

Is there a Lack of Socialization in Montessori?

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It is ironic that one of Montessori education's biggest strengths (socialization) is often misconstrued as a weakness. This misperception starts from another Montessori strength – individualization. The argument starts from a true premise (the individualization of education) and ends with a false conclusion that children don't get a chance to socialize.

There is some vague, hazy notion that children in a traditional classroom (who operate as a group) have greater opportunities for socialization. The reality is, "How much socialization do you get with the back of the head of the child in front of you?" (If a student does turn around to socialize he can count on the ever present, "Turn around in your seat.")

So how does Montessori's individualism intersect with its socialization? In traditional circles there seems to be a fear that if students work together, one of them will do the work and the other will coast. Reality, (especially in Montessori) holds that children will demand performance from their peers. The classroom is noted for its peer performance and peer regulation. Even in preschool children will tell their classmates, "We don't do that here." Montessori promotes individual accomplishment but also provides for collaborative activity. Life is built on both,

Effective socialization is built on a solid foundation of respect. The emphasis on grace and courtesy is a foundational principle of Montessori education. In Spanish the phrase for good manners is "bien educado" (well educated). Without grace and courtesy the effectiveness of a Montessori education (and socialization) is compromised. The social component is tremendously significant in the whole development of your child. Socialization (and grace and courtesy) are intertwined throughout the day – from circle time, to snacks, to playground or just working together in the classroom. Real socialization is about respecting others, treating others the way we want to be treated, learning to cooperate, learning to do our share, learning to contribute to our project.

Good manners is a concern for others and that is the basis for not only classroom socialization but effective lifetime success with people. Montessori children, even while achieving success independently, learn the lessons of sharing and helping others and contributing to the well being of their society. Could there be any more successful outcome of socialization?