Is Montessori unstructured?

Montessori classrooms have an invisible structure that are carefully prepared and designed to promote order, routine and choice. Every item in the Montessori classroom has been selected to help the child to grow and develop according to his or her developmental needs with attention to detail and systematic learning. The teacher is the dynamic link between the child and the materials, helping the child to connect purposefully and with meaning. Independence, concentration and autonomy are encouraged with clear and consistent ground rules and expectations for work. Many Montessori materials are “self-correcting,” and provide the child with the opportunity to problem solve and make their own discoveries, as well as to be guided to deeper understanding with extensions and more advanced presentations of materials.

Because there can be 16 children in a classroom doing 16 different things, some observers may not see the structure (thus, “invisible”) but without it, the calm, purposeful work one sees would not be possible. When children are engaged in activities that satisfy their inner need for growth, they display a demeanor of self-assurance, satisfaction and calm enjoyment. Children learn to take responsibility for themselves and their environment when they are shown how to use materials with care, make them ready for a friend when they are done, and return the work to the shelf.

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” ~ Chinese proverb