

NATURAL SPIRITUALITY

Montessori saw that children held within them something wonderful – something so special that it could be the key to changing the world. She saw that they were inherently good and that, if allowed to develop freely, they felt connected to everything and were naturally caring to each other and the world around them. The more that she worked with the children, the more convinced she was that they had precise inner ‘guides’ and that the work of adults was to help them to be all that they could be. She felt that it was the spiritual nature of children that had been forgotten and denied and that children could therefore show adults the way to return to a more meaningful, holistic way of living.



CHILDREN MOVE THROUGH SENSITIVE PERIODS

Montessori noticed that there were certain periods of particular sensitivity that kept occurring in the children. During these periods the child could learn the activity that she was focused on at a particularly intense rate and that such learning appeared to come very easily. They included a sensitive period for order, refinement of the senses, language acquisition, walking and movement, small objects and involvement in social life. What became clear is that at such times it was as though there was a light shining on that particular activity that completely held the child’s attention. If left to follow this natural interest the child could achieve much more than would normally be expected. Montessori teachers therefore watch out for these very creative periods and make sure that the children have the freedom to follow their interests.

Montessori philosophy

There were certain things that Montessori saw were very important for children’s natural development. She outlined them in her courses and they form the basic understanding behind all Montessori schools.

CHILDREN THRIVE ON ORDER AND STRUCTURE

Order plays a very important part in the lives of young children. Order consists in recognising the place for each object in relation to its environment and in remembering where each thing should be.

Such an awareness is essential for a child to feel secure within its environment

and to build on existing experiences. Order in the environment makes children feel safe and that they know how things should be. Great emphasis is therefore put on order within the Montessori classroom. By ensuring that everything has its place, and that the environment is designed to be as accessible as possible for children to work in, they can then be given the maximum freedom to move and develop.



CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH THEIR SENSES

Montessori saw that children built on their physical experiences of the world through their senses and that by carefully designing interesting materials which the children were drawn to experiment with, she could help them extend this understanding. She did so by taking each of the senses in turn and developing materials that isolated certain aspects that could then be increasingly explored by the children. She believed that children loved working with beautiful objects so all the materials were prepared with the greatest care. Rather than proving to be outdated in the modern world, these beautifully designed items have gone on to show how accurate Montessori’s initial observations were. Many are now reproduced in schools of all types throughout the world.



CHILDREN NEED FREEDOM

Montessori saw freedom as the single most important factor in allowing children to develop as spontaneous, creative individuals. She saw the role of education as providing environments in which the children could be set free to follow their natural impulses – to become the wonderfully dynamic, natural learners they were designed to be.

CHILDREN ABSORB THEIR CULTURE

Montessori's emphasis on children being allowed the freedom to work alone and to develop concentration, did not mean that she underestimated the importance of social development. Instead what she saw was that it was precisely because the children were allowed to work in such freedom that they could display such love and care towards others. She saw that children literally absorbed the world around them and that true discipline and harmony was something that came from within and was not something that could be enforced.

BIG TEACHERS

Montessori called her teachers Directresses because she felt that they sensitively guided, rather than controlled, the children's activities. She asked that they be "more psychologists than teachers" and considered that success lay in the ongoing nature of the teacher's own personal development as well as on the sensitivity of the observations of individual children. Ultimately she saw their role as not so much to teach the children as to 'direct' the natural energies that they saw emerging.

LITTLE TEACHERS

As she watched the children busily going about their work Montessori realised that it was natural and very easy for the younger children to learn by watching and listening to the older children. In fact she saw that children learn best this way and that something wonderful happened when a community of children could actively support and help each other. Montessori schools therefore encourage children of all ages to work together as a social group and do not normally split children by sex or age.



CHILDREN ARE NATURAL LEARNERS

Montessori saw that children underwent extraordinary transformations in overall happiness, self-confidence and self-discipline when they were allowed to follow their innate needs. She saw that the work of a child, therefore, was fundamentally different to that of the adult: that the child worked for the joy of the process rather than for the end result, that the child had a need to repeat activities over and over until an inner need was fulfilled, and that the child was excited and energised through work, rather than burdened and fatigued by it. She felt that children only stopped loving learning when they were forced to go against their natural impulses.

PROCESSES NOT RESULTS

Montessori schools believe that children are at their happiest when they are busily involved in processes. Children are natural learners who, if left to follow their instincts, will want to constantly explore the world. All too often what stops children enjoying this natural curiosity are external demands that don't fit with their needs. The only results young children are interested in are the ones that end up making them feel good about themselves and their abilities. When they learn, instead, that there are unacceptable results that make them feel bad about themselves they start to fear the processes. And that fear can cut them off from the joy of learning forever.

Montessori schools therefore believe that each child is an individual and should be encouraged to work at the pace that is right for him or her. There are no grades or tests. Children are never in competition with each other.

And Montessorians continue to fight to preserve the rights of each child to be protected from undue pressure.

Learning should be FUN!

Montessori saw that children learn best by doing and that happy self-motivated learners form positive images of themselves as confident, successful people.

“ Education must no longer be regarded only as a matter of teaching children, but as a social question of the highest importance, because it is the one question that concerns all mankind. The many other social questions have to do with one group or another of adults, with relatively small numbers of human beings; the social question of the child, however, has to do with all men everywhere. ”

Maria Montessori

