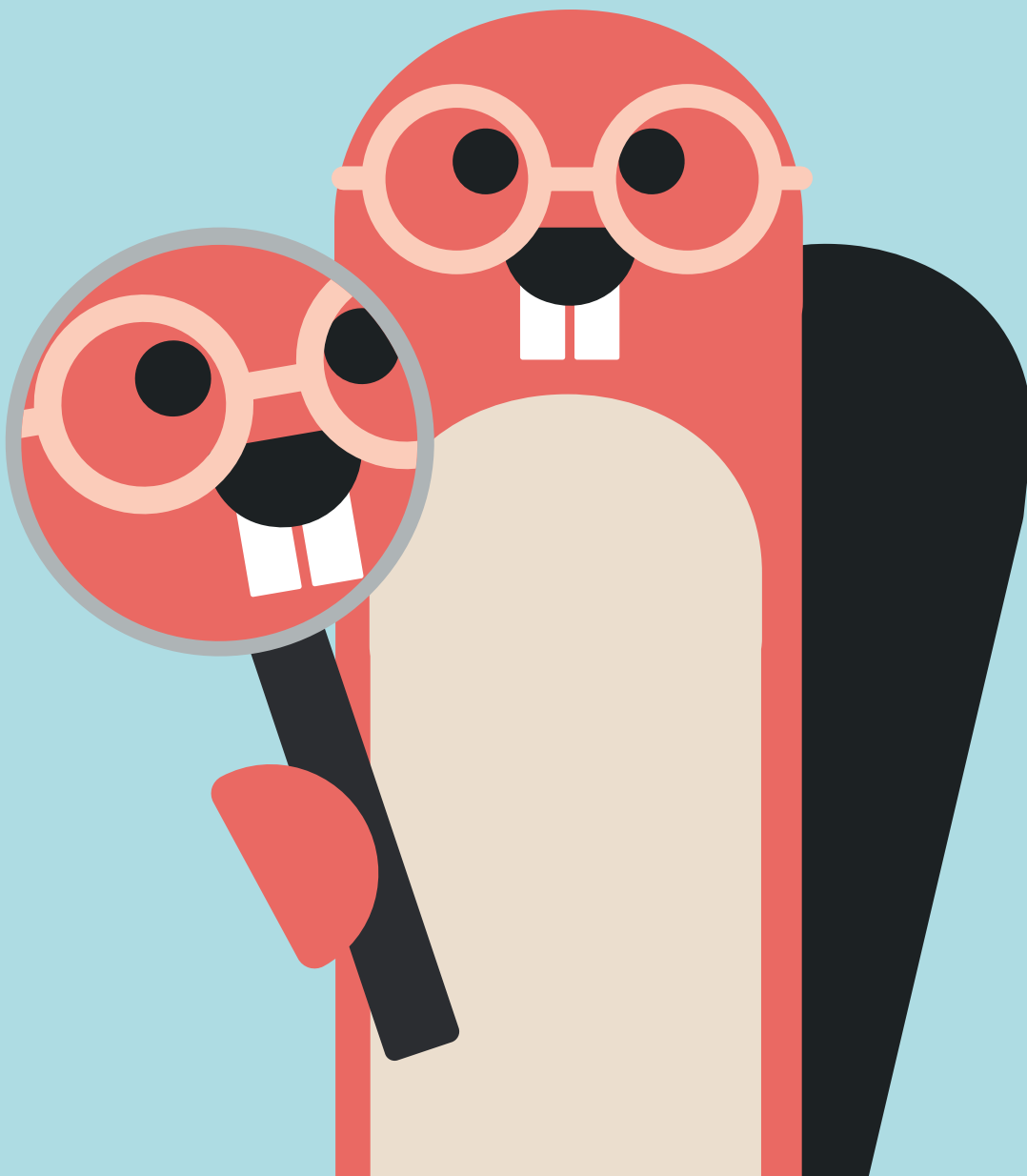




LEARNING ALONE OR LEARNING TOGETHER

Exploring the Differences between
Montessori & HEI Schools



One of the most common questions we get here at HEI Schools is “How are you different from Montessori?”

Montessori, a well-established early education model, was founded in the early 1900s and made its way around the world thanks to its child-centered approach to learning. HEI Schools is based on Finland’s renowned early education model. Its original concept, the HEI Schools Learning Center, has spread to many countries and enjoys success thanks to its adaptability to different cultures.



HEI Schools

The two models are actually similar in several ways. The Montessori philosophy is to “follow the child” and the HEI Schools approach asks educators to take the child’s perspective. As such, they are both **child-centered**, which means that children take the lead in their own learning. Both philosophies are grounded in the idea that childhood is an important time of life to explore and discover new things, so early education should be a joyful experience.

The Montessori and HEI Schools philosophies **also take children’s developmental phases into account**. In practice, this means that the models are based on the science of brain development and the fact that every child learns differently. The classroom environments welcome a variety of learning styles and children learn at their own pace.

Finally, they both take a **strength-based approach**. In other words, they focus on what children do well instead of what children cannot do quite yet. Teachers build upon children’s previous experiences in the learning process in order to boost their self-confidence. This way, children feel empowered and become lifelong learners thanks to the solid foundation that these approaches provide.



Similarities in a nutshell:

- **Child-centered**
- **Take developmental phases into account**
- **Focus on children’s strengths**

Differences shortly:

- **Learning environment and materials**
- **Daily life at school**
- **Standardization**
- **Development of the models**

Learning environment and materials

Where the children learn and the tools they learn with are quite different depending on whether it's a Montessori or a HEI Schools Learning Center.

Montessori

A prepared learning environment

The classrooms consist of child-sized chairs and tables, practical household items and different toys and tools on display. The learning materials are organized within the classroom by curriculum area, which are Practical Life, Sensorial, Mathematics, Language and Culture.

Sensory and real-life learning experiences

Montessori materials are intentionally sensory so children can engage all of their senses in the learning process. This supports their intellectual development. They also learn real-life skills, like how to cook, clean, sweep and button. Because many tools are delicate or fragile, children learn how to handle these objects with care and practice their fine motor skills.

Control of error

All Montessori tools have a control of error, which means that there is one right way of using them. If a child makes a mistake, it looks obvious so they can 'fix' the problem without an adult's help. While this fosters independence, it discourages creative thinking because these materials demonstrate that there is just one way of accomplishing a task.

HEI Pictograms

One special set of learning materials are HEI pictograms. These cards illustrate objects, activities, emotions, concepts, days of the week and more with graphic pictures and the English term.

- They are used for:
 - Making choices
 - Practicing English
 - Depicting the daily schedule
 - Labeling materials and rooms in the learning space

HEI Schools

Learning everywhere and all the time

HEI Schools Learning Centers do not have traditional classrooms. Instead, they have multifunctional spaces, like the HEI Base, HEI Downbeat and HEI Workshop. According to the HEI Way, learning happens everywhere and all the time so even places like the hallway, the restroom and the HEI Cafe are important learning areas. In these places, children learn how to, respectively, greet others in passing, take care of personal hygiene and exhibit appropriate table manners.

Limiting distractions

Unlike Montessori classrooms, HEI learning spaces do not have all the toys and learning materials on display. While some materials like books are visible, other toys are stored in easily accessible spaces to limit distractions. The HEI design also uses natural colors and materials to minimize visual and audio noise. According to research, this calming effect is beneficial for more active children.

Open-ended learning materials

While HEI Schools learning materials draw inspiration from Montessori, they offer many different tools that have no specific goal. For example, each HEI Schools Learning Center has climbing ladders, unusually shaped wooden blocks, adaptable train sets and more. Though children learn how to use certain tools, such as paintbrushes, they are free to creatively explore many learning materials.

The importance of nature

Finnish early education guidelines recommend at least two hours of outdoor time every day, regardless of the weather, and the HEI curriculum takes a similar approach. With HEI Outdoors as a learning space and HEI field trips recommendations, the model emphasizes nature and spending time outside.

- Benefits of spending time outside:
 - Less boundaries than indoors
 - Experiencing and building a relationship with nature
 - Establishing a sustainable way of living

Daily Life

One major difference between Montessori kindergartens and HEI Schools is the way in which the children play and learn.

Montessori

Work cycles

Maria Montessori, the founder of Montessori, believed that children struggle with transitions and needed uninterrupted periods of time to become focused on a task. Therefore, children have three-hour 'work cycles' to get absorbed in one activity for a long period of time.

Independent play

Children typically play alone because they learn independence. If a child wants to play with the same toy or work at the same station as another child, they must wait their turn. This helps them practice self-regulation, discipline and manners. Teachers also model these good behaviors for the children.

Working through problems alone

One reason why children work alone is because it teaches them autonomy. When a child faces a problem, the teacher typically lets the child work through it independently. While this can be great for a child with normal development, it can be difficult and even detrimental for a child who might need extra support in those moments.

HEI Schools

Collaboration

Children establish common rules for their group together and they participate in community decisions during children's meetings. This teaches them how to listen, compromise and work together in real-life situations. They also get to share their opinions, which boosts their self-esteem and confidence.

Group activities

The HEI Schools approach emphasizes group learning. Therefore, children learn together in activities like HEI Time, which happens at the beginning of the day. Children sit down together, create a schedule, discuss the weather, sing songs and more. This helps them build social relationships and communication skills.

Hands-on support from teachers

Teachers act as facilitators, so they let children lead the way in learning. However, when children with different learning abilities need extra support, teachers are trained to recognize this and give hands-on guidance. All HEI Schools Learning Centers also have small teacher-child ratios so that every child gets the help they need.



HEI Schools

Standardization

Ensuring that an approach is implemented in the same way around the world is an important aspect of establishing its reputation. HEI Schools emphasizes this, while Montessori does not.

Montessori

No patents or copyrights

Because there are no regulations, any school can use the name Montessori in its title, regardless of how well it follows the model.

Many Montessori organizations

There's a lot of variety in the Montessori approach. For example, two of the largest organizations are the Association Montessori Internationale and the American Montessori Society. The former focuses on the original principles, while the latter welcomes teachers to incorporate components like technology into the curriculum. But because every organization is different, the quality of education can vary significantly.

A variety of teacher training programs

There's no single governing body for teacher training, and just a quick Google search shows many different certification options. Because of this, teachers could learn different methods and approaches depending on the training they receive.

HEI Schools

Licensed model

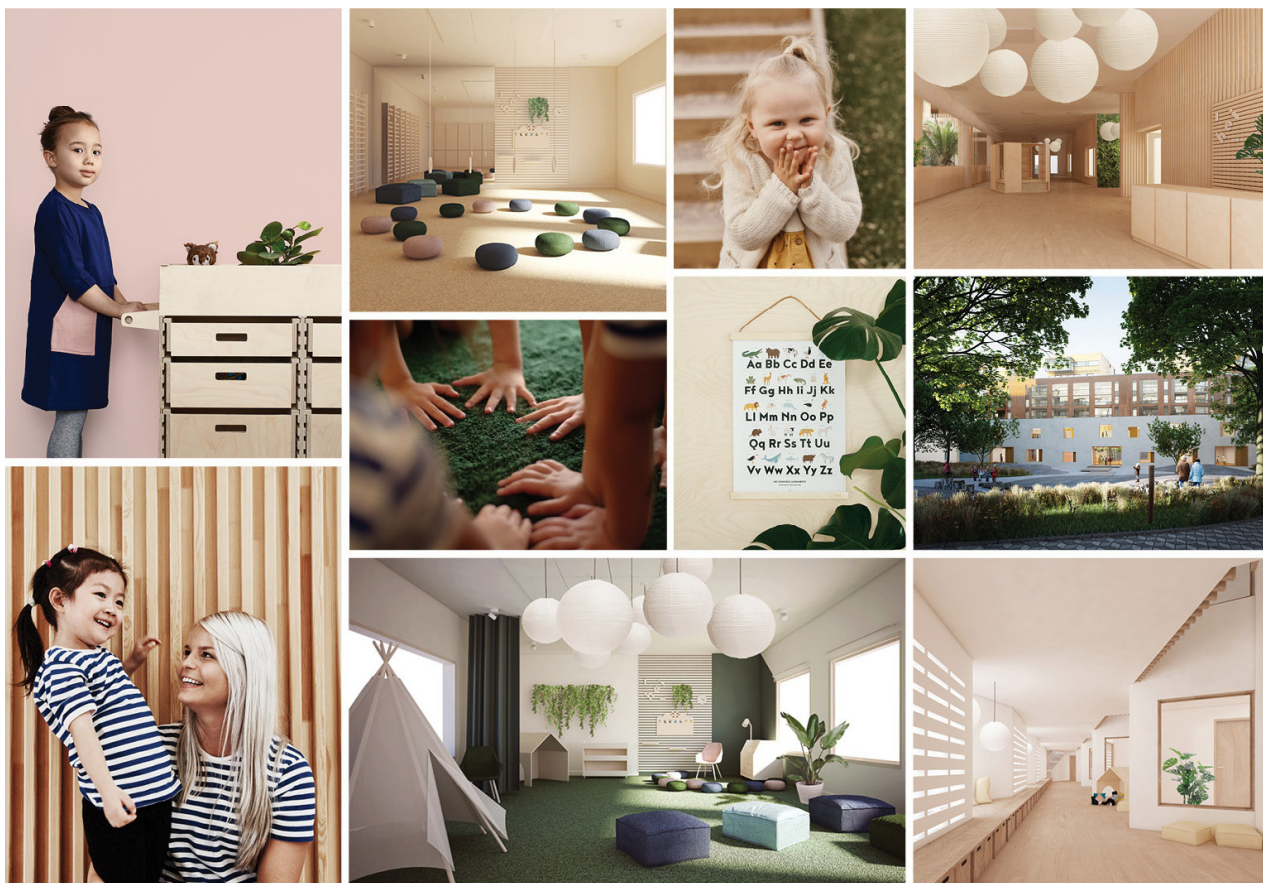
All HEI School partners receive comprehensive training and guidelines in all aspects of the Learning Center concept, from space design to brand and marketing.

Quality assurance assessment

Every Learning Center receives a yearly assessment from the HEI Schools pedagogical team in Helsinki and they also complete their own quality assessments twice a year based on self-assessment and families' feedback. If they identify issues, the teams create action plans to improve. This ensures a high quality education for every child.

One high-quality teacher training program

Local teachers undergo a rigorous program based on the University of Helsinki's ECE teacher training curriculum. They also receive mentoring from Finnish teachers and complete continuing professional development materials online.



Development

One final difference is in the development of the models. The founder of Montessori created a model that is enshrined in the Association Montessori Internationale and while other organizations encourage teachers to develop the model further, updates are not uniformly applied throughout all Montessori schools.

HEI Schools, on the other hand, was founded in partnership with University of Helsinki, one of the top universities in the world. As such, the curriculum is grounded in educational research. The HEI Schools pedagogical team also works closely with university professors to continuously update the approach based on the latest findings in educational research.



Conclusion

There are many reasons why Montessori or HEI Schools would be a good choice for your early learning center. Both are grounded in the idea that children are individuals who should be treated with the same level of respect as an adult. Children have the freedom to explore, make decisions and develop their independence in age-appropriate ways.

The HEI Schools model may be a better choice if you want the children at your learning center to regularly interact and actively learn with their peers. Though a Montessori school does teach children skills like self-regulation and courtesy, it does not foster active collaboration among children because they often learn alone. There are not as many opportunities for children to practice teamwork, empathy and listening skills, which are best developed with peers.

However, if you want to offer a program for children who thrive on order and total independence, the Montessori model would be a better fit. Montessori preschools are noted for their calm, quiet environments and children are certainly independent in most situations. At HEI Schools Learning Centers, which offer visually calm environments, children participate in group activities and regularly learn with others.

Standardization and development are not uniformly applied throughout all Montessori preschools, so it is important to keep these ideas in mind while researching options. HEI Schools carefully monitors the quality and implementation of its guidelines to deliver consistent results. Whatever you decide, it is important to consider how families in your region will perceive the educational option you provide and how you will implement it yourself.



Want to learn more about the HEI Schools approach?

Book a meeting with one of our partnership team members to hear about how HEI Schools can work in your region.