



## An Introduction to Montessori

Community life is a very important element in any early years' environment. The development of the young child's social skills is essential in their healthy development towards self-esteem, independence and care and respect for others. The concept is developed by allowing the child to take leading role in their environment, through freedom of choice and movement. Everything in the classroom is at their disposal, designed for their enjoyment and development. The furniture is child-sized so that they too can have a part to play in where things are and help to maintain order and cleanliness. This develops not only a certain responsibility but also a sense of achievement and control. Montessori called her schools "Casa de Bambini", translated this means the "Children's Home".

A unique aspect to a Montessori class and one that sometimes causes room for concern is that children of mixed ages work together in the same space. A typical class might be composed of one third two and a half-year olds, one third three to three and a half year- olds and one third four and above year olds. All of us have different personalities and life experiences (i.e. cultural, social etc...) therefore the older child is often found teaching the younger child some new knowledge or skill they have learned (reinforcing and perfecting their own understanding) or helping the other achieve something that is just above their reach, or merely inspiring the young child to begin a new challenge. However, let us not be so short sighted that we cannot see that the older children also gain from the younger. I once taught a two and a half-year-old who knew all the countries in Africa something, without an atlas at hand, I could certainly not repeat. The young children also often have a greater sensitivity reminding the older child of their roots in development and are constantly questioning their work and their actions. A role model for ALL!

The classroom contains materials connected to many curriculum areas.

### *Practical life*

- Prepares the child in the care of self, develops concentration, fine and gross motor skills and independence; these materials are the foundation of later learning.

### *Art*

- The creative subjects are reflected in the Art area, book corner and through musical instruments and activities. These are available to the child throughout the day.

### *The Sensorial*

- Introduces material covering the five senses and helps the child gain important knowledge and language, particularly for mathematics.

### *The Mathematics*

- Uses attractive materials to introduce the quantities 0 - 10 and then if the child is ready to continue the quantities and symbols form 11 up and introduce simple operations of additions and subtraction.

### *The Language*

- The area begins with the popular game of "I-spy" to help the child become familiar with their phonic sounds and goes on to introduce writing and reading skills.

### *The Cultural*

- The subjects include Biology, Geography, History and Science; giving the child information through puzzles, models and matching exercises.

The children experience these areas through individual and group presentations following their developmental needs and interests. The subjects are connected to the topic themes that we use to introduce children to the world they live in.



The Montessori classroom allows all to follow their own individual learning programme laying foundations for the child's later learning in a happy, relaxed and spontaneous space containing such a large variety of learning experiences that the sky is the limit!

The educational materials that the children use are created at all levels so there is something for everyone in almost every area of the curriculum. If the young child chooses something too complex they will realise by trying that they cannot achieve it. The way the materials are laid out in the room allow the older children to return to more simple pleasurable activities that give them opportunity to relax and take in the more complex and abstract academic work. For the younger child they can see their curriculum laid out before them (simple to complex, concrete to abstract).

A Montessori classroom should reflect life in all its realities, preparing the young child in all aspects of their development, working towards fulfilling each of their potentials. Not an easy task for parents or teachers alike but one that has been given to us by the children themselves, for their futures.

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### Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori was born in Italy in 1870 and died in Holland in 1952.

Her family expected her to become a teacher and made sure she had a good education, but as her studies developed, she expressed an interest in science. She showed an independent spirit and against great prejudices towards women of that time, she eventually went to medical school and became a doctor. It was through becoming the first woman doctor of medicine in Italy that she became a recognised personality.

Her first appointment / job was at a psychiatric clinic in Rome, where she encountered the so-called "idiot" children. They had no sensory stimulation of any kind. When they were taken food, they would throw themselves on the floor afterwards looking for crumbs. It occurred to her that this behaviour was a distinct effort to learn about the world around them through their hands. This idea, that the path to intellectual development is through the hands, is a major theme in her methods.

She was convinced that these mentally deficient children could be helped, so she travelled to London and Paris to study the work of two of her pioneers, Itard and Seguin.

Montessori took the principal ideas of education through movement and education through the senses and adapted and developed them into a system that became her own. This was the start of the Montessori Method. Some of the "idiot" children she taught were labelled uneducable, but through her methods they learned to read and write and even passed primary exams with higher grades than the "normal" children.

Montessori set up her own school in a tenement house in a slum clearance and re-housing programme. She called it "Cassa de Bambini" or "Children's House". It was here that she was now able to apply her methods to "normal" children. These too benefitted from her method and it was soon evident that all children were capable of learning and achieving through the Montessori Method.

Montessori was a great traveller, learning about different countries and cultures and today Montessori is worldwide and growing.