

MONTESSORI EDUCATION - A Few Questions and Answers

WHAT IS IT? This system of education is both a philosophy of child growth and a rationale for guiding such growth. It is based on the child's developmental needs for freedom within limits and a carefully prepared environment which guarantees exposure to material and experiences through which to develop intelligence as well as physical and psychological abilities. It is designed to take full advantage of the self-motivation and unique ability of children to develop their own capabilities. The child needs adults to expose him to the possibilities of his life, but the child himself must direct his response to those possibilities. Premises of Montessori education are:

1. Children are to be respected as different from adults, and as individuals who differ from each other.
2. The child possesses unusual sensitivity and mental powers for absorbing and learning from his environment that are unlike those for the adult both in quality and capacity.
3. The most important years of growth are the first six years. Unconscious learning is gradually brought to the conscious level.
4. The child has a deep love and need for purposeful work. He works, however, not as an adult for profit and completion of a job, but for the sake of the activity itself. It is this activity which accomplishes for him his most important goal: the development of himself—his mental, physical, and psychological powers.

IS IT FOR ALL CHILDREN? The Montessori system has been used successfully with children between the ages of two and a half and eighteen from all socio-economic levels, representing those in regular classes as well as gifted, retarded, emotionally disturbed, and physically handicapped. Because of its individual approach, it is uniquely suited to public education, where children of many backgrounds are grouped together. It is also appropriate for classes which the student teacher ratio is high because children learn at an early age to work independently.

IS THE CHILD FREE TO DO WHAT HE CHOOSES IN THE CLASSROOM? The child is free to move about the classroom at will, to talk to other children, to work with any equipment whose purpose he understands, or to ask the teacher to introduce new material to him. He is not free to disturb other children at work or to abuse the equipment that is so important to his development.

WHAT DOES THE DIRECTRESS DO? The directress works with individual children, introduces material, and gives guidance where needed. One of her primary tasks is careful observation of each child in order to determine his needs and to gain the knowledge she needs in preparing the environment to aid his growth. Her method of teaching is indirect in that she neither imposes upon the child as in direct teaching nor abandons him as a non-directive, permissive approach. Rather, she is constantly alert to the direction in which the child himself has indicated he wishes to go and she actively seeks ways to help him accomplish his goals.

WHAT DOES IT DO FOR THE CHILD? The goals of Montessori for children are several:

1. It encourages self-discipline, self-knowledge, and independence.
2. It encourages enthusiasm for learning.
3. It is an organized approach to problem solving and academic skills.