opportunity or simply unaware of the tremendous, research-backed benefits of the third year. A common practical reason to leave is that a highly sought-after private elementary school may have more openings in kindergarten than in first grade, making the decision to leave after Year Two feel urgent. It's worth taking a moment to consider the true cost of that choice. The research is clear, and the experience cannot be duplicated.

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1 The Third Year Is the Harvest

The first two years are about planting and growth. Children spend those initial years simply becoming Montessori children. They learn to trust the environment and navigate it confidently. Soon, it feels like a second home. Year three is when that preparation begins to pay off with focused work and quiet confidence. Walking away at the end of Year Two is like leaving the garden just as it starts to blossom.

2 Your Child Becomes a Teacher

In a mixed-age classroom, the older children act as guides. A third-year student shows newcomers the basics of the classroom, models how to treat the classroom with respect, and helps younger students with their work. All of these experiences build confidence. When an older child guides a younger one, both children benefit; the younger gains a scaffold toward new understanding, and the older deepens their own by having to explain it and doing so with kindness and patience helps build character that lasts a lifetime. It also shows younger children, by example, what it means to belong to something.

3 Focus and Self-Control Reach a New Level

Three years of meaningful internal motivation and choice lead to something remarkable: a child who can sustain deep attention not because an adult demands it, but because they have developed that skill themselves. Research confirms that Montessori children demonstrate significantly stronger executive function than their peers, with the most notable differences appearing at the end of the third year. These executive function skills include working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control. Research shows these skills are among the best predictors of success in school and in life.

4 Reading and Mathematics Click Into Place

Montessori gradually prepares children for literacy and numeracy through hands-on activities and sensory experiences. All of the sorting, classifying, and sensory exploration in the first two years build a strong foundation for children to read, construct, and work with large numbers in the third year, engaging in mathematical thinking that often extends well beyond what is typically expected in a traditional kindergarten program. Year Three often represents the natural peak of this process, when the child's transition into reading unfolds at their own pace, as Montessori described. Children who complete the full cycle start elementary school with a stronger foundational understanding of both literacy and mathematics than those who transition earlier.

5 Your Child Knows Who They Are in This Space

When children start over each year in a new environment with a new set of children and teachers, this takes a great deal of time and energy. In the Montessori early childhood program, third-year children enter an environment that is physically and emotionally familiar. They have an internal understanding of the shelves and the big work they have been waiting to do. This confident self-knowledge and the ability to direct their own learning with purpose and calm are among the most important accomplishments of early childhood, and they take three full years to develop.



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6 The Benefits Last Well Beyond Kindergarten

This isn't just about what happens in Year Three. Long-term research following Montessori students into adolescence shows that those who complete Early Childhood have both better academic and social outcomes in middle school than peers who attend non-Montessori programs or Montessori for shorter periods. For families considering the appeal of an early kindergarten opening elsewhere, this is worth considering: the third year doesn't just complete the experience; it is where the real return on three years of work comes in.



7 They Get to Be the Eldest

There is something profound about being the most experienced person in a community. But it is not just about becoming a leader; it is about becoming an empathetic leader, someone others trust and turn to for help easily. Your child will carry themselves differently in their third year: quiet pride and a gentle authority that is their own will become clear. That feeling of being known and respected within a community shapes a child's sense of self in lasting ways.



8 The Friendships Are Real

After two years together, children in a Montessori classroom become familiar with each other, both as classmates and as genuine friends. The social environment of Year Three is full of relationships built through shared experiences and collaborative work. Research on mixed-age communities confirms that this structure encourages empathy and prosocial behavior more effectively than same-age groupings.

9 The Transition to What Comes Next Will Be Smoother

Children who complete the three-year program enter their next school, whether Montessori or traditional, with strong academic skills and self-regulation. That ease with learning, the confidence of a child who knows how to work and persist, travels with them. It shows up on the first day of a new school year and again whenever something hard is asked of them.



10 This Time Is Irreplaceable

Staying for the full three years is giving your child the gift of time, and honoring where they are developmentally. Maria Montessori described the years from three to six as a period of the absorbent mind, an extraordinary window of neurological receptivity during which children effortlessly build themselves from their environment with depth that will never occur again. Neuroscience confirms this: these are years of rapid brain development during which experience leaves lasting structural marks. Year Three is your child's last full year inside that window.

Schooling decisions are personal to each family, and often there are real constraints and considerations. Conversations around school decisions may come with stress and pressure to get a coveted seat in the "right" kindergarten. At the same time, any time a child spends in a Montessori environment is truly nourishing and honors who they are. With that in mind, it can be helpful to pause, quiet some of that external noise, and take a closer look at what unfolds over the full three-year cycle in a Montessori Early Childhood program, and the unique benefits that come with seeing that journey through.

Helping Children Navigate Differences with Confidence and Respect

A Montessori perspective for families

By Cathy Durand-Horne



Children naturally notice differences—how people look, move, speak, or live. These observations aren't rude or inappropriate; they're part of how children make sense of the world. In Montessori education, we see these moments as opportunities to guide children with calm, respectful language rather than shutting curiosity down.

Curiosity Is Strength

When adults rush to shush or redirect, children may learn that differences are uncomfortable to talk about. A Montessori approach invites us to pause, respond simply, and model respect. Curiosity doesn't need correction, it needs guidance.

When You're Unsure

You don't need perfect words. Montessori emphasizes the prepared adult, not the perfect one. It's okay to say, "That's a good question—I need to think about it," and return to the conversation later.

What to Say in the Moment

Parents often ask for clear, usable language. Remember to keep it simple and age-appropriate. You don't need perfect words. Here are a few examples:

"Why does that person look different?"

"People's bodies come in many different forms, sizes, and colors."

"Why does she speak another language?"

"Some families speak more than one language. It can be fun to learn to say words in different languages!"

"That's weird."

"It's different from what you're used to. Learning about new and different things can be interesting and fun"

These responses name the difference without judgment and help children build understanding.

Belonging Starts at Home

Inclusive values grow through everyday experiences: the books you read, the language you use, and how you speak about others. This might look like noticing differences together at the park, reading stories that reflect many cultures, or modeling respectful language in daily conversations. When children experience openness and respect at home, they learn to navigate differences with confidence.

The Montessori Connection

Montessori education is rooted in respect for the individual and trust in the child. Conversations about differences fit naturally into this philosophy—meeting curiosity with calm guidance and helping children see differences as a normal and meaningful part of life.

Children take cues from the adults around them. What we model as adults shapes how they understand and respond to the world. When we consistently model acknowledgement, acceptance and respect of differences, children learn to do the same with confidence and care.