

Montessori Classroom Design

Classrooms should provide enough floor space to comfortably accommodate the total number of children enrolled along with the complete collection of Montessori educational apparatus, tables and shelving, and related activity areas, such as art.

Number of Students in a Class: The Montessori Foundation recommends an ideal class size of 25 to 30 students at the early childhood and elementary level, representing a three-year age range (traditionally ages 3 to 6, 6 to 9, 9 to 12, etc.). Naturally circumstances, such as room size, local regulations, or the challenges faced in the early years when a new class is being established, may lead schools to set up classes with a smaller group size.

Size of the Classroom Space: We strongly recommend that schools allow a minimum of 35 square feet per student enrolled, which complies with many jurisdictions in the United States.

Ideally, the Council recommends a ratio of 50 square feet per student at the early childhood level, 75 square feet per student at the elementary level, and 100 square feet per student at the secondary level.

We recognize and anticipate that few schools will

be able to attain this ideal, with many factors coming into consideration, most especially local conditions and climate. For example, schools in crowded urban environments may find it financially impractical to secure larger facilities, and recognize that their children and adults are accustomed to smaller amounts of personal space. In warmer climates, schools may be able to take excellent advantage of shaded and semi-shaded outdoor environments adjacent to each classroom. Ultimately the final test is how well the children function within their environment.

Charlotte Montessori School, Charlotte, North Carolina

Need for a self-contained Environment: Classrooms at the Primary and Elementary levels should ideally include within each environment an appropriately sized kitchen, classroom library, science area/lab, greenhouse, and art studio. A small woodshop or hobby workshop is also highly desirable.

For each class of 25 to 35 students, we recommend the provision of a large 3 compartment sink for dish washing in the kitchen, and within the classroom at least two individual bathrooms to allow privacy. Avoid multi-stall restrooms.

Traditionally Montessori classes are designed to create an uncluttered and beautiful homelike atmosphere. Spaces with an institutional feel are avoided if at all possible or their sterile look and feel is softened by a conscious use of design elements.

Access to the Outdoor Environment: Ideally, each class should have at least two walls facing the outdoor environment, which again ideally should be a natural setting of gardens, forest, or fields. At least one door should lead outside, allowing children to freely go in and out to a prepared outside environment.

Design for elementary cottage at the New Gate School, Sarasota, Florida

The Children's Garden: Ideally, each classroom should have a small garden and outdoor environment enclosed by a picket fence or perhaps a Mediterranean style garden wall. Again ideally, the children should be able to go outside as they wish to work in the garden, observe nature, paint, or work outside.

Windows: Montessori classrooms should have an abundance of natural light brought in through an

abundance of attractive windows that can be opened to allow the air to flow. In classes designed for younger children, windows should be selected that reach down to almost floor height or mounted lower to the floor to allow small children to see outside without stretching.

Avoid Clutter and Traditional School Posters and Displays The Montessori class is not supposed to look or feel like a classroom in the traditional sense, but rather a comfortable and inviting home. We do not teach group many lessons in the first place, so we don't need to use blackboards or bulletin boards as decorative elements on the walls.

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A few more suggestions:

- * Don't try to add color to the room with eye catching educational posters.
- * At all costs, don't create a display of twenty five identical art projects
- * Avoid cartoon-like posters
- * Never feel compelled to hang an alphabet up

along the wall

Instead select carefully chosen highly quality art reproductions or original art and hang them around the room at the children's eye level. Even better, provide the children with mattes and frames and allow them to select and display individual pieces of their art or work in an attractive manner. Create attractive areas for displaying individual sculptures or projects. Take a fresh look at how art is displayed in a fine gallery or art museum.

Lighting: Fluorescent lights can create a harsh light. Soften the glare with the light from your windows and by introducing several attractive floor or table lamps with shades. Just a little incandescent light from some lamps can go a long way to making your classroom feel like a Children's House.

Floors: Traditionally Montessori Children's Houses had wooden, tile, or stone floors because that was the norm in European and North American buildings at the time. Today wall to wall carpet is so pervasive, that we tend to see a normal pattern of a space divided between carpeted space and a practical life and art area that is tiled. It is important that at least the area where the children work on their practical life skills and art have a tile or other non-carpeted floor to avoid damaging the

rug and to provide a hard surface as a control of error (the little glass pitcher should break, not bounce, if dropped). Avoid bland institutional looking tile or wall to wall carpet. Create the most attractive and harmonious look and feel that your budget and creativity allows. Consider the possibility of wooden floors or one of the new imitation wooden flooring materials. The look is just what most of us dream about creating in our schools.

Toxic Substances: When selecting any paint, carpeting, or flooring material, take care to avoid introducing something into your indoor environment to which chemically sensitive children and adults might react. Some carpets and paints give off chemicals that can be real, if not visible, environmental pollutants.

Plants: Use as many large and small plants in your environment as possible. Large ferns, palms, and various decorative but nontoxic plants help to soften your environment, create a warm cozy feeling, help keep your indoor air healthy, and provide a host of practical life activities.

Grounds and Facilities:

Without a great deal of money, it is difficult to

create and maintain a first-rate Montessori environment. On grounds as large as yours, this task is magnified. Even once you have the funds available, you will need to train your support staff to be sensitive to the needs of a Montessori program.

Arrange for basic janitorial service to every room on a daily basis: vacuuming, tile areas cleaned, bathrooms.

Throw out all of that junk from the school and storage areas. Create order out of what remains.

Don't allow your outdoor environment to look neglected. Keep your buildings painted, equipment in good repair, and grounds carefully tended.

Find space somewhere for a faculty lounge. Teachers and administrators should take pride in keeping it neat and clean.

Many school offices need cleaning, junk removal, and fancy little touches to make them comfortable for visitors and the school staff.

Schools should be aggressive in getting parents to help fix things up: parent work parties, special projects, etc. Develop a written plan for educating your parents to the need to help.