

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

Myths and Realities of Montessori

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I will begin by commenting that I have been following my passion for this philosophy for many, many years, aware that Dr. Montessori's legacy continues to grow solidly. However, when I worked as the General Coordinator of a school, when giving reports to new parents, I never ceased to be surprised by the similarity of the doubts that they expressed year after year. These continue to arise due, among other things, to a series of unfounded urban myths that circulate which confuse, question and sometimes disqualify Montessori as a preferred option for children. I will address this topic to continue to awaken reflection with the idea of guiding parents and professionals who want to know more about this beautiful path in education.

Myth: Children "do what they want," leading to indiscipline and chaos.

Fact: Children have the possibility to follow their own interests, under the guidance of a trained adult.

This is the image some have when they hear that children have the opportunity to freely choose but it is a myth. Whoever observes a Montessori environment can see an air of tranquility, harmony and work.

Giving children the possibility of choosing their work causes concentration, repetition and results in significant learning, at the same time that their will develops and as a consequence each one is self-controlled. Children have freedom, but not to do something destructive, they have only one type of freedom: to work and do things for themselves, to carry out any productive activity for their development, which is in harmony with the environment and the people in it. Thus, children do not "do what they want", but "want what they do".

Discipline in Montessori is not a discipline imposed by the adult. The doctor states that the true and genuine discipline is self-discipline, that which arises from the individual himself and that is only achieved in freedom, from work, activity and the common good.

Myth: Montessori is only for "gifted" or "special" children.

Fact: Montessori is for all children; it arose from the observation of "normal children".

Dr. Montessori worked with "normal children" for more than 40 years and, based on her observations, her educational proposal emerged. Due to the nature and pedagogy of the method, the Guide follows up with respect and love to each child, offering them what they need according to their strengths, weaknesses, interest, age, capacity, pace of work; most importantly... to their individuality.

What is left over in this myth is the word "only", because at the moment of entering into an environment each child becomes special and unique, because the program they will follow will also be special and unique. Every individual can benefit from Montessori education.

Myth: Montessori children have difficulty adjusting to "real life and do not possess a high academic level".

Fact: Children who leave a Montessori school generally adapt easily and "shine" when they integrate into new environments.

Among the main objectives of Montessori environments are: to help the child in his task of adaptation, to become a person "of his time and space", to develop his greatest potential and to relate socially with grace and courtesy. Recent research shows that children educated in Montessori are prepared for their later life and tend to be autonomous. It is easier for them to organise their work, they are able to establish goals and objectives, they show interest, enthusiasm for learning, they are self-critical and in general they have high self-esteem; skills that allow them to adapt without difficulty to new situations.

They are accepted without problem in different educational institutions, no matter how high the academic level, and they are often awarded scholarships of excellence that they manage to maintain throughout their studies. However, the most outstanding thing is that their directors and teachers define them as "good human beings", who know how to work in a team, who are cooperative, resilient, inclusive, capable of looking for positive alternatives, sharing interesting ideas and inspiring their classmates.

Myth: Montessori is very "directive", it does not promote children's creativity.

Reality: The Montessori system promotes children's initiative and new proposals in each activity.

A child can only be creative when he can follow his interests and have the freedom to work, to create, to express himself. Creativity is not just the work of "art", but a quality that is implicit in each of the activities they carry out.

In Montessori, each material is shown to the child so that they know how to use it in a safe and orderly way. However, they have the freedom to explore other ways on their own initiative and express their personality in the different areas: practical life, language, mathematics, sensory, art, music, movement. Truly, each environment is a creative and satisfying space for a child to experience and express their inner self.

In addition, Montessori environments also have an area for expression and art, with organised materials that can be used freely, without restrictions, and without the adult telling them "what they should do" or "what should be" the final result of their work. Doing all the same work, expecting similar results, is not creativity.

Myth: Montessori schools are "elitist".

Reality: There are private schools and serious efforts to reach disadvantaged areas.

Maria Montessori founded her first school in a marginal area of Italy and was committed to the idea: of an education for peace, as an aid to life, where people would have their own thoughts, develop empathy and love for humanity.

Currently, there are many private Montessori projects in the world that are usually "expensive", due to the high operating expenses. They need to have prepared, spacious, beautiful environments, with scientifically designed materials for the different areas and the people who support their development, the Montessori Guides and the staff in general, are adults with a very specialised preparation. In some countries such as Thailand, China, and the United States, there are also more than 500 schools supported by public funds where accessibility is favoured.

Fortunately, Maria Montessori's initial vision of reaching all children continues to be taken up with seriousness and strength from Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) through its Educateurs sans Frontières (Educators Without Borders) activity, which supports global initiatives for vulnerable children and families, highlighting the application of Montessori principles. Mexico is part of these efforts through "Horme" which is a network of social projects and programs.

Myth: All Montessori schools are the same.

Fact: Unfortunately, "no." All schools that have the Montessori name are not the same.

As Dr. Montessori is internationally recognised as a great pedagogue, many educational projects bear her name, but do not necessarily provide an approach based on her philosophy and pedagogical principles.

There are three important, elementary aspects that a serious "Montessori" project must cover:

1. Guides at the different levels must be certified, preferably by the International Montessori Association.
2. Montessori principles are followed throughout school hours.
3. Each group will be made up of children of three different ages: small, medium, and large.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Gutiérrez finds her "life mission" in work under the principles of the Montessori Philosophy, where she has developed for more than 40 years. She is currently an International Examiner, advisor of different educational projects, lecturer and Director of the Villa Montessori International Center for the Training of Guides and Assistants of Casa de los Niños, in Mexico and Spain.

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