

WHAT IS MONTESSORI?

The Montessori Method was developed by Maria Montessori (1870-1952), the first female Doctor of Medicine in Italy. She believed that no one can be educated by another person. She must do it herself or it will never be done. A truly educated individual continues learning long after the hours and years she spends in the classroom because she is motivated from within by a natural curiosity and love for knowledge. Dr. Montessori felt, therefore, that the goal of education should not be to fill the child with facts from a pre-selected course of studies but rather to cultivate her own natural desire to learn. Dr. Montessori's system of education is both a philosophy of child development and a rationale for guiding such growth. It is based on the child's developmental needs for freedom within limits, and a carefully prepared environment that guarantees exposure to materials and experiences. Through this, children develop intelligence as well as physical and psychological abilities. It is designed to take full advantage of children's desire to learn and their unique ability to develop their own capabilities. Children still need adults to expose them to the possibilities of their lives, but children determine their responses to these possibilities.

The main premises of Montessori education are:

- Children are to be respected as different from adults and as individuals who differ from each other.
- The child possesses an unusual sensitivity and intellectual ability to absorb and learn from his environment that are unlike those of the adult both in quality and capacity.
- The most important years of a child's growth are the first six years of life when unconscious learning is gradually brought to the conscious level.
- The child has a deep love and need for purposeful work. He works, however, not as an adult for completion of a job, but the sake of an activity itself. It is this activity that enables him to accomplish his most important goal: the development of himself - his mental, physical, and psychological powers.

WHAT MAKES MONTESSORI EDUCATION UNIQUE?

The Whole Child Approach

The primary goal of a Montessori program is to help each child reach her full potential in all areas of life. Activities promote the development of social skills, emotional growth, and physical coordination as well as cognitive preparation for future intellectual academic endeavors. The holistic curriculum, under the direction of a specifically prepared teacher, allows the child to experience the joy of learning, the time to enjoy the process, and ensures the development of self-esteem. It provides the experiences from which children create their knowledge.

The Prepared Environment

In order for self-directed learning to take place, the whole learning environment - classroom, materials, and social setting - must be supportive of the child. The teacher provides the necessary resources, including opportunities for children to function in a safe and positive environment. Together, the teacher and child form a relationship based on trust and respect that fosters self-confidence and a willingness to try new things.

The Montessori Materials

Dr. Montessori's observations of the kinds of things which children enjoy, and go back to repeatedly, led her to design a number of multi-sensory, sequential, and self correcting materials to facilitate learning.

The Teacher

Originally called a "directress," the Montessori teacher functions as a designer of the environment, resource person, role model, demonstrator, record-keeper and meticulous observer of each child's behavior and growth. The teacher facilitates learning. Extensive training is required for a full Montessori credential.

GOALS OF A MONTESSORI SCHOOL

The main purpose of a Montessori school is to provide a carefully planned, stimulating environment that will help the child develop an excellent foundation for creative learning.

The specific goals for the children who attend a Montessori school are:

Developing a Positive Attitude Towards School

Most of the learning activities are individualized: i.e., each child engages in a learning task that particularly appeals to him...because he finds the activities geared to his needs and level of readiness. Consequently, he works at his own rate, repeating the task as often as he likes, thus experiencing a series of successful achievements. In this manner, he builds a positive attitude toward learning itself.

Helping Each Child Develop Self Confidence

In the Montessori school, tasks are designed so that each new step is built upon what the child has already mastered, thus removing the negative experience of frequent failure. A carefully planned series of successes build upon inner confidence in the child assuring him that he can learn by himself. These confidence-building activities likewise contribute to the child's healthy emotional development.

Assisting Each Child in Building a Habit of Concentration

Effective learning presupposes the ability to listen carefully and to attend to what is said or demonstrated. Through a series of absorbing experiences, the child forms habits of extended attention, thus increasing his ability to concentrate.

Fostering an Abiding Curiosity

In a rapidly changing society, we will all be students at some time in our lives. A deep, persistent and abiding curiosity is a prerequisite for creative learning. By providing the child with opportunities to discover qualities, dimensions, and relationships amidst a rich variety of stimulating learning situations, curiosity is developed and an essential element in creative learning has been established.

Developing Habits of Initiative and Persistence

By surrounding the child with appealing materials and learning activities geared to his inner needs, he becomes accustomed to engaging in activities on his own. Gradually, this results in a habit of initiative - an essential quality in leadership. "Ground rules" call for completing a task once begun and for replacing materials after the task is accomplished. This "completion expectation" gradually results in a habit of persistence and perseverance.

Fostering Inner Security and Sense of Order in the Child

Through a well-ordered, enriched-but-simplified environment, the child's need for order and security is intensely satisfied. This is noticed in the calming effect the environment has on the child. Since every item in the Montessori classroom has a place and the ground rules call for everything in its place, the child's inner need for order is directly satisfied.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER MONTESSORI?

Montessori children are unusually adaptable. They have learned to work independently and in groups. Since they've been encouraged to make decisions at an early age, these children are problem solvers who make choices and manage their time well. They have also been encouraged to exchange ideas and to discuss their work freely with others and good communication skills ease the way in new settings. The habits and skills developed in a Montessori classroom are good for a lifetime. They will help children to work more efficiently, to observe more carefully and to concentrate more effectively, no matter where they go. If children are in a stimulating environment, whether at home or at school, their self-education - which is the only real education - will continue. Research has shown that the best predictor of future success is a sense of self-esteem. Montessori programs, based on self-directed, non-competitive activities, help children develop good self-images and the confidences to face challenges and change with optimism.