

What Makes a Montessorian?

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[Editors' note: This is an excerpt from an article originally published in *The American Montessori Society Bulletin*, Spring 1962.]

Children learn, with or without teachers. They absorb knowledge from whatever environment they are in. The type of environment conducive to children's learning depends largely on adults. Adults have always professed to love children. Less often have they professed a need to respect them. Many are the adults who believe that the role of the child is to respect the adult and not the reverse. Maria Montessori believed that any effective education of the child must necessarily involve a modification of the adult.

"The adult considers everything that affects the psyche of the child from the standpoint of its reference to himself, and so misunderstands the child. It is this point of view that leads to the consideration of the child as an empty being which the adult must fill by his own endeavors, as the inert and incapable being for whom everything must be done, as a being without an inner guide, whom the adult must guide step by step from without.

"Finally, the adult acts as [if] he were the child's creator, and considers good and evil in the child's actions from the standpoint of relation to himself. . . . Any way in which the child departs from the characteristics of the

adult is an evil that must be speedily corrected. And, in adopting such an attitude, which unconsciously cancels the child's personality, the adult feels the conviction of zeal, love, and sacrifice" (Ref. Montessori, Maria, *The Secret of Childhood*, p. 18, Orient Longman, Calcutta, 1961).

It is the transformation of the adult that is the underlying theme of the Montessori Teacher Training Program. What makes a Montessorian? A Montessorian is compounded of observer, exemplar, and protector of the child's right to learn.

The Montessorian is an observer. To learn from the child, one must observe the child. Observation is an art that must be a highly developed skill in Montessorians. The necessity for observing children and anticipating their needs becomes of increased importance in the classroom situation, where individual work allows a number of children to be engaging in different activities simultaneously under the direction of one teacher. The art of observation is a learned art. In classroom situations where the teacher is the active element and the children are passive, it is not important for the teacher to watch the children, as it is the teacher who determines what will be taught, when it will be taught, how it will be taught, and what the gratification will be for both teacher and learner.

In a Montessori class, a teacher must anticipate the needs of the child, as well as answer them by indirection.

The Montessorian must be an exemplar for the child. If the child is to imitate the actions of the adult in the environment where the adult "shows" rather than "tells," it is important that the adult himself, or herself, study carefully his demeanor from which the children will derive their principal behavior clues. Teachers learn to move quietly, to work carefully, and to give the children a chance to follow an example that is geared to the child's capability and not to the adult's facility.

The Montessori teacher is the protector of the child's right to learn: That right is little appreciated and understood in the young child. We have long protected the child's right to play in conventional, nursery, and kindergarten education. How much more does the child have the right to learn, when, in a few short years, the complex and competitive culture into which he is going will demand a great deal of him at a time when he may be unready; time will have run out for him by his sixth birthday.

There is little opportunity for the child to enjoy learning if he has not learned how to learn initially. The Montessorian recognizing the individual rhythm of the children, offers each, at his own pace, varied activities, which are both direct and indirect preparations for academic learning, is protecting the child in his first steps toward knowledge.

How is a Montessorian trained? Montessori Teacher Training attempts



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Sandpaper letters facilitate connection

to incarnate in the individual the skills of observation and participation in classroom activity that develop the integrated responses of a Montessori teacher. Through many long hours of observation and classroom participation, the trainee learns to relate the theory to the actual practice in the classroom. Through lectures on theory and practice of Montessori, as well as exposure to educational and developmental trends in early childhood education, a Montessorian learns to relate the insights of Montessori to those of

American educators. Through arduous work developing the “albums,” the vade mecum of the Montessori teacher, the workbooks in which a trainee illustrates and describes in sequence the Montessori learning material and methodology, the trainee makes habitual the learning sequence.

The Montessori teacher could be characterized briefly in this way: He does not tell, he shows. “If the child is to increase, the adult must decrease,” Montessori says. A Montessori teacher must have experienced a conversion, a

transformation, if he is to be a condition rather than an obstruction for the child’s learning.

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