

# Creativity in the Montessori Classroom

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One of the first responses I get when I tell people I am an artist or that I love art is, “Oh, I am not creative at all. I can’t even draw a stick figure!” Though humorous, their responses disappoint me every time because creativity is not confined to the art studio or canvas. Creativity is not for an elite club of dreamers whose special DNA is predisposed to color, line, shape, and texture. Creativity is an innate ability we possess from birth that plays a vital role in the construction of our perception of the world. From our very first breath we creatively begin to gather knowledge and organize it into some kind of understanding, even before we are aware such a process exists.

The Montessori classroom is a prepared environment. But what is it prepared for, exactly? The environment is prepared, at various developmentally appropriate levels, to engage the creative instinct of children. To, at first, pique their curiosity, and then, to satisfy it with knowledge grounded firmly in truth and reality that they can see, hear, feel, smell, and sometimes taste. Finally, that foundation becomes the platform on which the child climbs, stands, and confidently reaches forward toward new possibilities. All the while it is the teacher’s responsibility to preserve the child’s innate interest in creating, so that the development of the child’s own education may continue to flourish.

From the very beginning, Montessori children are learning the effect they have upon their environment, not the other way around. They are learning that they are the creators, the ones who, by taking deliberate action, bring into existence their own education. In the Toddler classroom, the child discovers patterns in jewelry she invented, in Primary, the pink tower does not build itself. Lower Elementary students transform checkerboards and beads into compound multiplication, and in Upper Elementary, our burning questions are ignited by the child’s own wonder.

To balance this power of creativity, the Montessori classroom is extended beyond the school building walls into nature. Unlike the prepared works that await a child’s interest inside the classroom, nature exhibits constant change that happens with or without the child. Through careful observance and interaction with nature, the child develops a sense of respect for his or her place within the natural world.

Montessori prides itself on educating the whole child. Therefore the Montessori philosophy places creativity alongside mathematics and language in the hierarchy of significance. It seems time is moving faster now than ever before. Technology, innovation, and invention are rapidly expanding and uniting the far corners of our world. It is imperative now, more than ever, that children be prepared to face and adapt to constant change and preserve the courage to ask questions and solve problems creatively.

The world has a wealth of problems to solve. The invitation to develop the natural creative sense in a Montessori environment goes beyond drawing stick figures, it’s an encouragement to sustain the kind of openness, determination, and stamina required to solve the problems that lie ahead.