

Class 6

Maria Montessori: Theory and Practice

Article:

Maria Montessori

Discussion Questions:

Who was Maria Montessori?

What are the principles of the Montessori Method?

Main Points

Early Childhood Education Today

by George S. Morrison 2d Ed., Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publ. Co., 1980, pp. 63-91.

Maria Montessori-1870-1952 was the first woman in Italy to earn the degree of doctor of medicine.

Although Montessori's first intention was to study children's diseases, she soon became interested in educational solutions for such problems as deafness, paralysis, and idiocy. Montessori read the works of Itard and Seguin, and credits them with providing the inspiration necessary to continue her studies with mentally retarded children.

The opportunity to perfect her methods and implement them with normal school age children occurred by chance. In 1906, she was invited to organize schools for young children of families who occupied the tenement houses in Rome. Her first school was called "Casa Dei Bambini" or "Children's House."

PRINCIPLES OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD

1. **Respect for the CHILD**-Because children are unique individuals, education should be individualized for each child.

Children are not miniature adults and should not be treated as such.

2. **The Absorbent Mind**-Montessori believed that no human being is educated by another, rather each must **DO IT FOR HER/HIMSELF**.

The child absorbs knowledge directly into his/her life. Simply by continuing to live, the child learns to speak the family's and/or local native tongue.

There are **STAGES** in the development of the absorbent mind:

excerpted by Nina Mogar (Feb. 1983) from:

from **birth to three years of age** the **unconscious absorbent mind** develops the senses used for seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. The child absorbs everything.

from **three to six years** the **conscious mind** selects sensory impressions from the environment and further develops the senses. In this phase, the child is selective in that s/he refines what s/he knows.

For example, in the unconscious stage he merely sees and absorbs an array of colors without making distinctions between them. However, from three on, s/he develops the ability to distinguish, match, and grade colors.

3. **Sensitive Periods**-Montessori believed there were sensitive periods when children were more susceptible to certain behaviors and when specific skills could be learned more easily. The secret of using sensitive periods in teaching is to recognize them when they occur. When a sensitive period occurs is different for each child; therefore, observation of children is crucial for teachers. Observation of children's achievement and behavior is more accurate than the use of tests. Teachers-must: Recognize sensitive periods exist; Learn to detect them; and Capitalize on them by providing optimal learning settings
4. **The Prepared Environment**-Montessori believed that the child learned best in a prepared environment. The purpose of the prepared environment is to make the

child independent of the adult. It is a place where the child can do things for him/herself. Following a teacher's introduction to the prepared environment, children could come and go - deciding for themselves with which materials to work. Montessori removed typical school desks and replaced them with table and chairs where children could work alone or in small groups.

Although the Montessori teacher believes in freedom for the child and in the ability to exercise that freedom, this does not mean the child is free to make unlimited choices. For example, the child must know how to use materials correctly before the child is free to choose those materials.

5. **Self - or Auto-Education-Means** children are capable of educating themselves. Children actively involved in a prepared environment and exercising freedom of choice educate themselves. The art of teaching includes preparing the environment so that children, through participation in it, educate themselves. The education is more child centered and less teacher centered.

The Role of the Teacher

1. Making children the center of learning.
2. Encouraging children to use the freedom provided them.
3. Observing children in order to prepare the best possible environment; Recognize sensitive periods; Divert unacceptable behavior to meaningful tasks.

THE MONTESSORI METHOD

In a prepared environment there are materials and activities which provide for three basic areas of involvement on the part of the child:

1. Practical Life (or Motor Education);
2. Sensory materials for training the senses;
3. Academic materials for teaching writing and reading.

ALL THE ACTIVITIES IN THE ABOVE THREE BASIC AREAS ARE TAUGHT ACCORDING TO A PRESCRIBED PROCEDURE-demonstrated by the teacher to the child.

Criticisms of the Montessori Method:

1. The focus is too narrowly confined to the learning of specific concepts of size, texture, shape, etc.;
2. The structured "didactic [academic], materials" may be used in only one way to fulfill the correct lesson they were designed to teach;
3. Children are free to use the materials only after they have been present to them by the teacher who shows them how to use them;
4. Children do not have opportunities to participate in dramatics, pretending;
5. The Montessori classroom does not provide for socialization of the child;
6. The Method does not promote the development of language skills because there is a minimum of talking among the children;
7. There is usually a lack of creative materials such as paint, paste, etc.