

THE PREPARED ENVIRONMENT

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Montessori classrooms tend to fascinate children and their parents. They are normally bright, warm, and inviting, filled with plants, animals, art, music, and books. There are interest centers filled with intriguing learning materials, mathematical models, maps, charts, fossils, historical artifacts, computers, scientific apparatus, perhaps a small natural-science museum, and animals that the children are raising.

Montessori classrooms are commonly referred to as a prepared environment. This name reflects the care and attention that is given to creating a learning environment that will reinforce the children's independence and intellectual development.

You would not expect to find rows of desks in a Montessori classroom. The rooms are set up to facilitate student discussion and simulate collaborative learning. One glance and it is clear that children feel comfortable and safe.

The Montessori classroom is organized into several curriculum areas, usually including language arts (reading, literature, grammar, creative writing, spelling, and handwriting), mathematics and geometry, everyday living skills, sensory awareness exercises and puzzles, geography, history, science, art, music, and movement. Most rooms will include a classroom library. Each area is made up of one or more shelf units, cabinets, and display tables with a wide variety of materials on open display, ready for use as the children select them.

Students are typically found scattered around the classroom, working alone or with one or two others. They tend to become so involved in their work that visitors are immediately struck by the peaceful atmosphere.

It may take a moment to spot the teachers within the environment. They will normally be found working with one or two children at a time, advising, presenting a new lesson, or quietly observing the class at work.