

The Montessori Message

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) brought a message and a method that transformed early childhood education the world over. Because the message is based in principles, not theories, it continues to be right for the children of today and of tomorrow. Italy's first woman physician, holder of doctorate degrees in psychology and philosophy and professor of anthropology, Dr. Maria Montessori keenly observed little children, sensed their needs, and tried to fulfill them through a carefully prepared environment. She called her method simply, help to life.

The Principles

The Absorbent Mind

One of the principles discovered by Montessori reveals the mind of the child up to the age of seven to be absorbent in nature. Everything in the child's environment and experience is assimilated into the personality and character of the child. Because of this principle, our staff is diligent in providing a carefully prepared environment that is filled with interesting and inviting lessons that are also beautiful and pleasing to the young child. Everything is scaled to their size and is designed to be appealing to them while providing ample opportunity for movement. The children are the caretakers of their environment and are comforted by its order and beauty.

Sensitive Periods

Between the ages of three and six, children are in the developmental sensitive period for language (vocabulary, writing, and reading), good manners, order, and sensorial refinement. At this time, the child learns effortlessly. After age six, the absorbent mind begins to diminish as rational and abstract thinking emerge. Understanding its importance and significance of these sensitive periods, Montessori teachers endeavor to provide each individual child what is needed and when it is needed.

Freedom in Education

Freedom in the Montessori classroom means freedom to do what is right. During the course of the school year, the children and teacher work together to build a miniature, but very real community. The children learn to honor a few carefully chosen, well-understood, and strictly enforced ground rules. Beyond that, they are free to find work to do among many interesting choices. The fruits of this freedom are individuality, self-discipline, concentration, obedience, and positive social interactions.

The Curriculum

Motor Education in the Montessori environment helps the child develop good muscular coordination, concentration, and physical independence. Practical life exercises provide inviting opportunities for movement that assist in the control and refinement of both gross and fine motor skills, teach sequencing and logic, teach a practical skill, and build character.

Sensorial Development is one of Maria Montessori's greatest gifts to early education. Her scientifically designed materials help the child to form clear concepts and thereby help build the foundation for intellectual development. Sensorial refinement developed during these early years is permanent.

The Development of Language begins with the presentation and classification of the vocabulary of the child's own surroundings. Phonics is used to teach the basic language skills. Most Montessori graduates are able to read and write with confidence before entering the elementary school.

Early Preparation of the Mathematical Mind is achieved through use of manipulative materials which present abstract concepts in concrete form. While gaining mastery of math operations, they are laying a

foundation for higher math in later years. Children learn at different rates and need a varying amount of practice with concrete enthusiastically chosen by the children.

Music Education is a daily activity enjoyed by the children. They start by listening to the pure tones of the famous Montessori bells. Later they learn to match tones and play simple melodies. The children enjoy singing daily and have the opportunity to play rhythm instruments regularly. Day by day, they build a strong foundation for further music education and enjoyment.

Cultural Subjects such as science, geography, history, art and foreign languages are also a regular part of the curriculum—both as individual activities and as group lessons.

Spirituality is a natural part of the Montessori environment. This includes nurturing sensitivity for living things—plants, animals, and for each other. Even in non-sectarian Montessori schools, there is generally a reverence for God and religious expressions in art and music. The standard is the Golden Rule.

The Montessori Three Year Program

Each year of the three-year program prepares the child for the wonderful world of education that will follow and more importantly gives them experience in building their own community, where there is kindness and caring of each individual. Although there are marked individual differences, the following is a brief picture of Montessori, year by year:

First Year: Three-year-olds have exhausted the resources of the home and come to school ready for more. They come into an established community where they are the youngest members who need a little “domesticating.” They learn that there are ground rules that never change. They learn that they are free—to do what is right. In general, their greatest needs/interests at this time are : 1. coordination and refined control of movement—given mainly through the Practical Life exercises, 2. increasing their working vocabulary—we pronounce clearly and slowly the words they are learning and we engage them in conversations and give them an opportunity to speak in groups, 3. sorting out impressions that have accumulated since birth and before, through the use of the materials for Sensorial Development, which is the foundation for intellectual development.

Second Year: They come back to school to discover that they are no longer the youngest. In fact, they turn into the lawgivers. They know all the rules and routines and are very helpful in trying to keep the new little ones on track. At the same time they are now more aware of the activities and projects of the older children and through this, prepare for what is coming. They are now capable of handling more complex practical life lessons. They begin writing and blending sounds and the sensorial refinement exercises continue as well as formal lessons in math, music, and science.

Third Year: This is where it comes all together. The blending of sounds becomes the joy of reading and writing. The counting from the previous year set the foundation for wonderfully interesting lessons involving the four operations (addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division) with manipulative materials. Mathematical concepts are clearly presented, freely practiced, and permanently internalized. Puzzle maps used at age four are brought out again so the children can make their own maps and learn names of specific countries within the continents as well as the United States. They are exposed to grammar and written composition, botany, geography, geometry, zoology, art, and music theory. They have a watchful eye on the younger children and are lovingly ready to help whenever needed, even by giving introductory lessons. At six, they are ready to move on to a bigger and more complex environment., taking with them capabilities and understanding that is the basis of real self-esteem, confidence, and eagerness to discover a bigger world.

The job of the Montessori teacher is to support, assist, encourage, and love them enough to allow the natural development of every little child manifest. In this, the teacher must answer the child’s call: **“Help me to do it all by myself!”**