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### The Joy of Learning

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HONORS SPECIAL STUDIES

Department of Education

for

Mrs. Carl Durkee

Fall 1970

by

Lenora Risher

"THE JOY OF LEARNING"

The year 1970 marks an important milestone in the history of Montessori. It is the 100th year anniversary of the birth of Maria Montessori. She was born in Italy on August 31, 1870. Choosing to become the first woman physician\_educator\_psychologist, she graduated from the University of Rome with double honors. Dr. Montessori became interested in and developed a program for retarded children. Her success made her direct the new therapeutic education toward normal children. However, Montessori gave special education the scope and direction it follows today. She became a world famous as well as controversial person and traveled extensively writing and lecturing on her new methods.

A philosophy of self realization under lies all her work in developing materials that operate her system. She drew many of the concepts and ideas from Itard and Sequin. The thrill of success came with a free flow of natural energy. She was convinced that freedom of choice and individual active learning answered the needs of all children. Her experiments were to make the learner the center of education and to adapt a curriculum according to his interests and needs. Her pupils began to be enthusiastic, increased in achievement, worked harmoniously, were more balanced in movement, were self sufficient in their work and more honest in their attitudes toward others.

The basic principle of Montessori philosophy is that every child carries within him potentialities of the man that he may become. To develop to the fullest, he must have freedom which is achieved through order and self discipline. Montessori recognizes the potential and all attempts to develop it be means of a prepared environment. The purpose is to provide the vehicle whereby the child attains inner discipline and control. He becomes the master of himself.

A child's world is full of many sights and sounds. From the chaos, he must create order. Gradually, he learns to master himself and his environment. Dr. Montessori developed the "prepared environment which possesses a definite order and disposes the child to develop at his own speed, according to his own capabilities, and a non-competitive atmosphere." "Never let a child risk failure until he has a reasonable chance of success," says Dr. Montessori. She felt it was necessary to acquire basic skills before being placed in a competitive situation.

She discovered a sensitive period of growth. The years between three and six are the years when a child learns the ground rules for human behavior. His character is formed by the age of six. This time may be devoted to civilizing the child or teaching him to take his place in society through the acquisition of good manners and habits. The child benefits later in life when he is free to give himself to the development of his intellect.

The method used in the Montessori School may be referred to as "structural learning." Since the child has learned to work by himself in the prepared environment, he is ready to enjoy the presence of other children without working directly with them. The teacher is able to work with each child individually. The structure of Montessori learning and training involves the use of many materials with which the child may work independently. These materials were painstakingly and scientifically developed by Dr. Montessori.

The existence and use of any piece of apparatus in the prepared environment is dictated in relation to its direct ability to answer the needs of the child on a physical, mental, or spiritual level. Apparatus provides the motives for activity of the child. It is also most important to note that most of the Montessori materials have what is termed a built-in control of error. The error becomes self evident and requires no



adult intervention. An error is a constructive means of learning and children are interested in finding and correcting their mistakes.

The only valid impulse to learning is self motivation of the child. Children move themselves toward learning by nature. Adults often intervene, with the best intentions, and place obstacles to learning in the child's path. Children will learn because of or in spite of the adults in their world. To this effect, Dr. Montessori stated that any unnecessary help given to the child hinders him in growth. The teacher prepares the environment, directs the activity, functions as the authority and protector of the children and the environment, and offers work according to each child's readiness and needs.

The Montessori child is free to learn because he has acquired experience with both physical and mental order. He is aware of his freedom and the responsibility to himself and to others. Here lies the core of the whole child. Intellectual, physical and social development are of equal value. The teacher strives to encourage and guide the child, to help him realize a balanced personality that will carry him happily through life.

The Montessori discipline is an inner discipline--control which the child develops over his own behavior through his interest in the Montessori materials. Many so-called undisciplined children are really frustrated by a lack of proper stimulation and would become happier and more self controlled after a period of time in a Montessori class. When a child's intellectual energies are utilized in a constructive manner, there is no energy left over for mischievousness nor deviation. This is true inner discipline.

The ideal size of a class is about 20 with teacher and assistant. It is important that there not be too few people in a class; the teacher's job is not to teach in the usual sense but to encourage the child to learn how to learn. Classes are ungraded. The children are from  $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $5\frac{1}{2}$





for primary grades and  $6\frac{1}{2}$ - $9\frac{1}{2}$  for elementary grades. As a result, a child can work with older children in one subject and with younger children in another, and still have social interaction with children his own age: This is the only solution to the problem of skipping and withholding children who do not fit in academically with others of the same chronological age.

The Little Rock Montessori School is located on Woodland Heights Road in Pleasant Valley. It is a beautiful new building with wonderful facilities. The parents and administrators have worked together to complete the school.

The same holidays are observed by the Montessori school that are observed by the public schools. The only exception is the longer break at Easter. School hours are 9:00-2:30 for a full day and 9:00-11:30 or 11:45-2:30 for half days. Each child brings his own lunch. Snacks are offered and naps can be taken if a child shows signs of fatigue.

Tuition is 600.00 for the full day school year, September through May. Half day tuition is 396.00.

The children are provided material in Art, Music, History, Literature, Biology, Botany, Science, Geography, Algebra, and Geometry. French is offered twice a week. Each child is free to work on material of his choosing as long as he pleases. The only requirement is that he replace his material where it belongs when he finishes.

Everyone is quiet and very well behaved. The entire classroom is geared to prepare the child or to get him ready to learn. Explosion is the term used when a child completes the requirements for readiness and actually takes on the task.

My first visit immediately brought my attention to the pleasant atmosphere. The children were all busy with their work and were well



behaved--no one was loud or boisterous. The teacher apparently had few problems with discipline. The second visit revealed an incident where two children had to be called down for their conduct. However, I was pleased to note that the teacher took them and talked quietly with them. In a few minutes, they were working together again.

Each Wednesday, visitation in another classroom is allowed. A child may invite another child to eat lunch in his room. Special attention is given to setting the table that day and everyone looks forward to Wednesdays.

On the second trip, I discovered that the ungraded primary class had plans to visit a museum after lunch. Everyone had begun to finish their work and put it away. One dainty little girl had her work on a table with colored flags. She was working on a history unit. Another child, a boy, had an abacus before him which he was using to complete a math problem. I found several girls spending their morning reading a book in the loft. It was interesting to note that the children were not being bothered by other activities going on in the same room.

The administration of the school desires to have children from all backgrounds. Several scholarships are given to children who are deserving but are not able to go due to financial conditions. There are both black and white children in the classrooms. Occasionally, you see a handicapped child but there are no severely retarded children at present.

In the primary classes children were participating in such activities as putting large wooden puzzles together. A child was learning to distinguish sounds by shaking cylinders filled with pebbles, sand, or beans. A small boy poured rice from a pitcher to a glass in order to develop muscle control. Several children were grouped in the center of the room with the tower blocks. By learning to place the largest on bottom and the smallest on top, they were exercising coordination of the hands and eyes. Montessori children are taught useful responsibilities that can be put to use at home.



Montessori is both a philosophy and a system. From my research, I have become convinced that it is a well organized and worthwhile system. It has become a special interest of mine.

## THE TWELVE POINTS OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD

1. It is based on years of patient observation of child nature.
2. It has proven itself of universal application. Within a single generation it has been tried with complete success with children of almost every civilized nation. Race, color, climate, nationality, social rank, type of civilization--all these make no difference to its successful application.
3. It has revealed the small child as a lover of work, intellectual work, spontaneously chosen and carried out with profound joy.
4. It is based on the child's imperious need to learn by doing. At each stage in the child's mental growth, corresponding occupations are provided by means of which he develops his faculties.
5. While it offers the child a maximum of spontaneity, it nevertheless enables him to reach the same, or even a higher, level of scholastic attainment as under the old systems.
6. Though it does away with the necessity of coercion by means of rewards and punishments, it achieves a higher discipline than formerly. It is an active discipline which originates within the child and it is not imposed from without.
7. It is based on a profound respect for the child's personality and removes from him the preponderating influence of the adult, thus leaving him room to grow in biological independence. Hence the child is allowed a large measure of liberty (not license) which forms the basis of real discipline.
8. It enables the teacher to deal with each child individually in each subject, and thus guide him according to his individual requirements.
9. Each child works at his own pace. Hence the quick child is not held back by the slow, nor is the latter, in trying to keep up with the former, obliged to flounder along hopelessly out of his depth. Each stone in the mental edifice is "well and truly laid" before the next is added.
10. It does away with the competitive spirit and its train of baneful results. More than this, at every turn it presents endless opportunities among the children for mutual help - which is joyfully given and gratefully received.
11. Since the child works from his own free choice, without competition and coercion, he is freed from danger of over-strain, feelings of inferiority, and other experiences which are apt to be the unconscious cause of profound mental disturbances in later life.
12. Finally, the Montessori method develops the whole personality of the child, not merely his intellectual faculties but also his powers of deliberation, initiative, and independent choice, with their emotional complements. By living as a free member of a real social community, the child is trained in those fundamental social qualities which form the basis of good citizenship.

This material was collected from the Montessori in Little Rock.

## ALPHABET SOUNDS

The Montessori child learns the most often-used sound of the alphabet before he learns the letter names and sequence. This is most beneficial to his eventual "total reading", i.e. correct association of written symbols and sounds, proper pronunciation, spelling, and word comprehension.

When you are reading with your child and he stumbles on a word WAIT a few moments before you make the appropriate alphabet or diphthong sound (i.e. vowel combination or consonant combination). If he is unable to identify the letter(s) by making the correct sound(s), say them correctly and have him repeat them. DO NOT CORRECT THE CHILD OR CHIDE HIM. ("I know you knew that all the time, didn't you?") ONLY GIVE THE CORRECT PRONUNCIATION.

| <u>Letter</u> | <u>Sound as in</u> | <u>Letter</u> | <u>Sound as in</u>     |
|---------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| a             | apple              | n             | nut                    |
| b             | box                | o             | ox                     |
| c             | cat                | p             | pup                    |
| d             | dog                | q             | quick                  |
| e             | extra              | r             | red                    |
| f             | frog               | s             | sit                    |
| g             | grass              | t             | tin                    |
| h             | ham                | u             | up                     |
| i             | ink                | v             | van                    |
| j             | jam                | w             | wet                    |
| k             | kid                | x             | x-ray                  |
| l             | lid                | y             | (give both sounds) yes |
| m             | mat                |               | <u>and</u> funny       |
|               |                    | z             | Zoo                    |



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