

# The Montessori Paradigm of Learning: So What?

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## Abstract

*This critical literature examines the methodology of teaching and learning developed by Dr. Maria Montessori. Maria Montessori always believed that children are a unique being and they always surprise us with their unseen capabilities. In order to fully develop those unseen capabilities, we must give them freedom of choice to explore their environment. We can assist them with sensory-based teaching methodology. Montessori methodology claims that children can teach themselves. Learners should be guided in times of need only. The job of a teacher in a Montessori classroom is to encourage learners to engage meaningfully.*

*The Montessori approach treats children as a whole being with a minimum of interruption by an adult. Maria views learners as a complete being capable of directing themselves. The learners according to Montessori ideology, can enjoy learning in any given condition and must chose what they wish to learn. The Montessori learning program is an innovative approach which unites three modalities (visual, auditory and vestibular) into one intervention. Maria argued that by applying all of our senses, it is possible to acquire necessary skills to achieve academic excellence.*

*Although Maria Montessori had devoted much of her life in educating the children, needless to say that her theory of Montessori has created many problems among our young. Montessori has given too much freedom to our children and left our little hearts without proper supervision in the classroom as well as in the playground; exposing them to unseen danger. Copyright: Qais Faryadi 12-4-2007*

The Montessori Method of learning was developed by Dr. Maria Montessori (Maria Montessori 1996-2006). She was a medical doctor from Italy. As a medical doctor, her interest was to help mentally ill and retarded children to learn. Maria always cherished one necked perception in her mind that, *children teach themselves*. As a result, she developed the Montessori methods of learning. Her methodology of teaching was unique, effective and efficient. Maria always emphasized that adult's too much intervention does not help children to learn (Bunnag, Daungvan 2000). Dr. Maria Montessori believed that each learner is a unique being, and he/she can surprise us with unique and unseen potential.



(Picture 1: Learning together)

In order to fully develop that unseen, we must give them freedom of choice to explore their environment. We can assist them with sensory-based teaching methodology. (Kramer, Rita. 1976). The Montessori Method of teaching concentrates on quality rather than quantity. Maria Montessori insisted that children must enjoy while reading (Bunnag, Daungvan 2000). In another words, in the Montessori approach children are given a holistic approach status. A learner is considered as a whole individual and must not be guided and controlled all the time by an adult.

*“Scientific observation has established that education is not what the teacher gives; education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences upon the environment. The task of the teacher becomes that of preparing a series of motives of cultural activity, spread over a specially prepared environment, and then refraining from obtrusive interference. Human teachers can only help the great work that is being done, as servants help the master. Doing so, they will be witnesses to the unfolding of the human soul and to the rising of a New Man who will not be a victim of events, but will have the clarity of vision to direct and shape the future of human society”.* [Maria Montessori, Education for a New World: Retrieved from: http://www.michaelolaf.net/maria.html](http://www.michaelolaf.net/maria.html)



(Picture 2: Making a tower)

In Montessori learning there is a sense of direction rather than forcing children to learn. According to the Montessori approach, effective learning happens when the learner's senses are inspired. Study has found that 75 % of learning occurs through visual, while 13 % occurs through hearing and touching. Smell and taste counts for 12 %. So if multi

senses are stimulated, greater learning takes place (Laird, D. (1985). The sensory learning program is an innovative approach in developing learning that unites three modalities (visual, auditory and vestibular) into one intervention allowing individuals to merge sensory messages for perfect learning outcomes (Mary Bolles. (2004). According to Professor Shelly, we all learn differently using our dynamic characteristics. We all have certain values, attached to our learning styles. If we combine all these attached values like cognitive and sensory learning styles, it undoubtedly helps us in our learning process.



(Picture 3: Matching the sounds)

She further argues that, our mind is like a locked playground. We have to unlock that playground to achieve learning outcomes. So by applying of all our senses, it is possible to acquire the necessary skills to achieve academic excellence (Shelly Loewen, 2002). Research confirms that, sensory motor integration undoubtedly helps children to achieve success and acquire necessary skills. “*Montessori method can be recast as a viable contemporary, constructivist program for early childhood education. Montessori believed that children in the crucial years from birth to age six possess extraordinary, innate mental powers to absorb the environment*” (Moll, Ian 2004).



(Picture 4: Counting)



(Picture 5: making words)



(Picture 6: Learning by touching)



(Picture 7: Discipline)

The Montessori approach is a unique methodology of teaching. It must be applied precisely for a positive outcome. Study has found that Montessori children performed well compare to those studying in public and private schools (Bower. B. 2006).

In the Montessori Method there is a link between instructors and parents. In order to learn effectively, Maria Montessori insisted that children, teachers and parents must have a link with each other for the smooth running of the whole learning process (Dorothy Goren, Ed.D. 2005). Piaget and Vygotsky had a very respectful relation with Montessori. They were only not happy with her explanation of sensory education. But in fact, Piaget and Vygotsky wanted to use her method as a bridge for constructive accomplishment. (Moll, Ian 2004). In the Montessori class, children work hands on and they get constant experience and accomplish a given task in a highly motivated manner. In another words, according to Montessori, the role of the hands play an important contribution in children's education (Smith, Dennis R. 2005, Rathundi, Kevin, Csikszentmihalyi, Mihali.2005).



(Picture 8: Solving the puzzle)

The Montessori methodology of learning emphasizes on the developmental needs of learners. One of the most outstanding objectives of the Montessori teaching is to foster competency and a sense of responsibility in the mind of young learners. In the Montessori classroom every body has a role to play. Teacher's commitment is to create an astonishing instruction and to prepare students for the learning environment. Learners'

prerequisite is to be engaged in a meaningful activity that straightens them physically and intellectually (Martin, Robin Ann 2002). Study indicated that the success of the Montessori methodology is based on respect and individualistic attention given to the learners. Instructors in Montessori teaching help learners within prepared learning conditions and let learners to strive for the excellence through their own phase. (Roemer, Kathy Lynn, Ed.D. 1999). Study also examined that the Montessori methodology emphasizes that students should be give an opportunity to choose their own material for reading and learning. This personal autonomy ameliorates them in the problem solving process (Curry, Linda Jean 1990).



(Picture 9: Making words)



(Picture 10: Thinking skill)

Although Maria Montessori has devoted much of her life in educating the children, needless to say that her theory of Montessori has created many problems among young. Montessori has given too much freedom to our children and left our young without proper supervision in the classroom. In the process, naturally, there is more war among the children rather than work in the classroom. Older children naturally suppress the younger one for the supremacy and above all for the possession of the favorite toys.

In a Montessori classroom, children are more hostile rather than friendly or rule abiding learners. They break every rule to be the winner in the class. There is no creativity as well as interaction among the children. In fact, the effectiveness of the Montessori theory is not really proven by the researchers and studies suggest that the measurement of sensory approach on children's learning outcome is insufficient (Humphries, Tom; Wright, Maureen; McDougall, Beth; Verites, Joan. 1990), Miller, Lucy Jane; Kinnealey, Moya. 1993). Kratzig, Gregory. P. Arbuthnott, Katherine D. (2006).

According to **William Heard Kilpatrick** and John Dewey, Montessori is too preventive and the concept of social interaction is missing in the classroom. While to **Dewey's** point of view, Montessori lacks creativity and the classroom is not encouraging. Montessori's teaching materials are very expensive and highly specialized and can not be used at home as most of the parents can not effort to purchase it. The Montessori concept of child evaluation is poor and not systematic. They evaluate children's progress through report cards which makes it very difficult to assess a child's success or failure (**Marsha Enright, (1997).**

Eye witness has expressed shock at the way children roam around in a Montessori compound: *"Everything about it seems a little off. I mean, they got kids playing out on the playground at all times of the day. And scraping away on those weird Mexican gourds. What kind of school is that?" Kramarczyk asked. "And the teachers have always got the kids doing these weird little puppet shows. That's gotta tell you something right there."* (**The Onion 2000**)



Montessori Teaching aid



Montessori Teaching aid



Montessori Teaching aid



Montessori Teaching aid



Montessori Teaching aid



Montessori Teaching aid



Montessori Teaching aid

Table 1: Montessori and the construction of knowledge

Picture retrieved from: <http://www.michaelolaf.net/maria.html>



**Dr. Maria Montessori 1870-1952**

<b>Montessori Learning</b>			
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Teaching</b>	<b>Theory</b>	<b>Student</b>
Develop self respect as well as for others.  Take the opportunities to educate yourself.  Respect for the teachers and adults. Contribution and good intention. Develop love for learning. Responsible student. Knowledge is a great pleasure. Learners are born with unseen talents.	Cognitive and sensory learning We have to unlock student's mind. Mental power is crucial. Early childhood education.	Learning done through exploration. Environment is the key for learning. Sensory-based learning methods. Inspiration of senses key to learning. Innovative learning.	Each learner is a unique being. Freedom of choice. Each learner learns differently. Learners have attached values.

## Discussion

Regardless of its chilling critics, Dr. Maria Montessori remains as a living example for many generations to come. The Montessori methodology somehow has fulfilled its promises to the body of existing knowledge. The promise of Montessori is simple, children learn in a unique way distinct from the adults. Instructors should not ignore the *absorbent mind* of these unique individuals. Educators can not attempt to flout the importance of sensory learning as an effective and efficient means of educating their young.

Although the Montessori methodology has come under painful critics from many outspoken oppositions about the success and failure of children under their care, educators cannot ignore Montessori's most spontaneous and life supporting learning conditions to our children. However Montessori concept of learning has not offered yet a harmonious learning condition for our children. Our learners are left without adequate supervision for a long time exposing them to the existing environmental danger. As such, without doubt there are still rooms for improvement.



(Picture 11: Learning in a unique way)

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