

Montessori Education

"The discovery of the powers of the child is the most important discovery humanity has ever made and uncovers the very roots of our life."

Dr. Maria Montessori

Children enter the world as unformed beings. While born only with potentialities, they possess amazing powers that will allow them to complete the difficult work of their own construction-developing into fully formed, fulfilled and responsible individuals.

Unlike adults, they cannot accomplish this task in an immobile state but rather through purposeful movement, exploration and discovery. The adult's crucial role is to foster and protect this all-important endeavor.

Dr. Maria Montessori, the first woman to graduate from the University of Rome, College of Physicians and Surgeons, began her work with children as a physician. In later years, she became an educator and anthropologist. Studying children in all conditions throughout the world, she discovered universal principles underlying the development of all children.

SPECIAL POWERS FOR CONSTRUCTION

Nature has given children special forms of mental powers which aid in their self-construction.

THE ABSORBENT MIND

The first of these powers is the Absorbent Mind. The Absorbent Mind is the ability to absorb all aspects of one's culture and civilization without effort or fatigue. This mental approach is indiscriminate, incorporating both good and bad, and disappears by the age of six.

THE SENSITIVE PERIODS

Children also experience Sensitive Periods in their development. During these periods they seek certain stimuli with immense intensity, to the exclusion of all others. These are transitory periods in which they develop specific mental functions, such as: movement, language, order, refinement of the senses and social awareness. They occur universally at approximately the same age in all children. If a child's need for specific stimuli is not met during the sensitive period, he loses this opportunity for optimal development.

Dr. Montessori devised special materials to aid children in each Sensitive Period. One of the major responsibilities of the Montessori teacher is to recognize these periods in individual children and put them in touch with the appropriate materials in the classroom environment.

THE HUMAN TENDENCIES

Dr. Montessori was able to identify distinct human tendencies, the same tendencies that have accounted for man's survival since his first appearance on earth. Exploration. Orientation. Communication. Work. Activity. Manipulation. Order. Exactness. Repetition. Abstraction. Self-Perfection. She built an environment for children based upon these

tendencies and allowed them to explore within it. The Montessori environment enables children to discover the world for themselves, much as the first humans on earth must have done.

THE PLANES OF DEVELOPMENT

The metamorphoses of children, from birth to adulthood, occur through a series of developmental periods. The focus of Montessori education continually changes in scope and manner to meet the child's changing needs and interests.

The first plane of development occurs from birth to age six. Children are sensorial explorers, studying every aspect of their environment, their language and culture.

From age 6 to age 12, children become reasoning explorers. They develop new powers of abstraction and imagination. They utilize and apply their knowledge to further discover and expand their world.

The years between 12 and 18 see children becoming humanistic explorers, seeking to understand their place in society and their opportunity to contribute to it.

From age 18 to age 24, as young adults, they become specialized explorers preparing to take command of their own lives.

The Montessori classroom prepares its students for each successive developmental plane, allowing them to take responsibility for their own education making choices, changing and becoming unique human beings.

THE MONTESSORI CLASSROOM

The students' building of their mental lives is an arduous, ceaseless and delicate labor which no one can do for them.

In the classroom, the Montessori teacher prepares an environment which allows the children to come in contact with the qualities and facts of the world as presented through the Montessori materials. The teacher is the link between each child and this prepared environment. This role alternates between a direct and indirect one, as the teacher closely and continuously observes each child and watches for the next manifestation.

When a class first begins, all the children need continual help in their relationships with one another and care of the environment. Gradually, in response to their new environment and the teacher's careful guidance, the children develop into a harmonious, independent community. The teacher becomes a participant/observer in a community of children.

This environment enhances the children's discipline, concentration, belief in themselves and belief in each other. They develop a sense of responsibility and an appreciation for the world and the things and people within it, achieving harmony with life.

THE REWARDS FOR MONTESSORI EDUCATORS

Montessori education is a challenging career and the rewards are high. The classroom