

The Montessori Philosophy

Dr. Maria Montessori, who died in May of 1952, was the first woman to receive a medical degree in Italy when graduating from the University of Rome with a double honors degree. In the years to follow her graduation, she was an assistant at the Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Rome, Director of the Orthophrenic School, holder of the Magistero Femminile at the Feminine University of Rome, and Professor of Anthropology at the University of Rome. After spending much time in the study of Mentally Disabled, disturbed, and disadvantaged children, she renounced all her positions to devote her life to the study of the child.

To label the contributions which she made as the Montessori “method” of education can be misleading as it sets a limit on the concept which she sought to create. Dr. Montessori preferred to speak of her contribution to humanity as being an “aid to life.” This is a more precise description of the principles which she offered which are as dynamic and creative as life itself and yet at the same time are built upon a structure which came from the observance of the natural order of human phenomena.

The educational process which develops from this does not suggest yet another learning program in which adults have arbitrarily selected what attitudes, values, and facts they wish to impose on children. Instead, the adult forms a model for the child by striving for his own self-perfection and serves with humility the creation that is being formed by the child. This implies a mutual respect between the child and adult and an establishment of a balance of freedom and discipline, which leads the child to be free in his own self-discipline.

The human person, of all things, evidence basic tendencies of love, exploration, order, and reputation. Manifestation of these depended upon the psychological characteristics of the individual’s plane of development and their specific culture. Dr. Montessori observed the four phases of development to be between the years zero to six, six to 12, 12 to 18, and 18 to 24 (maturity).

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The child on the first plane of development (zero to six) gains his security and love first from mother, then father, then the rest of the family. By the age of six the circle includes those outside the family. This young child explores the world in a factual way because of the characteristic absorbent mind that uncritically takes in all about it i.e., language, lifestyle, customs, prejudices, etc. The child employs the acutely developing faculties of senses. The Montessori center adds specific scientifically established activities and materials to give the child opportunities to feed this inexhaustible absorption of the world. These materials and activities are so designed to be consistent with the human tendencies toward order and repetition.

The child from six to 12 years expands his capacity to love to include many more friends and people who are not immediately before him. This fascination with society includes the formation of his own groups and the exploration of societies of the past. The child no longer primarily explores in a sensorial or muscular manner, but now is aided by the emergence of imaginative faculties and a greater capacity for work. This characteristic of the reasoning imagination allows him to explore all that is not concretely available, i.e., areas of culture we call history, geography, language, arts, religion, mathematics, etc.

The role of the family is to recognize this desire to discover intellectually and to help the child to care for what he knows. With such help what is learned is transformed into love and ultimately self-happiness. The Montessori center assists the imaginative exploration using thoroughly tried materials and research activities, according to the child's level within this board plane of development.

Thus, this "aid to life" which we are seeking to maintain is by necessity to cooperative effort of the home, community, and school. The full implementation of the Montessori program requires much of the parents of the child enrolled in the school. Staff and parents are in constant communication concerning the growth of each child. The home and school are working together constantly to complement and supplement one another. Together we seek to aid the natural development of life towards happiness, independence, responsibility, and love.