

MONTESSORI: AN ADVENTURE IN LEARNING

"The child of three to six has one intuitive aim: self development. He desperately wants to develop his resources, his ability to cope with a strange, complex world. He wants to do and see and learn for himself, through his senses and not through the eyes of an adult. The child who accomplishes this, moves into harmony with his world. He becomes a truly full person and in this sense he is educated." -- Maria Montessori.

The method is based on the philosophy of Maria Montessori, an Italian physician, anthropologist, and educator. Her child-centered approach to education was developed in early nineteen hundreds while she was working with the children in the slums of Rome. The school which she founded was truly devoted to the child; a school existing for the child's pleasure; to help him develop his character and to realize his happiness; to provide a refuge from pressures which keep him from being himself.

Maria Montessori found that the young child has a tremendous capacity and innate enthusiasm for learning. She also observed that the child employs all his senses in discovering the world about him. She in turn capitalized on this natural mode of learning for the child, in creating specialized practical educational material which seek to employ all of the child's senses. These materials, she felt, absorbed the child's interest and subtly developed the child's ability to see, feel, and discriminate between various shapes, sounds and textures. The materials build concentration, self-confidence, and pleasure of accomplishment, which in turn lead to more advanced materials and exercises which teach language skills and mathematics.

The teacher's role in the Montessori class is to observe and diagnose each child's interest, level of understanding and most fruitful line of development and then, if necessary, guide the child forward using the materials which will build on these interests and needs. Thus, the child chooses his own areas of continuing interest, and when left alone to develop his natural talent, he learns quickly without compulsion. In short, the child teaches himself.

While a Montessori child may learn at a faster rate than others elsewhere, this is not an end in itself. The lasting benefit, hopefully, is the development of a strong sense of himself and an enthusiastic and open attitude towards learning and life itself.

Montessori felt that the pre-school years are the most important in the child's life. She sought to provide the child with an educational atmosphere where he is able to discover and follow his natural interests and develop his resources. Montessori provides the child with the opportunity to "learn by doing" through a variety of individual and group activities -- free play, art activities, music and creative dance, story time, sharing time -- to the end that the child will grow in the greater knowledge and confidence of himself and the world he lives in. He will be encouraged to develop his relationships with his peers and hopefully discover successful ways in which to interact with others.