

# MARIA MONTESSORI

1870 - 1952



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# Biography

Maria Montessori was born in Ancona, Italy on August 31, 1870. She was born to a well respected and influential family. She was expected to grow up to fulfill one of two traditional roles for the Italian woman - teacher or mother. Instead, rising above many obstacles, she pursued an advanced degree at the University of Rome and became the first woman physician to graduate in Italy. Her interests drew her work to children, initially those who were economically disadvantaged and those who had special needs.

With a background in biology, psychiatry and anthropology, Dr. Maria Montessori's decisions about working with children were made by observing them first. Since she was not trained as an educator, her methods and materials were based upon watching what children did and what they were attracted to. Through her observations and trial and error, she developed what became known as the Montessori Method of Education.

She opened her first Casa Dei Bambini (children's house) in Rome in 1907. It was a radical departure from traditional educational systems in her time. She did not place children in restricting environments, but instead designed the environment to reflect the children. Tables and chairs were child-sized and materials were placed on low shelves to be readily accessible to the students. Many of the skills were designed to teach children to become independent and take responsibility for doing things themselves.

Throughout her lifetime, Montessori continued to work for the betterment of the lives of children. She founded training centers for teachers and traveled throughout the world sharing her educational philosophy. During her later years, her focus centered on educating children to promote the principles of peace. Maria Montessori died in the spring of 1952. Her legacy has been the establishment of Montessori Schools around the world.

*I studied the children and they taught me how to teach them. ~Dr. Maria Montessori*

# Philosophy

The Montessori educational philosophy is a system for educating children from birth through age 18. The premise of this philosophy is founded in the belief that children carry within themselves the person he/she will become.

One important feature of the philosophy is the prepared environment. This environment consists of organized and coordinated materials and equipment which promote the natural development of children. Materials are self-corrective and carefully sequenced. They progress from the concrete to the abstract and appeal first to the child's senses. They are attractive and emphasize reality. Most importantly, the materials are manipulative, based on the fact that children learn by doing.

The teacher in a Montessori classroom serves more as a guide and facilitator, rather than an "instructor." The teacher prepares the environment, directs the activity, functions as the authority and offers the child a stimulating learning space. Children are introduced to the joy of learning; they gain independence and self-confidence through a structured and ordered learning environment.

*There was no method to be seen. What was seen was a child.....acting according to its own nature.*

*~Dr. Maria Montessori*

# The "Normalized" Child

The basic goal of the Montessori method is "normalization" of the child so that he/she becomes well-balanced, spontaneous and able to utilize his/her capabilities to the fullest. Some of the characteristics of such a child are the following:

- Ability to concentrate well
- Sense of personal dignity
  - Independence
  - Self-motivation
  - Love of order
- Enjoyment of repetition
  - Ability to work alone
  - Self-discipline
- Desire for freedom of choice and movement
- Pleasure and fulfillment in work for its own sake.
- Desire to work without need for rewards or punishment
  - Obedience
  - Love of learning

*"What was seen was a child...acting according to its own nature"*

*- Dr. Maria Montessori*