Montessori Philosophy

The Montessori teaching philosophy was first developed by a European doctor by the name of Maria Montessori. The foundation of the philosophy is that every child develops at their own individual pace and level. While developing, every child deserves to be treated with respect and provided with choices and interesting alternatives with which to develop their learning potentials. Below are some basic concepts and core areas of concentration, which are closely followed within the Montessori Method of teaching.

The Montessori classroom is more teacher-initiated versus teacher-centered. The teacher's role in the Montessori classroom is to maintain order and each student's self-discipline, along with directing the children towards solving their own questions through the Montessori materials and the use of feedback from their peers. The child is an active participant in the learning process.

The use of manipulative materials is very important in the Montessori classroom. The Montessori Method is built upon allowing children to discover questions and find the answers themselves. This process enhances the development of their cognitive and problem solving skills.

The Montessori classroom highlights the social interaction between the different age groups. The classroom facilitates several age groups working together at one time. For example, in the 3 to 6 year old classroom, the older children act as role models for the younger children, while older children experience a sense of responsibility and importance.

The Montessori Method, out of respect for the individual child, provides education on real-life experiences and responsibilities. It is common for a 3-year-old child go through the process of obtaining a snack for herself. She may need to wait until one of the three chairs at the snack table is open, but she will then she gather the correct number of apple wedges and crackers indicated by the sample plate and pour herself a glass of juice from the child size pitcher. After carrying her plate, juice, and napkin to the snack table, she enjoys her snack with one or two other children. After finishing her snack, she clears her dishes and cleans up her spot for the next child. The child has been taught the individual steps to the process of getting her own snack, as well as the responsibility for cleaning up after she is finished so that the next person is allowed the same opportunity. All of this occurs with little intervention from the Montessori teacher.

The daily routine of the child relies heavily on their own individual interests and choices. The teacher closely supervises to ensure that, over an extended period, each child is exposed to all essential areas of the curriculum in the classroom.

A typical Montessori program thrives and depends on parent involvement and support. It is very important that each parent understands the experiences that their child goes through each day, in addition to the philosophy and teaching behind those experiences. An open channel of communication between teachers and parents is critical to the success of any Montessori program.

The Montessori Method works to instill an excitement towards learning with children and to develop their own internal motivation for continued learning.

Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori was an Italian physician, educator, and innovator, acclaimed for her Educational method that builds on the way children naturally learn.
She opened the first Montessori school—the Casa dei Bambini, or Children’s House—in Rome on January 6, 1907. Subsequently, she traveled the world and wrote extensively about her approach to education, attracting many devotees. There are now more than 22,000 Montessori schools in at least 110 countries worldwide.

Maria Montessori was born on August 31, 1870, in the provincial town of Chiaravalle, Italy. Her father was a financial manager for a state-run industry. Her mother was raised in a family that prized education. She was well-schooled and an avid reader—unusual for Italian women of that time. The same thirst for knowledge took root in young Maria, and she immersed herself in many fields of study before creating the educational method that bears her name. Beginning in her early childhood years, Maria grew up in Rome, a paradise of libraries, museums, and fine schools. Maria was a sterling student, confident, ambitious, and unwilling to be limited by traditional expectations for women. At age 13 she entered an all-boys technical institute to prepare for a career in engineering. In time, however, she changed her mind, deciding to become a doctor instead. She applied to the University of Rome’s medical program, but was rejected. Maria took additional courses to better prepare her for entrance to the medical school and persevered. With great effort she gained admittance, opening the door a bit wider for future women in the field. When she graduated from medical school in 1896, she was among Italy’s first female physicians. Maria’s early medical practice focused on psychiatry. She also developed an interest in education, attending classes on pedagogy and immersing herself in educational theory. Her studies led her to observe, and call into question, the prevailing methods of teaching children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The opportunity to improve on these methods came in 1900, when she was appointed co-director of a new training institute for special education teachers. Maria approached the task scientifically, carefully observing and experimenting to learn which teaching methods worked best. Many of the children made unexpected gains, and the program was proclaimed a success.

In 1907 Maria accepted a new challenge to open a childcare center in a poor inner-city district. This became the first Casa dei Bambini, a quality learning environment for young children. The youngsters were unruly at first, but soon showed great interest in working with puzzles, learning to prepare meals, and manipulating materials that held lessons in math. She observed how they absorbed knowledge from their surroundings, essentially teaching themselves. Utilizing scientific observation and experience gained from her earlier work with young children, Maria designed learning materials and a classroom environment that fostered the children’s natural desire to learn. News of the school’s success soon spread through Italy and by 1910 Montessori schools were acclaimed worldwide. In the years following, and for the rest of her life, Maria dedicated herself to advancing her child-centered approach to education. She lectured widely, wrote articles and books, and developed a program to prepare teachers in the Montessori Method. Through her efforts and the work of her followers, Montessori education was adopted worldwide.

As a public figure, Maria also campaigned vigorously on behalf of women’s rights. She wrote and spoke frequently on the need for greater opportunities for women, and was recognized in Italy and beyond as a leading feminist voice.

Maria Montessori pursued her ideals in turbulent times. Living through war and political upheaval inspired her to add peace education to the Montessori curriculum. But she could do little to avoid being ensnared in world events. Traveling in India in 1940 when hostilities between Italy and Great Britain broke out, she was forced to live in exile for the remainder of the war. There she took the opportunity to train teachers in her method.

At war’s end she returned to Europe, spending her final years in Amsterdam. She died peacefully, in a friend’s garden, on May 6, 1952.