

A Letter to Montessori Teachers

By Nicholas Warren Pontrelli

My time as a college student is rapidly approaching its conclusion, and it is during this time that I optimistically look toward my future of higher education, pursuing an MA and then a PhD in Psychology in order to fulfill my dream of helping others. However, as many of us have been told throughout our lives, *you can't know where you are going unless you know where you came from*. So while my future is right in front of me, my recollections of being a Montessori student are never far behind. Maria Montessori once said, "It is the child who makes the man, and no man exists who was not made by the child he once was" (Montessori, 1995, p. 15). I believe these words are even more powerful when we assert that the early education of a child is a catalyst for the potential to have a complete and healthy life. My own foundation is deeply rooted in the Montessori experience.

As individual human beings, we tend to view our experiences as unique; unsurprisingly, I view my personal educational history to be such. Hopefully, a brief overview of my pre-collegiate education will illuminate the reasons for my beliefs. In my time as a student, I have experienced the essence of Montessori, the unbridled expression that is found in public elementary school, and the nurturing discipline of a private all-boys Catholic high school . . . pretty special, right? All joking aside, I do in earnest believe that the diversity of these experiences has played an enormous role in my ability to participate in, and in some cases, surpass the expectations of a collegiate lifestyle, as well as what it means to be a contributing member of the human race.

If I could extract the core meaning of what it meant to be a *child of Montessori*, it would be the notion of having the ability to make a difference. In its most basic form, this idea is in all the types of learning materials that are found exclusively in a Montessori environment. Whether it is the triangle box, the moveable alphabet, or the multiplication and division boards, these materials do not hold the child at a distance, but instead, invite the child

to embrace them and make them a part of his exploration and learning. Montessori provides the tools to learn all the necessary academic skills, but more importantly, it provides the child with tools to build in himself a healthy human being. What is most beautiful about this style of learning is that the child is not on an island; she/he is surrounded by children of varying ages, all empowered to experience the same thirst for knowledge, as well as the understanding that they themselves have the ability to affect the classroom and world around them. I believe these positive interactions with others at a young age are the building blocks for children to form healthy relationships as they continue their educational careers and beyond. It was the encouragement to interact, adapt, and work with others that allowed me to maneuver so deftly through the multiple educational styles I have encountered throughout my life.

It goes without saying that the totality of my experiences are unique to me, and what I have taken from the Montessori experience may not be what another child will take. But I will hold strong to my conviction that the Montessori way, in and of itself, is a unique experience unlike any other educational methodology, because of the emphasis that is placed on the power within a child: the power to think and express thoughts as an individual, the power to become the most compassionate of friends, the power to help others and accept help when needed, the power to love, to grow, and to learn, and the belief that even a child has the power to change the world. I have been given the tools.

Reference

Montessori, M. (1995). *The absorbent mind*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.

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