

ABOUT THE MONTESSORI METHOD

How did it begin?

Dr. Maria Montessori, the first woman to graduate from the University of Rome Medical School, became interested in education as a doctor treating mentally challenged children. After returning to the University for further study, she began her work with non-disadvantaged children in 1907 when she was invited to organize schools in a reconstructed slum area of San Lorenzo, Italy. Later she traveled all over the world lecturing about her discoveries in the realm of child development and founding schools where children could develop at their own pace in a non-competitive atmosphere.

When was Montessori education introduced to the United States?

Montessori education came to the U.S. in 1912, with one of the early schools established by Alexander Graham Bell in his home. Because of opposing trends in education and two world wars, Montessori education virtually disappeared in the U.S. from 1920 to 1953 when it was reintroduced by Nancy McCormick Rambusch. In recent years the first six years of life have been recognized as extremely important in child development. This in turn has fostered mounting interest in Montessori education.

Is Montessori for all children?

The Montessori system has been used successfully with children between the ages of two and a half and eighteen from all socio-economic levels, representing those in regular classes as well as the gifted, those with special needs, the emotionally disturbed, and the physically handicapped. Because of its individual approach, Montessori education is uniquely suited to public schools, where children of many backgrounds are grouped together. It is also appropriate for classes in which the student-teacher ratio is high because children learn at an early age to work independently.

Are the children free to do what they choose in the classroom?

Children are free to move about the classroom at will, to talk to and work with other children, to work with any equipment whose purpose they understand, or to ask a teacher to introduce new material. They are not free to disturb other children at work or to abuse the environment that is so important to their development. Everything in the Montessori classroom is so arranged that, after some initial help, the children can teach themselves. Children choose freely among activities and materials which are easily available on low, open shelves.

What does the teacher do?

The teacher works with individual children or with children in small groups, introduces materials, gives guidance when needed, and provides affection and emotional support. One primary task is careful observation to determine the needs of each child and in order to gain the knowledge necessary to prepare the environment to aid the children's growth. Montessori teaching is indirect; the teacher neither imposes upon the child as in direct teaching nor abandons her as in a non-directive, permissive approach. Rather, the teacher is constantly alert to the direction in which the child indicates he wishes to go and actively seeks ways to help the child accomplish such goals.

How does Montessori affect the children?

Observers have described children educated according to the Montessori system as being self-disciplined, self-confident, independent, and creative. They are said to be enthusiastic about learning, to concentrate well, and to have a good foundation in academic skills and in organized problem solving. Children find joy in learning itself rather than in the teacher's approval or a gold star. Montessori education provides a framework in which intellectual and social development go hand in hand.

What happens when children go from a Montessori class to a traditional class?

Most children adjust readily to new classroom situations. They have developed a high degree of self-discipline and independence in the Montessori environment and adapt well.