

# On the Pedagogical Theory of Maria

## Montessori

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### 1. The Pedagogical Principles of Montessori

If adults put children in a well-prepared environment and gently watch over the activity of the children, children will discover what they need for their own development at an appropriate time by themselves and absorb it into their mind and body. The critical elements for the growth of children are the environment, teaching materials and adults who watch over them. Instead of adults teaching children unilaterally and giving them some kind of ability, the emphasis is on providing the environment in which children can learn by themselves and making sure that children have some object to concentrate on as well as time and place to concentrate on it for themselves. When and what to offer depends on the adults. For that purpose, adults have to observe the children patiently. If the environment is prepared which corresponds to each individual child, every child can develop his/her ability. Often it is the interference of adults, in many cases in good intention, that obstructs the development of children. A child likes an orderly environment by his/her nature. Adults should try not to disturb the

growth of the child. They should extend their generous hands to him/her only when he/she is in trouble. As for the acquisition of knowledge and intelligence by children of different personalities in the process of becoming self-reliant, some general orders are known with scientific endorsements. However, the time and manner of acquisition depends on each child. Therefore, it is out of point to compare the promptness and depth of learning of one child to that of another child. It is not a matter of competition.

### 2. Montessori and Her Pedagogical Thinking

After she was 40 years old, Montessori devoted her life to the popularisation of the teaching materials which she developed as well as to her pedagogical thinking. She founded The Association Montessori Internationale (the AMI). She took patents for the teaching materials. Classrooms were setup featuring Montessori Method of Education, in which teachers who learned in certified AMI-schools and got the qualification are teaching with the aid of certified materials in the facility which meets the installation standard. The administration of the Association has

been succeeded to her son and, then, to her granddaughter.

Montessori's teaching materials embody the thinking of a woman who grew up in a quiet environment as an only daughter of an affluent home and later completed her education in engineering, medical science and anthropology. The administration and management of the association reflects the perseverance of a woman who took a prominent and pioneering role in a society of 100 years ago which was dominated by men, became an unmarried mother and let her son nurtured by other persons until he was 15 years old, and kept moving from one country to another in order to survive World Wars. Montessori's achievements were possible thanks to her mother who always supported her behind the scenes as well as her women friends who walked with her in her late years.

### 3.. Practice of the Montessori Method of Education

#### 3.— 1 Training in Actions of Daily Life

For Montessori, the first step of education was to let children experience the joy of doing things by themselves, which would promote their self-reliance in their daily life. For that aim, she prepared education materials of suitable sizes for each child to enable them to do actions and operations in daily life smoothly by themselves. It included practice kits for minute motions like pinching small materials and doing up buttons as well as practice kits for actions like holding something, carrying it and walking, which children would learn by themselves without special training. The emphasis was the importance of showing examples of motions which adults respect as beautiful and getting children to imitate such motions faithfully. In this way children

learn spontaneously to the point that they can do these motions in the same way. Children develop ability through learning. They cannot learn unless adults consciously provide them with such environment. On the basis of this understanding, the Montessori Method of Education includes the practice of decent behavior in greeting, yawning, coughing, wording and appearance. Practice in simple operations in housekeeping like cleaning, cooking, needlework, shoe-polishing and the like for small children is a unique aspect of the Montessori Method, which is not seen in other methods of early education. Although the importance of the education on daily life has been increasing nowadays with the emphasis on the consciousness on food, it is amazing that the importance of such education was pointed out in as early as a hundred years ago. This was possible partly because Montessori was a woman. This practice helps children to have their own role, even if it is quite small one, in the family and to develop the consciousness about their role and position in the family. Rather than being children who assist adult members of the family, they could proceed to feel themselves as a member of the family. In this way, the Montessori Method of Education combined the training and living in the family. Silence training is another aspect of the Montessori Method, which promotes an adaptation to the rule of society as well as the rule of adults. While this helps the handing down of the culture, it might include a tendency to impose the way of life of adults on children. For Montessori, recklessness, unpurposed motions and meaningless scurrying of children were a mere manifestation of disorder and poor education, which was not happy for adults as well as for children. This kind of approach reminds us of the quality of education in the upper-class Catholic families in Europe at her time.

### 3—2 Promotion of Sensibility

Montessori assumed that sense was the base of all intellectual activities. When senses are stimulated, the brain is activated. When the brain develops, it can control the motions of the body at will. The development of the brain is the same thing as the advancement of mind, which eventually leads to the formation of personality. Montessori devised education materials which help children isolate and differentiate each of five senses (tactile, gustatory, auditory, visual, and olfactory senses) from each other. For example, in the training of tactile sense, auditory sense, olfactory sense and gustatory sense, children are urged to touch certain materials with their eyes blindfolded and feel the heat and weight of them, feel the different textures, sounds, smells and tastes of them. In the training of visual sense, children are exposed to orderly changes of size, length, color and shape based on some mathematical rules and learn allocation of space, ranking and matching. The systematic training here to develop senses constitutes the foundation for developing intelligence. One of the most popular education materials, developed by Montessori herself at the earliest stage, is the cylindrical blocks which consist of ten blocks with different diameters and heights. However, this approach of comparison and analysis is criticized, for example, by Henry Wallon, for trapping children's senses into "one novel abstract existence" and ignoring the importance of the children's sensitivity in its natural state.

### 3—3 Arithmetic Education

Based on the sensibility education, Montessori added elements of precision to it and developed it into a method of arithmetic education. Instead of mere

counting numbers, Montessori's method emphasizes teaching the concept of "quantity" and the words which represents quantity. In order to visualize the numbers up to one thousand, she used beads and wood chips. The aim was to make children understand the quantity by their visual sense and perceive mathematics through physical experiences. Montessori understood that arithmetic education was more easily accepted by young children than language education, which had to deal with culture as the background.

### 3—4 Language Education

Although the Montessori's education started as the education for handicapped children and children of poor families, in the process of its popularization in the entire world, it had transformed into the education for healthy child of upper-class families. Montessori began to be involved in language education because of the demands from parents. As Montessori's education had already been established as education for individuals within the framework of a group, educational materials were not provided for reading aloud, which would break the silence. The emphasis was on educational materials which would promote the ability to write. As regards the ability to speak and hear, children learn the practice of greeting, how to ask someone to do something, how to express gratitude and how to listen to someone in the early stage of education through the daily life exercises for promoting self-reliance. However, the level of the development of materials for language education is not so high because of the strong link between language education and its cultural background. These materials can only let children learn to write alphabetic characters in the same way as they learn to write numbers.

#### 4. Montessori's Education of Handicapped Children

Montessori began to educate intellectually disabled children, who had only been treated as the object of medical science in the past. She evidenced that children could change themselves through education. However, it is regrettable that at that time Montessori only addressed to children with IQ scores of 75-90, which was her definition of intellectually disabled children, and children who didn't have the opportunity for sufficient education because of poverty. Presently, Montessori's teaching aids for sensibility education, in their original forms, are only used for the education of vision-impaired children in Japan. For use in other areas of special education, it is thought that some additional features have to be devised.

#### **Bibliography**

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