

## The Purpose of Montessori Education

Dr. Maria Montessori believed that no human being is educated by another person. He must do it himself or it will never be done. A truly educated individual continues learning long after the hours and years he spends in the classroom because he is motivated from within by a natural curiosity and love for knowledge. Dr. Montessori felt, therefore, that the goal of early childhood education should not be to fill the child with facts from a pre-selected course of studies, but rather **to cultivate his own natural desire to learn.**

In the Montessori classroom this objective is approached in two ways: first, by allowing each child to experience the excitement of learning by his own choice rather than by being forced; and second, by helping him to perfect all his natural tools for learning, so that his ability will be at a maximum in future learning situations. The Montessori materials have this dual long-range purpose in addition to their immediate purpose of giving specific information to the child.



## HOW THE CHILDREN LEARN

The use of the materials is based on the young child's unique aptitude for learning which Dr. Montessori identified as the "absorbent mind." In her writings she frequently compared the young mind to a sponge. It literally **absorbs** information from the environment. The process is particularly evident in the way in which a two year-old learns his native language, without formal instruction and without the conscious, tedious effort which an adult must make to master a foreign tongue. Acquiring information in this way is a natural and delightful activity for the young child who employs all his senses to investigate his interesting surroundings.

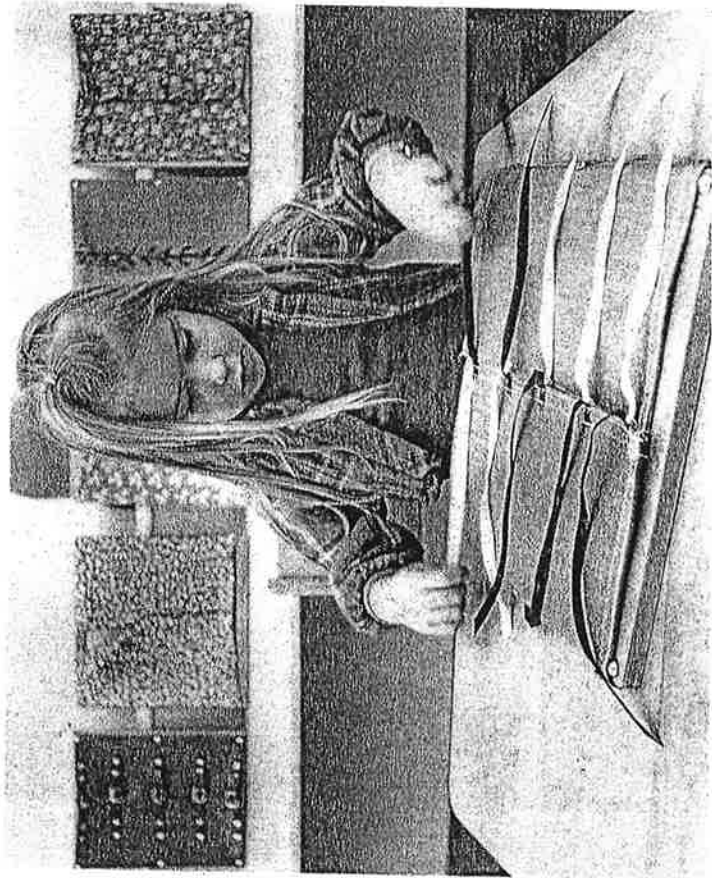
Since the child retains this ability to learn by absorbing until he is almost seven years old, Dr. Montessori reasoned that his experience could be enriched by a classroom where he could handle materials which would demonstrate basic educational information to him. Over sixty years of experience have proved her theory that a young child can learn to read, write and calculate in the same natural way that he learns to walk and talk. In a Montessori classroom the equipment invites him to do this at his own periods of interest and readiness.

Dr. Montessori always emphasized that **the hand is the chief teacher of the child.** In order to learn there must be concentration, and the best way a child can concentrate is by fixing his attention on some task he is performing with his hands. (The adult habit of doodling is a remnant of this practice.) All the equipment in a Montessori classroom allows the child to reinforce his casual impressions by inviting him to use his hands for learning.



## THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

In a Montessori classroom there is no front of the room and no teacher's desk as a focal point of attention because the stimulation for learning comes from the total environment. Dr. Montessori always referred to the teacher as a "directress," and her role differs considerably from that of a traditional teacher. She is, first of all, a very keen observer of the individual interests and needs of each child, and her daily work proceeds from her observations rather than from a prepared curriculum. She demonstrates the correct use of materials as they are individually chosen by the children. She carefully watches the progress of each child and keeps a record of his work with the materials. She is trained to recognize periods of readiness. Sometimes she must divert a child who chooses material which is beyond his ability; at other times she must encourage a child who is hesitant. Whenever a child makes a mistake, she refrains, if possible, from intervening and allows him to discover his own error through further manipulation of the self-correcting material. This procedure follows Dr. Montessori's principle that a child learns through experience.



## THE DRESSING FRAMES

The dressing frames are an important part of the Practical Life Exercises. Each frame isolates one skill of dressing and offers the child the opportunity to perfect this skill by repeating the motion over and over, thus helping him to become independent in dressing himself. There is one frame for each of the following: buttons, snaps, zipper, pins, buckles, laces, hooks and eyes, and bows to be tied. In the frame which features bow-tying, Dr. Montessori felt it was significant to have two different colored ribbons so that when giving assistance the teacher could say, "Put the black one around the white one," rather than saying, "Put this one around that one."

Since there are many opportunities for Practical Life Exercises in the home, parents should encourage the youngster in the skills of dressing himself as soon as he shows interest in the various operations. If the child wants to wash dishes, sort objects, polish silver, or pour milk, the parents should require the same orderly procedure that is encouraged in the classroom so that good working habits may become second nature to the child.