

## Which Montessori Teacher Education Program is Right for You?

### **Montessori education is unique**

Montessori education is an integrated approach which depends for best results on the free and conscious cooperation of the child. More than just the transfer of academic knowledge, its goal is the full blossoming of the child's personality and the release of their human potential.

Montessori education has proven to be successful in thousands of schools around the world for over a century because it acknowledges the fundamental principles of human development in every stage of a child's learning. Montessori education is **developmental**, which means that Montessori teachers' decision-making and interactions are informed by their understanding of child development, and that the teaching materials are designed to support age-appropriate outcomes. In addition, the Montessori "prepared environment" is designed to provide a structure within which individual children are offered **just the right amount of freedom to maximise motivation** and allow them to become independent thinkers and doers, agents of their own learning and growth.

The Montessori pedagogy is **child-centred and individually paced**, with most instruction done in small groups or one-on-one. Montessori teachers become astute observers who can personalise lessons to meet each child's needs. Montessori materials are designed to embody specific concepts which are revealed as **children explore, experiment and construct new knowledge**. These manipulatives are engaging, inviting and open-ended, and yet they are also generally self-correcting so that errors are revealed without the intervention of an adult.

### **Montessori teacher training is unique too**

Montessori teacher education takes a very different approach from traditional teacher training. Starting with fundamental courses on human development and the nature of learning, Montessori teachers learn **how to accurately observe children**. They practise and **internalise the details of a broad and deep curriculum** for the multi-age group they will be teaching: Infants and Toddlers (0-3 year-olds), Early Childhood (3-6 year-olds, known as "primary" in other parts of the world), 6-9 and 9-12 year-olds (known as "Primary" in Australia and "Elementary" in the United States), or Adolescents (12-18 year-olds).

Montessori training may include lectures and seminars on Montessori philosophy, child development and many hours of demonstrations with the Montessori materials. Quality Montessori teacher education should also include substantial periods of "supervised

practice” with the materials, observation of real classrooms, and practise teaching in collaboration with other student teachers and under the guidance of an experienced trainer. And finally, a “practicum” or internship as a student teacher in a functioning Montessori classroom gives the teacher hands-on practical training that reveals the nuances and complexities that are inevitably faced by teachers in their interactions with a multitude of different children situated in a particular cultural context.

Understanding and balancing all the moving parts in creating a nurturing and respectful environment for the child is the job of the Montessori teacher. A skilled Montessori teacher knows the curriculum for their three-year age span so well that they can recognise when a child is ready for a particular concept or skill, and present the appropriate material to the child at the moment they are most receptive. The well-prepared Montessori teacher also understands the true nature of the child and knows how to meet their needs – physical, emotional, social, cultural, academic and spiritual. Many Montessori teachers see it as a calling rather than a job, a privilege and a pleasure to be a guide in the development of a new and unique human being.

Montessori training goes further in preparing the adult emotionally and orienting their mindset for work with children. In everyday situations children are often given few, if any, meaningful choices in their own lives by harried adults. Over time this disempowers the child, robbing them of their ability to know their own minds and choose for themselves. Dr Montessori believed that in order to create an inviting atmosphere of respect for the child, the new Montessori teacher must experience what she called a “**spiritual transformation**”. By this she meant that they would need to learn how to see past their own cultural conditioning so that they can recognise the child for who they are, put aside their own agendas and allow the child to choose for themselves wherever possible. Dr Montessori’s own training programs focused as much on the spiritual preparation of the teacher (ie. developing a humble and non-judgmental mindset) as on their academic preparation. For this reason Montessori teachers are sometimes referred to as “guides” because their role involves guiding the child’s self-exploration (or “autoeducation”) more than it involves direct teaching.

All teachers in Australian schools (Montessori or otherwise) must have the relevant tertiary degree from an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program for the age group they are working with that is approved by federal and state regulatory authorities. An Initial Teacher Education (ITE) course (i.e. one that provides teacher registration) must be either:

- A four-year Bachelor of Education (Australian Qualification Framework AQF level 7)

- A two-year Master of Teaching (i.e. not 'Education' as that is not an ITE course) (AQF level 9)
- A two-year Graduate Diploma of Education (AQF level 8).

### **Early Childhood Educator Qualifications**

The National Quality Framework (NQF) sets out minimum qualification requirements for educators working in early childhood education and care services. The NQF is administered through the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). The ACECQA website provides information on the approved early childhood qualifications and for assessment of existing and overseas qualifications.

There are three main levels of educators, which apply to centre-based and family day care services from birth to preschool age: Certificate III Level Educator, Diploma Level Educator, or Early Childhood Teacher (ECT). Refer to the ACECQA Qualifications List on their website for details on what Montessori courses are approved.

### **6-12 Year-Old and 12-18 Year-Old Educator Qualifications**

Montessori educators teaching primary aged children should have relevant Montessori primary training, as well as a teaching degree and teacher registration in the state/territory that they intend to teach. Each state/territory in Australia has a regulatory body, which mandates these teaching qualifications.

In general, any undergraduate teaching qualification will be a four-year tertiary study such as a Bachelor of Education. (Montessori training qualifications are not assessed as part of their teaching qualifications.) Please refer to the links below for teacher qualifications and registration details.

- New South Wales
- Northern Territory
- Queensland
- South Australia
- Australian Capital Territory
- Victoria
- Western Australia

### **Overseas Qualification Holders**

Holders of overseas early childhood or Montessori qualifications may not be approved to work in early childhood in Australia. Your qualifications must be assessed individually by ACECQA as no overseas Montessori qualifications are accredited in Australia. Please refer to the ACECQA website for details. Unfortunately, most overseas

Montessori qualifications will not be recognised by ACECQA, so you may need to undertake Australian early childhood qualifications.

Teachers working in Montessori environments are usually required by their school or centre to have an additional Montessori qualification for the level with which they are working. Although schools and early childhood centres are regulated for curriculum and educator qualifications, national or state regulators are not able to assess individual Montessori TEPs according to the criteria that would indicate whether they prepare educators well for Montessori learning environments.

### **Accreditation of Montessori Teacher Education Programs (TEPs)**

Before choosing a training program it's important to take some time to assess which programs might best prepare you to successfully manage a Montessori environment in the particular school setting in which you will be working. A good way of assessing the quality of a Montessori training program is by its accreditation.

The *Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education* (MACTE) is an international accreditation body that is dedicated to improving academic degree and certificate programs for Montessori professional educators who teach and lead in schools at the Early Childhood through Senior Secondary levels, and to assure the public of their quality. MACTE was founded in 1995 in the United States and is recognised by the US Department of Education, however it has become the global standard bearer for effective preparation of Montessori educators. Many Montessori schools around the world require their teachers to hold certificates or diplomas from a MACTE accredited training program.

In 2021 Montessori Australia was accepted as an Affiliate Membership Organisation by MACTE in the Australasian region. All Montessori training programs that would like their Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) accredited to global MACTE standards and to have their future graduates receive a MACTE credentialed Diploma, recognised in many countries, can now apply through affiliation with Montessori Australia.

### **Which training is right for you?**

Here are some features to consider in balancing the quality of teacher preparation with cost and convenience:

- **Is there oversight?** The cheapest and easiest Montessori training options are the online self-study programs. Assessment is often limited to short answer open-book written assignments with no practical opportunities for a trainer to give direct feedback on a student's use of the materials. Self-study programs work best for activities that are easy to self-correct, or where there are clear right or wrong answers. However, self-study programs are limited in their capacity to

adequately prepare a teacher well for the complexities of a classroom environment or to prepare the new teacher for their role in guiding the child's development. Opportunities for extensive feedback from instructors and other students (including in the areas of emotional and spiritual development) allow the teacher to grow through self-reflection and mentoring. On-line study programs do not often have the ability to offer this type of feedback and so it is recommended that student teachers in these programs seek opportunities from their peers to gain a deeper layer of understanding.

- **How much experience have the trainers had in the classroom?** Trainers who have had significant experience in the classroom working directly with children prior to undertaking teacher training are able to give more useful insights and feedback to new teachers. Be sure to read the bio notes carefully for each of the trainers in the programs you are researching.
- **Are there hands-on components?** When giving presentations to children there are so many variables and unknowns that it is impossible to adequately prepare a teacher for giving lessons without lots of opportunities to use the materials under guided supervision. Internships or "Practicums" (significant periods of practice teaching under an experienced teacher) offer the new teacher an opportunity to try out their new skills with "training wheels" on. Training programs without internships may be fine for those who want to explore Montessori and are not ready to commit to further training, however most teachers consider their internship phase with an experienced mentor to be a highly productive time that validates the theory they have learned.
- **Is there a community of peers?** Adults, like children, learn best from direct experience and also from each other. Programs that provide you with albums that describe how to give lessons but don't provide opportunities to learn in collaboration with others can feel lonely and isolating. They also don't give the new teacher a sense of how children learn collaboratively in Montessori classrooms. Quality training programs will provide both an instructional guide and a field consultant who can provide both individualised feedback and advice.
- **Is the training program accredited?** Oversight by a larger accrediting organisation is a way of being assured that a training program meets certain quality standards. MACTE is the largest Montessori accreditation organisation for training programs worldwide.
- **Does the program have a reputation for training competent teachers?** Employers often know from experience which training programs have produced

their most competent teachers. Many schools develop a preference for teachers trained at these programs.

### **Many options to choose from**

Choosing the right Montessori training for you is an investment that will pay off many times over in helping you feel comfortable in managing all the moving parts of a Montessori classroom. There is so much more to becoming a Montessori teacher than knowing the theory or the mechanical steps in each lesson. Yet it can be challenging to commit to a high quality in-person training program while managing other life commitments.

Balancing quality, cost and convenience is an important decision that will be different for each new teacher's circumstances. We encourage you to carefully research the options before choosing the one that is right for you. If you are unsure whether Montessori education is right for you, or which age group you would like to teach, a short introduction Course in Montessori Education may be the best place to begin. [Montessori Training Australia](#) provides a selection of high quality online Foundation Courses which address the needs of interested parents, teaching assistants, school leaders and prospective educators.