



A Montessori School
“The Whole Child is the Whole Idea”
1015 30th Avenue South • Moorhead, MN 56560
phone (218) 287-0415 • fax (218) 287-0416
www.redrivervalleyacademy.com



Montessori History and General Information

Maria Montessori was the first female physician in Italy, an amazing accomplishment at the turn of the twentieth century. However, becoming a medical doctor was only the first step in her long successful career. She began her professional research involving children with observations of mentally retarded children, and was greatly influenced by the work of Itard and Seguin. In 1901, she seemed to be at the high point of her medical career, yet she felt a need for further study and re-enrolled in the University of Rome to study philosophy, psychology, and anthropology. In 1906, she was 36 years of age, an educator, writer, lecturer and medical doctor. She started a school for underprivileged children in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. Since funding allowed only office style furnishings, she contracted a carpenter to make smaller, child-sized furniture and equipment of her own design. She began this trial school with 60 deprived children under the age of six. As she worked, she observed and modified, modified and observed. Within six months, her results were phenomenal. She began attracting countrywide attention. The children displayed self-discipline, preferred learning materials to toys, and worked with a profound concentration and joy. They had a love for order, respected their environment, and enjoyed working in silence beside their friends. The children would carry on “business as usual” with or without the teacher’s presence.

Gradually, her work became known and practiced world-wide. She refused to patent her name or work because she wanted to see it grow freely, and it has, for better or for worse. Sometimes the name “Montessori” has been used in schools where the method is practiced incorrectly. Regardless, the books she wrote, the materials she developed, and the discoveries she made have greatly influenced the early childhood programs of today. There was wisdom in her decision to allow the method to evolve.

Maria Montessori believed the child’s mind from birth to six years is quite different from the adult’s and labeled it “an absorbent mind.” The child effortlessly soaks in everything in her/his culture and environment. Modern scientists are now, almost a century later, finding scientific data to support her discoveries. She saw a tremendous need for the child to have respectful and intelligent help during this absorbent mind stage. She saw the child as constantly unfolding and developing himself, and saw the adults that were trying to train him as obstacles to his progress. Her life’s work could be summed up as defining the nature of the child and the role of the adult in helping him, thus easing the tug-of-war that exists when two completely different natures meet:

...The child loves concentration - the adult entertains, distracts or interrupts him. The teacher in this prepared environment respects his concentration and allows him to

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complete an inquiry or exploration. This involves everything from watching a bug on the window sill to drops of water on a table.

...The child loves repetition - the adult becomes bored with it. Montessori allows this freedom, with respect, as the child perfects his movements.

...The child loves order but the adult provides a toy box that can afford nothing but disorder. (Try keeping your kitchen organized within one large box.) The prepared environment offers shelves with neatly arranged activities always in the same place.

...Children prefer work (learning) to play (toys) - adults do not. A child’s “work” is his preparation for life: hopefully when he matures he will enjoy his work, for he has perfected what he likes to do best.

...Children do not need rewards - adults like to think they do. Accomplishment and creativity are reward enough. A child is self-motivated at this age and with the right environment will remain so as he grows.

... Children love silence - adults demand it. The Montessori environment creates an awareness of silence. “Let me see if you can tip toe away so quietly I can still hear the birds chirping.”

On and on her discoveries move toward providing a practical way to a peaceful coexistence with children.

Maria Montessori developed materials for refining the senses. The materials help the child to discriminate sound, color, size, shape, smell, and touch. While the manufactured materials are expensive, many can be home-made and get the same results. The materials in the classroom area called “practical life” address the child’s love of movement, concentration and repetition. The activities involve pouring, sweeping, dressing, stacking, folding, wiping, polishing, and washing that include care of the environment, care of self, grace and courtesy. Conversational manners, table manners, and courtesy to others are all part of the activities in a Montessori classroom. Her math equipment is regarded by many as the most complete available. Four year olds can have a thorough understanding of the decimal system effortlessly. Many of the reading exercises are hand-made and can be supplemented at home. There are also geography, music, art, science and history materials. The method is adaptable to all subjects. All Montessori exercises employ movement, manipulatives, free choice (within limits) and a point of completion. The materials are usually self-correcting allowing a child to discover their own mistakes and truly internalize a concept. The Directress prepares the environment and is trained to know when to intervene in the child’s self-learning. This

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knowledge comes through her practice of the art of observation. The child is given what is termed as “freedom within limits.” What are the limits?

- ... She/He may freely choose to work only from materials he has been shown how to use.
- ... She/He must use the materials properly and return them properly.
- ... She/He may not infringe upon the rights of others.

Within this framework the child develops freely in individuality and self-confidence. The child is given the opportunity to become independent and care for her/himself in a responsible way. She/He flowers and becomes an inner directed member of her/his school and family. All of this will happen to the extent the child is exposed to these ideas. The more cooperation between the family and directors, the more benefit the child will receive from her/his Montessori experience.

Maria Montessori was a wonderfully gifted individual who was ahead of her time. She unfolded many of the mysteries, not only of childhood, but of human nature. Her books are read all over the world in many languages. The significance of her discoveries is yet to be fully understood, as much of her work is still being translated and compiled. She died in 1952, in Holland, after training directors all over the world.

Volumes have been written on Montessori philosophy. An understanding of the thinking behind these educational methods could not be completely conveyed without much further explanation. In short, Montessori emphasizes that children are not merely little people to be trained as adults, they are the other pole to humanity. They add the balance. Adults and children, all over this planet walk hand-in-hand, learning from each other, accepting each other, and providing balance for each other. The Montessori Method is a universal method that, when practiced correctly, has the potential to guide humanity towards peace. The practice and the pursuit begins within each individual.

-Taken from <http://a-childs-place.com/montessorimethodhistory.html>

Links and Resources

The following are helpful internet links and books you may wish to browse or read in order to help you better understand the Montessori method.

American Montessori Society <http://www.amshq.org>

Association Montessori Internationale <http://www.montessori-internationale.org>

The Montessori Foundation <http://www.montessori.org>

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North American Montessori Teacher’s Association <http://www.montessori-namta.org>

Education for Human Development by Mario Montessori, Jr.
Education for the New World by Maria Montessori
From Childhood to Adolescence by Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori: A Biography by Rita Kramer
Maria Montessori: A Modern Approach by Paula Lillard
Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work by E.M. Standing
Montessori in Contemporary American Culture by Margaret Loeffler
Montessori in the Home by Elizabeth Hainstock
Montessori Today by Paula Lillard
Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius by Angeline Stoll Lillard
Spontaneous Activity in Education/The Advanced Montessori Method by Maria Montessori
The Absorbent Mind by Maria Montessori
The American Montessori Experience by Nancy M. Rambusch
The Child in the Family by Maria Montessori
The Discovery of the Child by Maria Montessori
The Formation of Man by Maria Montessori
The Montessori Revolution by E.M. Standing
The Secret of Childhood by Maria Montessori
To Educate the Human Potential by Maria Montessori

Comparing Montessori with Traditional Education

Montessori	Traditional
Views the child holistically, valuing cognitive, psychological, social, and spiritual development.	Views the child in terms of competence, skill level, and achievement with an emphasis on core curricula standards and social development.
Child is an active participant in learning, allowed to move about and respectfully explore the classroom environment; teacher is an instructional facilitator and guide.	Child is a more passive participant in learning, teacher has a more dominant, central role in classroom activity.
A carefully prepared learning environment and method encourages development of internal self-discipline and intrinsic motivation.	Teacher acts as a primary enforcer of external discipline promoting extrinsic motivation.
Instruction, both individual and group, adapts to students’ learning styles and	Instruction, both individual and group adapts to core curricula benchmarks.

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developmental levels.	
Three-year span of age grouping, three-year cycles allow teacher, students, and parents to develop supportive, collaborative, and trusting relationships.	Same-age and/or skill level grouping; one-year cycles can limit development of strong teacher, student, and parent collaboration.
Grace, courtesy, and conflict resolution are integral parts of daily Montessori peace curriculum.	Conflict resolution is usually taught separately from daily classroom activity.
Values concentration and depth of experience; supplies uninterrupted time for focused work cycle to develop.	Values completion of assignments; time is tightly scheduled.
Child’s learning pace is internally determined.	Instructional pace usually set by core curricula standards expectations, group norm, or teacher.
Child allowed to spot own errors through feedback from the materials; errors are viewed as part of the learning process.	Work is usually corrected by the teacher; errors are viewed as mistakes.
Learning is reinforced internally through the child’s own repetition of an activity and internal feelings of success.	Learning is reinforced externally by test scores and rewards competition and grades.
Care of self and environment are emphasized as integral to the learning process.	Less emphasis on self-care, spatial awareness, and care of environment.
Child can work where she/he is comfortable and the child often has choices between working alone or with a group that is highly collaborative among older students.	Child is usually assigned a specific work space; talking among peers is discouraged.
Multi-disciplinary, interwoven curriculum.	Curriculum areas usually taught as separate topics.
Child learns to share leadership; egalitarian interaction is encouraged.	Hierarchical classroom structure is more prominent.
Progress is reported through multiple formats: conferences, narrative reports, checklists, and portfolios of student’s work.	Progress is usually reported through conferences, report cards/grades, and test scores.
Children are encouraged to teach, collaborate, and help each other.	Most teaching is done by the teacher and collaboration is an alternative teaching strategy.
Child is provided opportunities to choose own work from interests and abilities, concepts taught within context of interest.	Curricula organized and structured for child based on the curricula standards.
Early start in school (2-3 years old).	Late start in school (5-6 years old).

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There is a community atmosphere in the classrooms.	There is little socialization.
Students have a longer, freer work period.	There are frequent interruptions and transitions.
Emphasis is placed on learning.	Emphasis is placed on grades.
Emphasis on individuality.	Emphasis on conformity.
Emphasis on peace is taught throughout the curriculum.	Based on corporal punishment.
Parent participation and strong home/school ties are encouraged.	Little parent involvement.
Progress reports are based on observation.	Report cards are based on grades.
The schedule is child-centered.	The schedule is adult-centered.
Multiage grouping.	Same age grouping.

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