



Introduction to Montessori Philosophy & Practice

Specific Elements of Montessori Philosophy on which the Educational Method is based

CONCEPTS

The Human Tendencies:

The practical application of the Montessori method is based on *human tendencies* – which Dr. Montessori studied in detail – to explore, move, share with a group, to be independent and make decisions, create order, develop self-control, to abstract ideas from experience, to use the creative imagination, to work hard, repeat, concentrate, and to perfect one's efforts and creations.

The Process of Learning:

There are three stages of learning:
(Stage 1) to be introduced to a concept by means of a lecture, lesson, etc.; (Stage 2) to process the information, to develop and grasp the concept through work. Stage two is the most important and the longest with its emphasis on developing, working, experimenting, creating, transforming.
(Stage 3) to “know”, to possess an understanding of, and perhaps teach a concept.

Indirect Preparation:

The steps of learning any concept are so well analyzed by the *adult* and are systematically offered to the child. A child is always learning something that is indirectly preparing him to learn something else, making education a joyful discovery instead of drudgery.

ORGANIZATION

The Prepared Environment:

Since information passes from the environment directly to the child, not through the teacher, the preparation of this environment is vital. It is the role of the teacher to prepare and continue to adapt the environment, to link the child to it through well thought-out lessons, and to facilitate the child's exploration and creativity.

Multi-aged Grouping & Class Size:

Children are grouped in three-year spans in Montessori preschools, and 3 or 6-year age spans for the older child. Children have the same teacher for three to six years. The most successful 3-6 or 6-12 classes are of 30-35 children to one teacher, with one non-teaching assistant. This provides the most variety of personalities, learning styles, and work being done at one time.

Age Requirements:

There are no requirements for ages 3-6, but children are exposed to amazing amounts of knowledge and often learn to read, write and calculate beyond their age level. Children ages 6-18 have no curriculum requirements except those set by the state or college entrance requirements. Students design work contracts with their teachers to balance their work, and to teach them to become responsible for their own time management and education.

The schedule:

Ideally, there are two 3-hour, uninterrupted work periods each day, not broken up by required group lessons or lessons by specialists. Adults and children respect concentration and do not interrupt someone who is busy at a task. Groups form spontaneously.

LEARNING

Basic Lessons:

A well-trained Montessori teacher spends a lot of time during teacher training practicing the many basic lessons with materials in all areas, and must pass a written and oral exam on these lessons in order to be certified. She is trained to recognize a child's readiness – according to age, ability, and interest – for a specific lesson, and is prepared to guide individual progress.

Areas of Study Linked:

All subjects are interwoven. Subjects are not isolated from each other and a child studies them in any order he chooses, moving through all in his own unique way. Sciences move into language, history, and the arts. At any one time in a day all subjects will be studied at all levels.

Work Centers:

The environment is arranged according to subject area, and children are always free to move around the room, and to continue to work on a piece of material with no time limit.

Teaching Method:

The teacher is trained to teach one child at a time, with a few small groups and almost no lessons given to the whole class. She is fluent in the basic lessons of math, language, the arts and sciences, and in guiding a child's research and exploration, capitalizing on his interest in and excitement about a subject.

Observation:

Scientific observations are constantly carried out and recorded by the teacher. These observations are made on the level of concentration of each child, the introduction to and mastery of each piece of material, the social development, physical health, and so on.

Assessment:

There are no grades or other forms of reward or punishment. Assessment is by portfolio and the teacher's observation and record-keeping. The test of whether or not the system is working lies in the accomplishment and behavior of the children, their happiness, maturity, and love of learning and work.

The discoveries of Dr. Maria Montessori, MD, from 1907 through the 1950's can help parents and teachers in many situations. Here are lessons of observation, understanding, and wisdom. Whenever people came to her for answers to questions, she pointed her finger to children and said “follow the child.” Her discoveries led to revolutions in the teaching of children from preschool throughout high school.