

Checklist

“What to check when visiting a Montessori school”

During a short visit is possible that we won't be able to see all this, so it's a good idea to ask any doubts.

Respect

In a Montessori environment respect is the basis of everything; the respect of the guide towards the children, of the children towards the guide, of the children between them and also towards the environment and the materials.

Respect is something very broad but in the end it can be seen in the details, some things that we can observe are the way the guide addresses the children, the tone of voice, how they treat the material... It is possible that you'll see a child being not very respectful of the material or another child, but they are learning, what is really important is how the guide, the assistant and any other adult who works in the center act.

Freedom and limits

Another important point of a Montessori environment is freedom, but within limits, (which are usually given by respect for others and the environment). This balance between freedom and limits can be seen in details such as:

- **Freedom of movement:** Children are not required to sit in the same chair at all times. They do not need to ask permission to get up or go to the bathroom, but they also know that they can not spend their day wandering around doing nothing.
- **Freedom of choice:** Children can choose what they want to work on, as long as that material is available, they it has already been presented to them and they put it back when finished. They can also choose whether to work at a table or on the floor with a rug.

Conflict resolution

The way to resolve conflicts in a Montessori environment begins with respect. The guide can accompany children who have a conflict and are not able to solve it without help, but her role will be as mediator, trying that the children are the ones who seek a solution, without making judgments or forcing to apologize.

"Time out" is not used in the traditional way in which the adult is the one who sends the child to take some time to reconsider. Instead, the Peace table is used, to which the children can go to resolve a conflict, the guide can invite them to do so, but she will never impose it.

Punishment and rewards

In Montessori, punishments are not used, when someone, whether a child or an adult, does something wrong, is encouraged to learn from it and to seek ways to repair the harm caused as a result of their behavior.

The same thing happens with rewards, in a Montessori Environment there are no stickers of happy faces or stars in the children's works, the idea is that children have an internal satisfaction by their work well done.

Mixed age groups

Classrooms at a Montessori school are divided as follows:

- Nido: 0 to 18 months
 - Infant's Community: from 18 months to 2.5-3 years
 - Children's House: from 2.5-3 to 6 years
 - Taller I (Elementary): 6 to 9 years old *
 - Taller II (Elementary): from 9 to 12 years old *
- * Taller I and Taller II can be united in the same space.

These divisions are approximate, it does not automatically mean that a child moves to the next stage at their birthday or at the beginning of the year, usually (as far as possible) moving from one group to the next is done when the child is ready and gradually.

Montessori Materials

This is what most people look for when visiting a Montessori environment, but as we are seeing it is not the only thing. The fact that a school has Montessori materials is indicative, but not a guarantee, that Montessori is made there. A Montessori environment should have all the materials of the corresponding stage, but it is possible that they are not all on the shelves at the time we visit the school.

The personal touch of each guide is very influential, but usually the materials are distributed in the classroom by areas; for example in Children's House in an area is everything Practical Life, in another Sensorial, in another area Mathematics, in another area Language...

It is not necessary to know all the materials to visit a Montessori school, but you can ask something like "Are these materials of Sensorial?" Or "In this part is Practical Life, right?". Usually a guide who is showing her environment to some parents is happy to see that they have already been informed a bit about Montessori 😊

Order

We have already talked a lot about the importance of order in Montessori, so you can imagine that a Montessori environment should be tidy and clean.

Materials should be placed on shelves without stacking, each in place. Each child should have a space to keep their work, their coat, their toothbrush and toothpaste... Children should have access to basic cleaning utensils like brush and dustpan, mop, dust cloth...

Spaces and furniture adapted to children

This is not exclusive to Montessori, it is easy to find in many schools, it is details such as tables and chairs the right size for children, coat racks at their height, child-sized toilets...

Indoor and outdoor spaces

A Montessori environment ideally should have indoor and an outdoor spaces, and children can usually choose to work outdoors with some materials, for example those that take up a lot of space like making the chain of the 1000 with the pearls.

The outside environment is a continuation of the exterior, but at the same time are well differentiated, for example children learn about indoor voice and outdoor voice, and in many schools children have indoor shoes; when they arrive in the morning they put their indoor shoes on and if they go outside they have to change their shoes. Maybe you'll see in the entrance of the classroom an area where each child has a space to leave his shoes.

Tests & homework

As a general rule, in Montessori there is no homework. It is true that children can come home with the idea of doing a job or reading a book about something they have been working on at school, but it is not imposed by the teacher.

As for tests, in Montessori they are not necessary as the guide and the assistant monitor and evaluate each child individually, but occasionally some Montessori schools have to take tests to meet some legal requirement or pass an inspection.

These are the details I consider most important to check when visiting a Montessori school, but if you think I have missed anything, please leave a comment at the original post on the blog: <http://www.montessoriencasa.es/escuela-montessori-checklist/>