



The WMS Philosophy on AI and Education

The Montessori tradition begins with a simple yet radical idea: follow the child. Not the curriculum. Not the technology. Not the demands of the moment. The child.

We will not introduce AI tools because they are new. We will not avoid them because they are unfamiliar. We will introduce them when a child is ready, when a teacher judges the moment right, and when doing so opens up learning rather than shortcuts it.

What we believe

Artificial intelligence is a powerful technology. It can write, reason, generate, and assist in impressive ways, and that will only continue to grow. AI has the potential to greatly assist our world, but we are also keenly aware of what AI cannot do: it cannot feel, choose kindness because it understands cruelty, make art because it is moved by something, or form a relationship rooted in true presence and care.

We believe a WMS education must respond to this moment by deepening its commitment to what has always mattered most: learning to think, learning to relate, and learning to be a just, contributing member of society. The Montessori tradition has always held that children develop best when they first master themselves, their focus, their judgment, and their independence, before being handed any tool. That principle guides our approach to AI.

We also believe that the use of AI must be inseparable from our commitment to sustainability. We are aware that each AI query carries an environmental cost that most of us never see. Using AI is a choice with consequences, and we believe children should understand that. Just as we ask students to think carefully about what they consume and what they waste, we ask them to think carefully about what they ask of the technologies they use. Choosing when to use AI and when not to must take into account our belief in creating a sustainable future.

How we introduce AI tools and why

The Montessori pedagogy has always emphasized the deliberate use of tools/materials. In our youngest classrooms, materials are introduced only when a child has developed the readiness to use them purposefully and because they serve the child's development at that moment. AI use by asking three questions before introducing any AI tool to students:

- ***Does it serve the whole child?*** We consider not just whether an AI tool supports academic skills, but whether it supports the development of curiosity, independence, responsibility, and ethical reasoning — the qualities at the heart of a Montessori education.
- ***Does AI deepen learning, or replace it?*** A tool earns its place in our classrooms when it opens new possibilities for thinking, not when it allows a child to circumvent the challenges that so often produce genuine understanding.
- ***Is the child ready to use AI critically?*** Before a student uses an AI tool, they need the foundational skills to recognize what it gets wrong, what it leaves out, and where their own judgment must lead. AI tools are not introduced before those skills are established.

This means that AI tools are introduced gradually, with heavy teacher guidance, and in the context of developing understanding rather than producing outcomes.

In our YCC, Lower School, and Lower Elementary programs, our focus is on building the human capacities that make critical use of any tool possible: strong reading, independent thinking, careful observation, and a willingness to be wrong. AI tools are not part of schoolwork at these stages.

In our Upper Elementary and Middle School programs, where students are guided to develop metacognition and ethical reasoning skills, we begin to introduce AI as an object of study — something to be questioned, tested, and understood — before it is ever used as a working tool.

How this shows up in our classrooms

Montessori is designed around the learning process, not the product. We ask children to sit with challenging problems. We ask them to be wrong and to learn from it. We ask them to work alongside others, to negotiate, to help, and to disagree respectfully.

When AI appears at WMS, it is introduced as a subject that children learn to think about, question, and understand. We want students to be able to ask: *Where did this come from? What might it be missing? What does my own thinking say based on what I already know?* While we address some of these questions directly in our 4th-, 5th-, and 6th-grade technology

classes, critical literacy is not a stand-alone unit; it is woven into how we teach children to approach any source of information or influence.

We remain committed to the experiences that no technology can replace: making eye contact, building trust over time, loving a book, being moved by a piece of art, and learning what it feels like to contribute to a community.

How this shows up in our school culture

In a world that prizes speed and polished outcomes, WMS deliberately asks our community to respect the process, even when it is slow; to value the struggle as well as the solution, and to see character formation as integral to academic growth. A product that reflects deep understanding is the natural endpoint of learning.

This means that the WMS culture is one where children practice saying good morning to other community members, asking for help when they need it, and taking responsibility for what they put out into the world. It means that our teachers model inquiry and humility and do not just deliver content or impart knowledge. It means we hold the long view, preparing children not for the jobs of today, but for a life in which they can think clearly, act with integrity, and adapt with confidence so that they can meaningfully engage with and contribute to the successes of the communities of which they will be part.

We don't know exactly what the world our students will inherit will look like. But, we are certain that it will need genuinely and deeply human critical thinkers who can thrive in novel situations. That is what WMS cultivates.

This statement reflects our evolving understanding of AI and our enduring commitment to Montessori values. We will revisit it as the landscape changes.

S, Anna. (2026, February 23). Montessori in the Age of AI. Washington Montessori School.
<https://washingtonmontessori.org/stories/montessori-in-the-age-of-ai/>