

Montessori Education Philosophy

Dr. Maria Montessori, Italy's first woman doctor, began her work with children in 1899 when she was asked by the Italian Government to direct a state school for retarded children. After close observation and isolation of the learning difficulties, Dr. Montessori developed simple teaching apparatus to help these children. The success of Dr. Montessori's approach was revealed when these children shocked authorities by passing state examinations given to normal children of the same age. She devoted her life to the education of children and was honored and respected throughout the world at the time of her death in 1952. Today, the Montessori method of education is acknowledged as a progressive holistic approach to preparing children for life.

Maria Montessori believed that the most important period for education is not the age of university studies but the period from birth to age six. The environment of these first years of life will be most influential to the physical, intellectual, and spiritual development of the individual. It is before age six that we can best encourage or discourage many life-long characteristics. This is the period when the intelligence itself is being formed.

Upon entering the Montessori school, children gain, more than anything, a respite from the adult sized and ideal environment for the young child; suited to the inherent needs and interests of the three to six year old. We help the children to develop powers of deliberation, self-initiative, and independent thinking. Once developed, if matured properly, these will remain lifelong tendencies.

The young child is a lover of work. In the classroom, we give the opportunity to exercise the desire, by providing appropriate productive activities. When allowed to follow natural instincts, the child avoids developing misconceptions of work as drudgery. As a result, true joy for learning begins.

The child is allowed to choose tasks freely, within the ground rules of the classroom. Rather than being directed minute-by-minute, by the teacher, the child is encouraged in independent decisionmaking, and learns to listen to his own needs and desires.

At this young age, every child is driven to self-perfection. When given the freedom to do so, the child will repeat an exercise. The guide allows children to discover their own mistakes through working with the materials, which are self-correcting in their design. Children learn to be unafraid of making mistakes and use them as stepping-stones to greater discoveries.

The children work in an absence of rewards and punishments. The guide does not give positive or negative reinforcement as incentive. Instead, the children are encouraged to appreciate their successes and accomplishments, for their own sake. Children easily become dependent upon an adult's approval and praise. Left to acknowledge and recognize their own accomplishments, the children are helped to feel the consequences of their actions. This results in the creation of an inner discipline.

Finally, the Montessori Method develops the whole personality of the child, not merely his intellectual faculties but also his reasoning abilities with their emotional compliments. By living as a free member of a real social community, the child is trained in those fundamental social qualities that form the basis of good citizenship.

AST Early Childhood Program

In order to create a wide-spread implementation of our goal to develop of students as self-directed independent learners, AST offers a unique version of Montessori instruction in a model blended with traditional outcomes in single age classrooms. All pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers have earned certificates in Montessori pedagogy.

In 2017-2018, all of the Early Childhood classes will be moved to the Eastman Building to create a focused Early Childhood Learning Center, complete with a private entrance from a newly renovated gate behind the school on Rue Rossignol. To ensure maximum learning, class sizes will be held at 16-18 students. The building will house five classes, with one common area for arts and messy sciences.

In a Montessori class there are a wide range of activities available to the children at all ability levels which make possible the implementation of the Montessori model of individualized work, progress and independence. Maria Montessori believed that children learn best through their own efforts. As such, the teacher has both the role of guide and “objective observer”, as well as teacher.

PRACTICAL LIFE: Activities such as sweeping, pouring liquids and grains, sponging, polishing, washing windows, tables, food preparation, etc., are designed to develop the child's natural sense for order, focus of attention, ability to concentrate, sequential memory and eye for detail; all fundamental disciplines for further academic learning. These activities also encourage independence of the person and environment as well as social skills of grace and courtesy

SENSORIAL: The senses play an important role in the child's development at this early age. The exercises are designed to develop an awareness and refinement of the senses: visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory and gustatory senses. Sensory education helps the child acquire details and accurate knowledge leading toward a reasoning mind. It is a basis for future cognitive learning.

LANGUAGE: Language and its development is an integral part of each learning area as well as special area in and of itself. The classroom exposes the children to many materials and activities which will enable them to develop and refine their vision, hearing and speech as a preparation for more formal learning of language. In general readiness, the child prepares his hand for writing with equipment such as the insets. Through guidance in the way letters look, sound and feel, the child moves into the simple stages of phonetic reading. Next, they are introduced to more complex sounds, expanding their reading ability as a result. This approach gives the children a total reading experience which enables them to do more than identify words; it leads them to understand the ideas and feelings of the author. Parallel exercises enhance writing skills, both physical and creative.

MATHEMATICS: Humans are born with a mathematical mind and encounter mathematical concepts every day. By using manipulative materials to explore first the concept of quantity then its numerical symbol representation, the children can develop a clear comprehension of the foundation of the decimal system and operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division and eventually move towards working with them on more abstract levels.

CULTURAL: Cultural subjects include art, music, history, geography, and science, nature with Hawaiian studies applied to each. Whenever possible, these are taught in conjunction with other interests in order to give the child an appreciation of how the arts, sciences and humanities affect everyday life.