



From Montessori to Traditional

How Elementary Montessori Prepares Children for Life's Next Steps

by Joyce St.Giermaine

It's a sunny morning at Oakwood Montessori School, and inside the brightly lit classrooms, a quiet buzz fills the air. In one corner, Maya (a fourth-grader) is constructing a model of a Roman arch, while Jacob (a fifth-grader) is busy calculating irregular shapes' areas with Montessori geometry materials. Both are focused and seem to be motivated by inner curiosity.

Maya and Jacob have been in Montessori since they were toddlers, and most days are filled with moments of discovery. Today, for Maya, it's exploring history through building this scale model of a Roman arch that holds together without mortar. For Jacob, it's the satisfying moment when a challenging math problem clicks into place. They are, however, quietly developing something more enduring: self-reliance, critical thinking, and resilience; these are characteristics that will serve them well when they eventually shift to more traditional middle or high schools.

The elementary Montessori learning environment is clearly different from the traditional classrooms students may experience later. The area feels more like a studio or workshop than a typical classroom. Students move around and choose their activities, working alone or with a few others. This is a hallmark of the Montessori approach. It allows students like Maya and Jacob to explore their interests while still meeting set learning goals.

Claire, the Upper Elementary Montessori guide, observed, "They're not just working because they have to. They're engaged in work that they choose, which develops a much deeper connection to knowing."

Jacob enjoys challenging math problems. He says that he has been spending as much time as he can on geometry for weeks. "He's able to dive deep into subjects that interest him," Claire describes. "And he's establishing the discipline to keep going even when things get difficult."

Maya's experience with hands-on learning is typical in Montessori education. Through tasks like constructing a Roman aqueduct, she's not simply discovering ancient civilizations; she's learning more about engineering, team effort, and the value of water systems in society. She may not recognize it, but the flexibility to explore principles in such an experiential way is laying the groundwork for how she'll approach finding out for the rest of her life.

What's not obvious to the casual observer is that both Maya and Jacob are likewise sharpening skills that will reduce their ultimate shift to more conventional school settings. They are finding out how to handle their time, set objectives, and evaluate their progress with increasing self-reliance and very little assistance from trainers.

Navigating Freedom and Responsibility

In Montessori, children like Maya and Jacob have a substantial quantity of autonomy. Each day, they choose the work on which they want to concentrate, stabilizing their interests with the academic requirements. Although this technique might seem disorganized, it promotes a strong sense of obligation and self-motivation.

Jacob's mom, Laura, states, "He's discovered how to plan his day. It's not like he's simply doing whatever he desires. Jacob knows what he needs to accomplish, and he has to figure out how to make it happen. Yes, he has a weekly work plan, but he also keeps a journal of what he's done and puts together portfolios of his finest work. Like the majority of kids, Jacob doesn't constantly tell us about what he's performed in school unless it is something very amazing. However, he has so much to say at conference time or when

families invest an evening in the class for the students to share their work and projects."

This capability to self-manage makes Montessori students especially well-prepared for the next steps in their education. In a traditional middle or high school, where deadlines are strict and schedules are set, this self-discipline will help them thrive.

Tanya, Maya's mom, is confident that Maya will be ready for life after Montessori. "She currently has the skills to manage her work effectively. She has ownership of her education."



Montessori Elementary education is not just about letting children explore; it's about preparing them for the realities of the world beyond.

As they progress through the program, students like Maya and Jacob develop essential skills that will serve them well in conventional schools: critical thinking; prob-

lem-solving, and social intelligence. These abilities are not just for educational success but for life beyond academics, helping them navigate the complexities of the modern world.

In Montessori classrooms, children of different ages interact, fostering a collaborative environment where older trainees coach more youthful ones. This mixed-age grouping helps children like Maya and Jacob establish social maturity and leadership abilities. It's an experience that's hard to replicate in standard schools but one that offers Montessori trainees an edge when it pertains to browsing new social environments.



"...the shift to traditional schools has been less of a hurdle and more of an opportunity to apply the skills they've spent years developing."

"It's incredible to observe how they handle group work," their Montessori instructor, Claire, says. "They're not simply trying to get things done rapidly; they're focused on finding out together. That collaboration constructs a lot of emotional intelligence."

Jacob, who will probably transition to a standard middle school after sixth grade, is currently revealing indications of being ready for the modification. His self-confidence in handling his time and overcoming problems without fear of failure will be crucial as he moves into a more traditional environment.

Montessori Graduates in High School

Many Montessori parents question how their children will adapt from the Montessori approach to a more structured standard class setting. The experiences of former Montessori students, who efficiently transitioned from Montessori to conventional high schools, demonstrate the value of Montessori education in equipping trainees for the needs of standard academic environments.

Sophie, who is now a junior at a competitive private high school, recalls how her Montessori background offered her an unanticipated advantage when she started ninth grade. "At first, I fretted about all the tests and deadlines," she states. "But honestly, it wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. I was currently used to handling my own time."

Sophie gained valuable time management abilities in Montessori, which enabled her to organize her everyday jobs

and schoolwork separately. This capability served her well when she started high school, as she adapted to the more strenuous schedule without feeling overwhelmed.

Unlike many of her brand-new schoolmates, Sophie felt confident in staying up to date with her work, attributing her success to the skills she obtained in Montessori.

Sophie's mother, Jen, who initially stressed over the shift to high school, now feels the strong foundation Montessori offered. She appreciates Sophie's resilience, capability to express concerns, and desire to take risks in her educational journey.

Daniel, a sophomore at a public high school, tells a comparable story. "In Montessori, you're taught to think for yourself, not simply follow guidelines," he stated. "That actually assisted me when I got to high school. I wasn't scared to speak out in class or deal with jobs."

Throughout his time at Montessori, Daniel participated in all sorts of creative activities that improved his ability to think critically and resolve problems. These qualities served him well in his new school's more structured environment. "I believe Montessori made me more positive," he says. "It taught me how to figure things out on my own, which is something I see some of my friends fight with."

His mom, Lisa, concurs. "He's not just going through the movements," she says. "Montessori gave him the tools to really engage with what he's learning, which's carried over into high school."

6-12 Years | The Imagination Years

The Long-Term Impact of Montessori

Maya and Jacob's years in elementary Montessori are setting them up for success. They are learning to think deeply, work independently, solve problems, and make friends.

For graduates like Sophie and Daniel, the shift to traditional schools has been less of a hurdle and more of an opportunity to apply the skills they've spent years developing.

As Sophie prepares for college, she's optimistic that her Montessori background will continue to serve her well. "I don't just remember stuff for tests," she says. "I know how to study and learn. That's what Montessori offered me."

For parents like Jen and Lisa, the question of whether Montessori prepares children for traditional schools is clear. "Montessori isn't just preparing them for the next grade," Lisa states. "It's not just about getting them ready for the

next level. It's about providing the abilities and values they require to be successful in life."

The same can be said for Maya, Jacob, Sophie, and Daniel. Whether they are building Roman aqueducts, computing the area of an intricate shape, or tackling the difficulties of high school, Montessori has actually provided a structure that goes far beyond academics — it's provided the ability to navigate whatever comes next. ■



Joyce St. Giermaine is the Executive Director of the Montessori Foundation.

Her background includes a lifetime of work in association management, law, banking, and institutional advancement. A lifelong learner, she is an accomplished photographer, editor, and graphic designer. Joyce is a former Montessori parent and grandparent.