

Montessori Philosophy

The basic idea in the Montessori philosophy of education is that every child carries unseen within him/her the man/woman they will become. In order to develop their physical, intellectual, creative and spiritual powers to the fullest, they must have freedom – a freedom achieved through order and self-discipline. The world of the child, say Montessori educators, is full of sights and sounds, which at first appear chaotic. From this chaos, the child must gradually create order, and learn to distinguish among the impressions that assail their senses slowly but surely gaining mastery of themselves and their environment.

Dr. Maria Montessori developed what she called the “prepared environment” which already possesses a certain order and disposes the child to develop at their own speed, according to their own capacities and in a noncompetitive atmosphere in their first school years. “Never let a child risk failure until they have a reasonable chance of success,” said Dr. Montessori, understanding the necessity for the acquisition of a basic skill before its use in a competitive learning situation. The years between three and six are the years that a child most easily learns the ground rules of human behavior. These years can be constructively devoted to – freeing the child through acquisition of good manners and habits, to take his place in his culture.

The child who has had the benefit of a Montessori environment is freer at a later age to devote themselves more exclusively to the development of their intellectual faculties. The method by which children are taught in the Montessori school might well be “structured learning.” Since the child has learned to work by himself, in the prepared environment, enjoying the presence of other children, but not working necessarily directly with them, the Montessori teacher is able to teach a child individually. The structure of the Montessori learning involves the use of many materials which the child may work individually. At every step of their learning, the teaching material is designed to test their understanding and to correct their errors.

Dr. Montessori has recognized that the only valid impulse to learning is the self-motivation of the child. Children are more themselves toward learning. The teacher prepares the environment, directs the activity, functions as the authority, offers the child stimulation, but it is the child who learns, who is motivated through the work itself (not solely by the teacher’s personality) to persist in their given task. If the Montessori child is free to learn, it is because they have acquired from their exposure to both physical and mental order an “inner discipline.” This is the core of Dr. Montessori’s educational philosophy. Social adjustment though it is a necessary condition for learning in a school room, is not the purpose of education. Patterns of concentration and thoroughness established in early childhood produce a confident, competent learning pattern for latter years. Schools have existed historically to teach children to observe, to think, to judge. Montessori introduces children to the job of learning at an early age and provides a framework in which intellectual and social discipline go hand-in-hand.

The American Montessori Society has emphasized the importance of Montessori insights for children and adults of all ages. Although children traditionally begin Montessori education at age three, the principles of self-motivated learning apply to all learning experiences. Modern learning research has confirmed the validity of the Montessori principles of programmed learning and the non-teacher (who does not distort or inhabit the learning experience). Many public, private, and parochial elementary and secondary schools are now utilizing this approach.