

“THIS FORCE THAT WE CALL LOVE IS THE GREATEST ENERGY OF THE UNIVERSE.”
MARIA MONTESSORI



Over one hundred years ago, Dr. Maria Montessori told us that the truths she had discovered about children should concern us not only as educators, but as a society as well. She ‘looked deeply into the nature of love, particularly as part of the nature of children’. She said we must study love and use it; it is a gift that has a specific purpose. “It must be treasured, developed and enlarged to the fullest possible extent... It holds the universe together because it is a real force, and not just an idea”. Montessori developed her philosophy of education so deeply connected to the spirit of the child and dedicated her life to bringing this vision to the world.



Born in 1870, she became the first female physician in Italy in 1896 and spent the next decade practicing medicine and continuing her own education through the study and practice of psychology, philosophy, and anthropology. In 1906 she founded the first *Casa dei Bambini*, or "Children's House" in Rome and from that day on, she dedicated her life to furthering the ‘self-creating process of the child’. She placed great emphasis on human potential and developed an educational method with a vision of the whole child: body, mind, and spirit. Montessori determined that to be human means to “have a family and it is within the family that socialization and primary education of young children should take place beginning from birth”. Montessori discovered the ‘sensitive periods’ in which a child develops unique emotional and intellectual qualities that are critical to his self-development. He

unconsciously knows that the time to learn a specific skill is now and his intensity reflects his need for that particular acquisition. Learning manifests through 'the manipulation of the environment and the training of the senses'. Montessori thought that within every child there exists an "unconscious mental state, which is of a creative nature" and called it the '*Absorbent Mind*'.

"First, he takes in the world as a whole, then he analyzes it...He constructs his mind step by step till it becomes possessed of memory, the power to understand, the ability to think...The discovery that the child has a mind able to absorb on its own account..."

Montessori saw the *Absorbent Mind* in two phases. During the first phase, from birth to three years old, the young child unconsciously acquires his basic abilities; this is the 'period of unconscious creation' or the 'unconscious absorbent mind' and the



child will pass through significant sensitive periods: those for order, movement and language. The child's work during this period is to become independent from the adult for his basic human functions. He learns to speak, to walk, to gain control of his hands and to master his bodily functions. The child will then move into the next phase of the *Absorbent Mind*, the 'period of conscious work' or the 'conscious absorbent mind'. During this period, the child's mathematical mind compels him to perfect in himself that which is now there. His fundamental task during this phase is freedom; freedom to move purposefully, freedom to choose and freedom to concentrate.

Knowledge, according to Montessori, is life. It is created out of the ability to analyze, criticize, examine, observed, and interpret information in a meaningful way and results from our experiences in the environment. Furthermore, mistakes should be embraced, for they are a natural and critical part of the learning process.

Montessori developed a curriculum that provided an impressionable sensory experience in which stimulating, hands-on activities heightened their intellectual abilities. She felt that when the child uses their senses they become active participants in their education and absorb knowledge through their environment. She also found great importance in teaching practical life skills. She also felt it was worthwhile for the child to develop self-discipline and independence so that they can mature into meaningful members of society.

The school teacher, or directress, needs to be a nurturer while at the same time not

IT IS NOT ENOUGH FOR THE TEACHER TO LOVE THE CHILD. SHE MUST FIRST LOVE AND UNDERSTAND THE UNIVERSE. SHE MUST PREPARE HERSELF, AND TRULY WORK AT IT.

impeding on the child's self discovery.

Maria Montessori was very specific about the role of the teacher:

“The training of the teacher who is to help life is something far more than the learning of ideas. It includes the training of character; it is a preparation of the spirit.”

“The word education must not be understood in the sense of teaching but of assisting the psychological development of the child.”

“Education should no longer be mostly imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities.”

The directress must observe the children at work and interject only when necessary. Through observation, she is able to push the child to higher levels of thinking. She is also responsible for making certain that the environment is beautiful and bright, with everything in its place. “...All the apparatus is to be kept meticulously in order, beautiful and shining, in perfect condition. Nothing may be missing, so that to the child it always seems new, complete and ready for use”. This is known as the

‘prepared environment’ and if structured, organized, and aesthetically pleasing, it should satisfy the child’s curiosity and discovery. It should also be mentioned that the materials were designed to be self-correcting, allowing the child to gain knowledge from them on their own through feedback, clue and recognition when mistake are made. The materials are designed from concrete to abstract, from simple to complex, with a clear sequence as a unit. Montessori allowed the children the freedom to choose what materials they wanted to work with as well as who they wanted to work with, feeling that there is much that a child can teach another child more easily than a teacher can. The class is a mixed-aged group and there is mutual respect among the children and a lack of competitiveness that allows them to learn from each other. Individual work and teamwork is promoted, and the variety of interests and developmental stages fosters both independence and collaboration. Children are free to move, to explore and absorb as long as not to disturb others; this freedom “allows the children to grow in social grace, inner discipline and joy”.

Values of self-expression, consideration, proper social skills, and community are a few principles that guide the environment, and there is a great awareness of respect for others and respect for the environment. The intention of Montessori education is to “develop each person’s abilities to the fullest extent while celebrating and enhancing his or her uniqueness and cultural background. The goal of education is the development of autonomous, competent, responsible, adaptive citizens-lifelong learners and problem solvers”. This means that education is for life, not merely for the intellectual accomplishment, “the world is open to them, so their whole being [physically, emotionally and spiritually] could be fully and properly developed.”



Maria Montessori would likely determine that human potential is limitless and as caregivers, we must allow this idea to resonate in our actions. The experiences a child has can be limitless if they are made available to them, thus making human potential limitless. The key to this is love:

“The whole labor of life, which fulfills itself subject to its laws and brings beings into harmony, reaches consciousness under the form of LOVE.... [The child’s] self-realization comes about in him through love.”

This intense love of the environment within each child is “the secret of all man’s progress and the secret of social evolution”. Children are here to remind us [adults], if we are open to it, that “There is another life, that you have forgotten. Learn to live better”. Children have the power to renew us, to teach us all to live better.



“We must therefore turn to the child as to the key to the fate of our future life ... to learn from him the practical secret of our own life. From this point of view the figure of the child presents itself as powerful and mysterious, an object of meditation, for the child who holds in himself the secret of our nature becomes our master.”

Each child represents an opportunity for change, invention, innovation, and creativity. Each child also has a deep longing to understand what it means to be a human being in this universe and what his contribution might be to the whole. The Montessori environment allows the child the freedom to develop his mind so that he is able to find the answers that satisfy him. It is through this way of education, through supporting the creation of mind and essence of spirit, that power is given to the transformation of a more unified and loving existence of all humanity in our vast and infinite universe.

“WE MUST HELP THE CHILD TO ACT FOR HIMSELF, WILL FOR HIMSELF, THINK FOR HIMSELF; THIS IS THE ART OF THOSE WHO ASPIRE TO SERVE THE SPIRIT.”

MARIA MONTESSORI

"NOT ONLY CAN IMAGINATION TRAVEL THROUGH INFINITE SPACE, BUT ALSO THROUGH INFINITE TIME; WE CAN GO BACKWARDS THROUGH THE EPOCHS, AND HAVE THE VISION OF THE EARTH AS IT WAS, WITH THE CREATURES THAT INHABITED IT."

MARIA MONTESSORI

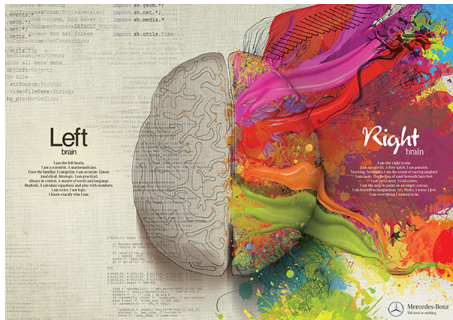


In your imagination, you can travel anywhere at the speed of light, without any obstacles. You can fly free from the confines of gravity, swim across the oceans without needing to breathe, befriend a dragon, or find out if there really is life on Mars. Imagination makes it possible to experience a whole world inside the mind. It is the ability to form a mental image of something that is not perceived through the five senses. Imagination allows one to look at any situation from a different point of view, and to mentally explore the past and future.

The most sacred thing about the elementary child is that he has embarked on the stage of development in which he possesses a new power; he has the capacity for imagination. The child is no longer completely satisfied by what his senses can answer, like how something looks or feels, or smells or tastes; he wants to know just *how* everything works, and why it is so. Maria Montessori believed that this emergence [of imagination] was a truly unique human experience and deserved to be nurtured and encouraged. It is through his interaction with the environment that he develops his imagination and creativity. In allowing the child the freedom of

mind, you allow him to find connections to the environment, as well as amongst his studies, and thus, he is able to construct profound ideas and images on his own.

The ability to be creative and imaginative allows the brain to make connections



between one area of learning and another. The part of the brain responsible for imagination is located in the frontal lobes and also helps to facilitate reflection, empathy, play and creativity. When children engage in imagination and creativity, their brains are signal processing at a higher level: they are literally seeing, sensing, hearing and feeling more of the world.

In the Montessori Elementary classroom, we bring the Universe to life through the child's imagination. Cosmic Education is the way in which Maria Montessori exposed the children to an imaginative and reasoning exploration of the universe, all while allowing the child to gain a deeper understanding and value for the interconnectedness of life. As in all other areas, we use materials to represent concepts concretely so that the child can understand certain ideas. It is his imagination, powerful and saturated with authentic experiences, which enable him to come to accurate conclusions about his world.

IMAGINATION

1. The ability of the mind to form new and original ideas that have their basis in reality.
2. The ability to be creative and resourceful.

In Elementary, all subjects “must be presented so as to touch the imagination of the child, and make him enthusiastic, and then add fuel to the burning fire that has been lit,” Montessori explains. “Our aim therefore is not merely to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his inmost core.”

The goal is to strike the imagination and send the child on a quest of discovery while keeping the core principal in mind: educate the human potential. With this in mind, every story told must resonate with this principle rather than of entertainment. The child will certainly be entertained; your drama should enthrall him however it

should always be rooted in reality. Any story that helps the child feel gratitude towards “the wonders of the world and sympathy with humanity” is a great and powerful story. With imagination the child can ‘put himself in the place of those who were before him – in contact with the great works of nature, or of humans’ accomplishments in art, science, literature, music, culture, life, and all of its manifestations – this feeds or fuels the creative imagination’.

As Montessori caregivers, we must provide the child with the opportunity to use his creativity and imagination to decide how to use his free time, what fantasy to explore or what part of his world he’d like to discover more about at his own pace, in his own way. This is the process of a meaningful and life-long education. We must set the imagination traveling through time and space so the intellect is free to create, and ultimately, free to reach his highest human potential.

“THE SECRET OF SUCCESS IS FOUND TO LIE IN THE RIGHT USE OF IMAGINATION IN AWAKENING INTEREST, AND THE STIMULATION OF SEEDS OF INTEREST ALREADY SOWN BY ATTRACTIVE LITERARY AND PICTORIAL MATERIALS, BUT ALL CORRELATED TO A CENTRAL IDEA, OF GREATLY ENOBLING INSPIRATION—THE COSMIC PLAN IN WHICH ALL, CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY, SERVE THE GREAT PURPOSE OF LIFE.”

