

Magnolia Academy: the new, old way to learn

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[Tamara Thornton](#)

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Magnolia Academy - Inside Space

Magnolia Academy opened its doors for the first time this September. It's branded as an alternative kindergarten, with much of the focus on:

- being outside in nature
- no electronics
- organic, open-ended toys
- building social skills
- small class sizes with one-on-one learning
- individualized lessons

Devin Walsh worked in London's public and private school systems for years, before deciding to open Magnolia Academy. Large class sizes are a large part of why she decided to break out on her own.

"There was lots of children falling through the cracks and their needs weren't being met. So, that's what really made me have the idea to do something about it."

The school currently has 5 students, who are between the ages of 3-6, and as the only teacher she says that she wouldn't take on many more.

"[I think] Having a small class size gives children the ability to be themselves and be able to be heard and seen... If I had a larger space I would have more children, probably up to 10. I wouldn't go any larger than 10 children... When you have more than 10 the teacher starts to lose the vision of each of the children."



Magnolia Academy founder Devin Walsh



One of the most popular items at school

Walsh drew inspiration from the London Waldorf School and from kindergartens overseas, where children spend much of their time outdoors learning from, in, and about nature. They play with sand, sticks, pine cones, and things that spark imagination and creativity.

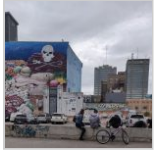
She says it's amazing when a small block of wood can become 20 things over the course of the day. It can be anything from a car to a cell phone.

With all the stimulation, it's important that there's a mandatory time for the kids to be on their own. A rest period that Walsh says allows the children to slow down and reflect, something they're not able to do in a jam packed class room.

She also says Brutus, the 13 year-old school support dog is a confidant and a non-judgemental friend that soothes the students and teaches them kindness.

With the lack of screens and electronics this new, alternative kindergarten feels much like classrooms of the past, where the only thing that could limit you was your own imagination.

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