

Why Montessori?

The Importance of the Early Years

Dr. Montessori, one of the most important educators of our time, emphasized the need for early education. She wrote,

“The most important period of life **is not** the age of university studies, but the first one, the period from birth to age six. For that is the time when man’s intelligence itself, his greatest implement, is being formed. But not only his intelligence; the full totality of his psychic powers...at no other age has the child greater need of an intelligent help, and any obstacle that impedes his creative work will lessen the chance he has of achieving perfection”.

The Real Needs of the Child

Montessori attitudes and philosophy are most consistent with the needs of a child in the process of developing and learning. Montessori’s educational theories are based on the way a child develops naturally and are then correlated for use as an educational system consistent with these laws.

Child Centered

Dr. Montessori believed that no human being is educated by another person. People teach themselves. A truly educated individual continues learning long after the hours and years spent in a classroom because he or she is motivated from within by a natural curiosity and love for knowledge. She felt therefore, that the goal of early education should not be to fill children with facts from a pre-selected course of studies, but rather to cultivate their own natural desire to learn. Her experiments made the child the center of education; her program is adapted to the interests and needs of children. As a result, children concentrate with enthusiasm and achieve a real and profound understanding of their work. This intellectual progress is accompanied by emotional growth. The children become harmonious in movement, independent in work, and honest and helpful with one another.

Phases of Growth

Dr. Montessori discovered, and recent educational research has verified successive phases of growth in children each with characteristic sensitivities which guide physical and mental development. These phases of growth, she called “sensitive periods”. They are outwardly recognizable by an intense interest which the child shows for certain sensorial and abstract experiences. Dr. Montessori discovered that the guiding sensitivities constitute needs in the child which demand fulfillment and are universal to all children. Thus, the validity of Dr. Montessori’s observations have remained constant since she began her task of the discovery of the child.

The Role of the Teacher

The function of the teacher in a Montessori classroom differs considerably from that of the traditional teacher; hence, Dr. Montessori used the term “**Directress**”. The directress brings children into contact

with the world in which they live and the tools by which they learn to cope with the world. She is, first of all, a very keen observer of the individual interests and needs of each child; her daily plan proceeds from her observations rather than from a prepared curriculum. She demonstrates the correct use of materials as they are individually chosen by the children, carefully watches the progress and keeps a record of their work. Individual children's total development as well as their progress toward self-discipline is carefully guided by the directress, who prepares the environment, directs the activities, and offers each child enticement and stimulation. The mutual respect of the student and the teacher-guide is the most important factor in this process.

The Ungraded Classroom

The greatest possibility for flexibility in permitting individual lessons and progress, while still retaining group sessions at no-expense to the individual child exists in the Montessori environment. The use of individual materials permits a varied pace that accommodates many levels of ability in the classroom. If the classroom equipment is to be challenging enough to provoke a learning response, it must be properly matched to the sensitivities of each child. The most satisfying choice can usually be made only by the children themselves. The Montessori classroom offers children the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of graded materials. The child can grow as their interests lead them from one level of complexity to another. They work in a group composed of individuals of various ages, abilities, cultures and interests and are not required to follow anyone else's program...it permits the younger children a graded series of models for imitations, and the older ones an opportunity to reinforce their own knowledge by helping the younger ones, hence, they add to the group as they receive from it what they need.

Montessori at a Glance

Montessori education has achieved world-wide recognition and success. This condensed explanation will acquaint you with the many advantages that Montessori offers your child.

- The Montessori Method has been time-tested for 75 years and has achieved success throughout the world with children.
- Montessori is a totally positive environment for children.
- In the scientifically prepared environment of the true Montessori school, the child develops the prime elements of character: freedom, concentration, independence, self-discipline, industry, sense of reality...in an atmosphere of co-operation.
- Each child is taught individually.
- The child's natural development of language is utilized in the process of learning to read.
- Children work at their own pace and at their own level.
- Children have the unique opportunity to fulfill their potential.

- Habits and skills developed in a Montessori classroom remain for a lifetime.
- The Montessori classroom is a land of opportunity for the child as well as a truly joyful place to be.
- Though much has been said about the academic achievements of Montessori children, the true value lies in the self-discipline, self-mastery and love of learning that children achieve.

What is the Montessori Method?

Montessori is a philosophy and method of education which emphasizes the potential of the young child and which develops this potential by utilizing specially trained teachers and special teaching materials.

Montessori recognizes in children a natural curiosity and desire to learn; the Montessori Materials awaken this desire and channel that curiosity into a learning experience which children enjoy. Montessori Materials help children to understand what they learn by associating an abstract concept with a concrete sensorial experience; in this manner, the Montessori child is actually learning and not just memorizing. The Montessori Method stresses that children learn and progress at their own pace so that fast learners are not held back, and slow learners are not frustrated by their inability to keep up.

What is Montessori Apparatus?

The Montessori classroom offers 500 unique educational didactic (self-teaching) materials which are manipulated by the children in the classroom. They accommodate many levels of ability. They are not “teaching aids” in the traditional sense, because their goal is not the external one of teaching children skills or imparting knowledge through “correct usage”. Rather, the goal is an internal one of aiding the child’s mental development and self-construction. They aid this growth by providing stimuli that captures the child’s attention and initiates a process of concentration. Children then use the apparatus to develop co-ordination, attention to details, and good work habits. When the environment offers materials that polarize children...the teacher is then able to give the freedom needed for healthy development.

Why Should You Send Your Child to a Montessori School?

Montessori is education...not a nursery school. The best time to start your child’s education is during the early years...2 ½ to 3 years when most of a child’s intelligence and social characteristics are formed. 50% of the child’s mental development occurs before 4 years of age. In a Montessori School, your child will learn to think in logical patterns and to deal with reality. Children with a Montessori background become better prepared to cope with the complex challenges of tomorrow’s world.

What Does Montessori Offer My Child?

Montessori allows children to experience the excitement of learning by their own choice. Dr. Montessori observed that it was easier for a child to learn a particular skill during the corresponding “sensitive period” than at any other time in life. These are periods of intense fascination for learning a particular skill. Montessori allows children the freedom to select individual activities which correspond to their

own periods of interest and readiness and to progress at their own pace. A child who acquires the basic skills of reading and arithmetic in this natural way has the advantage of beginning education without drudgery, boredom, or discouragement.

Will this Approach Help a Child with Difficulties in Reading, Spelling and Math?

A multi-faceted approach to reading and spelling, which includes phonetic and sight word approach plus color-coding of materials, enables children to move at their own pace. Command boxes and movable grammar materials excite the children's interest and help them to accomplish more difficult tasks.

Montessori's concrete approach to mathematics allows a clear and simplified understanding of our number system. The materials isolate the difficulty and a control of error exists within the apparatus. Thus, the child is able to perform the work with minimum interference from the adult and therefore receives the ultimate satisfaction of self-accomplishment.

“The child has one intuitive aim: self development. He desperately wants to develop his resources, his ability to cope with a strange, complex world. He wants to do and see and learn from himself, through his senses and not through the eyes of an adult. The child who accomplishes this moves into harmony with his world he becomes a full person. He is educated.”
(Maria Montessori)

Does the Montessori Environment Foster Creativity?

Experience tells us that “creating” cannot be taught and that the child's environment tends to either foster or restrict creative potential. To foster creativity, Montessori realized that the environment must itself be beautiful, harmonious, and based on reality in order for children to organize their perceptions of it. Then they are capable of selecting and emphasizing those processes necessary for creative endeavours. Children, therefore, need freedom to develop creativity – freedom to select what attracts them in their environment, to relate to it without interruption and for as long as they like, to discover solutions and ideas and select answers on their own, and to communicate and share their discoveries with others at will. Creativity is involved with the intellectual as well as the aesthetic processes of the mind. Children in the Montessori classroom are free from judgment by and outside authority that so inhibits the creative impulse.

Why are Montessori Children Generally Self-confident, Out-going, and Self-reliant?

Montessori is based on a profound respect for each child's personality. Children work from their own free choice and are allowed a large measure of independence which forms the basis of self-discipline.

As children progress at their own pace and successfully complete the self-correcting exercises, they develop confidence in their ability to understand their achievement.

Montessori presents endless opportunities among the children for mutual help which is joyfully given and received. Co-operative social interaction among children of different ages engenders feelings of friendship, respect for the rights of others, and self-confidence.

These aspects of the Montessori program help eliminate the necessity for coercion which often causes feelings of inferiority and stress.

What is the Montessori Concept of Freedom in the Classroom?

The Montessori environment includes a fine balance between structure and freedom. The concept of freedom carrying responsibility is gradually introduced from the time a child enters school. The Montessori children have a wide variety of constructive paths to choose. They gain the skills and tools to accomplish their choices and they are taught the social values that enable them to make enlightened choices. Undisciplined and unskilled children are not free, but rather are slaves to their immediate desires. Allowing this behavior to proliferate merely forms a habit that is hard to change. Children do not benefit from destructive behavior and they become unhappy. Freedom does not involve being able to do what you want to do. It does involve being able to distinguish what is constructive and beneficial and being able to carry that out.

Can a Child Without a Pre-School Background in Montessori Benefit from the Elementary Program?

Since the children are treated individually, not collectively, in an ungraded approach, stimulation and interest are sought out at their own individual levels and not in accordance with the group.

Dr. Montessori maintained that

“education is an aid to life”.

Hence, there is no period in the child’s life that cannot benefit from the Montessori approach to education.

What Happens When a Montessori Child Enters the Public School System?

The habits and skills which a child develops in a Montessori class last a lifetime. Since Montessori education is successful in developing concentration, self-discipline, a love of learning and social skills...the child is better equipped to enter new situations and to easily adjust to the traditional school environment. Good habits, that are acquired early in a child’s life, result in a lifelong pursuit of knowledge.

Knock on the Door to Return Home

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