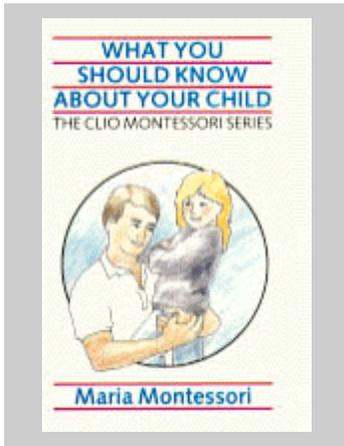




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From the Clio Montessori Series Summary:

"The Montessori Method is a scientific education based on a sound knowledge of childhood. In this volume, Dr Montessori examines the physical and mental development of the child in its early years and discusses what she considers to be the basic truths underlying the child's nature, growth, and development."

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR CHILD

BASED ON LECTURES BY MARIA MONTESSORI  
THE CLIO MONTESSORI SERIES

Maria Montessori  
CLIO PRESS  
OXFORD, ENGLAND

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## PREFACE

I am very proud that my work and my sentiment for children have awakened in a lofty personality such as Mr. Gnana Prakasam so much interest as to induce him to spend valuable time and so much

intellectual concentration upon the production of this book.

Refined interpreter that he is, he has been able to bestow the light of simplicity to idea difficult to understand. In this book, which promises to be of great aid to the diffusion and understanding of my work, the reader will not merely find lessons exposing ideas and my interpretation of the soul of the child, he will read through the clarity of vision of a psychologist who has contributed his generous efforts to link my thoughts to the mind of the public.

My Gratitude goes as homage to Mr. Gnan Prakasam who has come forth to protect the interest of the child and has stretched his hand to help him to ascend.

MARIA MONTESSORI  
*Adyar, 5th February 1948*

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## FOREWORD

Dr. Montessori in her above Preface says I have interpreted her. This is true, particularly as regards the essential truths underlying her Method of educating children. I have spared no trouble in distilling the essence from her books and lectures as well as from her career and work. Her approval is a reward. But that approval, though a valuable imprimatur of authenticity, is not my whole aim.

Has Dr. Montessori got at the basic truths underlying the child's nature, growth, development and functions? Is her Method conducive to the shaping of the most efficient, serviceable and happy men and women of the future? In answering these questions the reader may take into account the worldwide expansion of the Montessori System. But each individual reader must give the verdict after ascertaining whether, according to his her knowledge, observation and conscience, the relevant facts stated in this book are demonstrably true or not.

Such realism as implied in the above paragraph, such independence, such self-reliance, such discipline in activity and service, such happiness in achievement these are the essentials of the Montessori System as the following chapters will indicate and as the character of the schools and the pupils will prove. The reader has to see whether Dr. Montessori interprets Nature correctly and follows Nature's laws. Truth and reality are the tests. This way lies Scientific Education.

A.G. PRAKASAM  
*Law Library, Colombo, 1st May 1948*

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## DR. MONTESSORI: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE BY THE EDITOR

Dr. Montessori was born in 1870. Having decided on a medical career and having mastered the natural sciences, she obtained at the University of Rome an M.D. at the age of 26 years, distinguishing herself by securing a double honours degree as a Doctor of Medicine and a Doctor of Surgery. This was in 1896, Dr. Montessori being the first woman in Italy, and probably one of the few women in Europe at that time to become a Doctor in the Faculty of Medicine. This was sound scientific equipment for future achievements.

From 1896 to 1911, for nearly 15 years, Dr. Montessori practiced medicine and held the Professorial Chair for Hygiene and Anthropology. In 1898, in the course of her professional contact with children, she became interested in education and in 1907 she opened the first institution for children below 6 years which was called House of Children and which became her Educational Laboratory. A period of intense study of childhood and marvellous practical results followed. In 1909, her historical volume, called English *The Montessori Method*, was published and was

translated and read in most of the countries of the world. 1913 was a memorable year as it was then that she gave her first International Course of Lectures and visited the United States. In 1916 appeared another epoch-making book by Dr. Montessori called by its English publisher *The Advanced Montessori Method*.

In 1919 she visited England inaugurating an International Training Course in London. Her work spread into every country in Europe, was taken up by the Dominions and was welcomed in India and South America. As a consequence the Association Montessori Internationale (A.M.I.) was founded in 1929 at Elsinore with the aim which was stated as follows: "Spreading knowledge of how the child, immature and struggling to discover and develop his own powers, may be assisted in his task of self-realisation and of reaching his full perfection of growth."

In offering to Dr. Montessori the Honorary Fellowship of the Educational Institute of Scotland at an enthusiastic meeting at Edinburgh in 1946, the President said: "Teaching is a conservative profession, but once in a generation there arises an outstanding figure which comes with a breath of new life inspiring people to new endeavours and to new activities. These are the great figures of Educational History. Among them no one in our generation stands higher than Madame Montessori. Her name has become a household word, not only in Scotland, not only in Europe, but in every part of the world." The above is a tribute to Dr. Montessori by an Educational leader in a country like Scotland which is always in the vanguard of educational progress.

Dr. Montessori, in principle and practice, offers a strong hope for mankind to build the peace and progress of the world on the strongest foundation, namely a free and democratic education of the children of the World.

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## 1

### SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION

The Montessori Method is scientific education. Knowledge of childhood is its foundation. It is built on the discovered laws of the development of the body and mind of the child.

The march of science in modern times has been incredibly rapid. The human mind has unraveled myriads of secrets of the exterior world. The series of inventions and discoveries have been astonishing. The nature and the laws governing the physical environment of man are minutely known. Equal attention and care are now being given to the study of the Human Mind, the Human Intelligence and the Human Personality which are responsible for all achievements.

The scientific endeavour which is the characteristic of our age, the systematic examination of facts and ascertainment of principles and acting upon them, these procedures which have been successfully applied to discover the material world, must also be persistently directed to aid Human Life. Life includes Mind, Intelligence, and Personality.

Thus education is an aid to life. It is the protection of life. It is a help to life according to its own laws of development. Success in education clearly depends on understanding the secrets of life with a view to serve it the better, with a view to develop the great energies within man in strict normality.

If education is an aid to life, two conclusions are inevitable. The first conclusion is that education must begin with the beginning of life itself. The second conclusion is that education must assume an aspect very different from the one it has assumed for ages: education can no longer retain the form of mere *teaching* with which it has been synonymous up to the present day.

If education is a help to life and if education begins with life itself, what education can we give to a new-born baby? What help can we give to a child of six months or of one year? An answer will be: We can help the child by nursing, feeding, or giving hygienic care. Evidently the person who gives this answer forgets that the child from the beginning of life has a mind as well as a body, that the child

has both a mental and a physical life. If education is a help to life, it must help development both in the physical field and the psychic field.

This brings us to the problem: what is the nature, what are the conditions, what are the needs of psychic life of the child in its early stages? Are there any natural or ascertainable stages or periods of mental development? What are their characteristics? What sort of help or education can be given at these stages or periods? It is the answer to these questions with which the Montessori Method is first concerned. This inquiry is called Child Psychology or the Science of Childhood on which the Montessori Method is based. Ours is the study of the Psychology of the Child from its very birth and from its very beginning. "It is not true," says Dr. Montessori, "that I invented what is called the Montessori Method. I have studied the child, I have taken what the child has given me and expressed it, and that is what is called the Montessori Method."

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## 2

### HELPING THE CHILD TO HELP HIMSELF

Pre-primary Montessori Schools are called Houses of Children. Our idea of a school is not a building with four walls in which to enclose and confine children but a house wherein children are their own masters. This idea implies the necessity to prepare for the children a world of their own, where their minds and bodies can find suitable activities. The teacher should be a guest in the House of Children, or someone who intends to help them, or someone to be of service to them.

One of the first ideas that was born together with the beginning of Dr. Montessori's educational work was the idea of giving to the children specially suitable furniture of their own. To say this today is to say nothing new; but at the time when this idea was put into practice, it was startling. That was forty-three years ago.

At about that time Professor Dewey made a valuable discovery. He was a professor in the University of Columbia in New York City. He made up his mind to make a tour of the shops in that wonderful city for the purpose of buying, not toys for children, but articles which might be suitable for use by children. For example, he looked for furniture, tables, chairs, cupboards, and benches for children. Wherever he went the shop-assistant said: "No sir, nothing of that kind is available." He then tried to obtain towels, dishes, dinner-sets and basins suitable for children. But he met with no success. Then he wrote his opinion in a sentence which has become famous. That sentence contained the following thought: "The world, as far as the external environment is concerned, has forgotten the child."

That statement was true. But Dr. Montessori had undertaken the work of education for children. She said "If houses suitable for children do not exist, then let us build them. If articles suitable for children are not being made, let us get them made." What things to make and how to make them had to be found out by experiment and experience. Thus, not only pieces of furniture but so many other things suitable for the children were made to order.

Thoughts are institutions. Often from a simple idea great consequences arise. The outcome of the above idea was not merely that the children served themselves by using these objects, but the ultimate result was that the children changed their character by using these objects. They showed a creative joy in using them. The joy was different from the normal joy of children at play.

Thus there was opened up a new way, a new method. The special needs of the growing bodies and minds of children were kept in mind. Here was the vision of a method for a solution to the problem of the freedom of the child, and also for the solution to the problem of the occupation and conduct of the child. We shall now proceed to give details of these problems.

Mothers often say: "My child is exasperating," "He has fits of temper," "My child wants me to be with him always," "I cannot get away from him a moment," and "My child is easily bored." Other mothers say "My child is boring, or "He always wants stories and the whys and wherefores of things." Now these are problems arising out of occupation or want of suitable occupations.

There are also problems of conduct. Some parents say: "My child is bad. How am I to make the child good?" or "What are we to do with the child? He is mischievous. Are we to beat him or not to beat him?" In this and many other ways the child presents many problems both in the family and in the school.

There is a further and fundamental problem, the problem of the freedom of the child. The distinction between Democracy and Totalitarianism has still to be faced. Is the child to be left free to form himself or is he to be formed? The question of the freedom of the child and the freedom of nations demands an urgent solution.

Nowadays most people believe that it is necessary to give freedom to the child. So the family faces the problem of how to leave the child free. Giving freedom to the child is not one problem. It involves problems upon problems without an easy solution.

That is why it was a happy moment when the House of Children came into existence. It pointed to a solution. There was a failure on the part of the adult to understand the needs of the growing mind and body of the child and a failure to provide for those activities which are needed for his development. The House of Children was a solution.

Let us see what happens in a family where the adult rules. Let us go back forty-three years when the science of childhood or the laws of child development were ignored. Then, as now, mothers loved their children and took great care of them; bathed them and washed them, dried and powdered them, clothed and brushed and combed them, and took them for a walk and attended to all their physical needs.

But let us consider the mother, whose child climbs upon an armchair or sofa, and who says in a threatening voice to the child "Get down at once," or the mother who under similar circumstances says gently "Now dear, get off from there please." Each of the above mothers has her won way of correcting the child.

Yes, as you can well imagine, it is a matter of indifference to the child whether the mother uses angry tones or endearing ones, since the main object of both mothers is the same; both the angry mother and the affectionate mother are preventing the child from doing what he is doing. If the child wanted to on the steps of the staircase he is told at once: "Oh! Don't sit in that dirty place." Whether the prohibition is sweet or bitter, prohibition is a prohibition.

If you follow this matter of stopping a child from doing things which, according to adult ideas, he should not do, you will find that the child is in the same position as the poor people in the great city of London, for example, who attempt to sleep somewhere. They first try the churches, only to be driven away from there by the voice of authority which says: "Get out." They then try a park bench, but they are unceremoniously pushed out. Ultimately, they are obliged to walk about the streets the whole night, not being allowed to sleep anywhere.

So it was with the child. He was not allowed to use anything which surrounded him in the adult environment. "Hands off" was the standing order given to him as regards many frail or valuable things which were in the possession of adults and intended for their use, like a porcelain cup, a watch, an inkstand or other precious breakables. The child was allowed to touch practically nothing in the adult environment.

He was given a rubber ball or a toy and told to play with it. But he soon threw it away. Not knowing that the child also may have some reason for complaint, the parents had a complaint against the child and said: "As soon as I give a toy to my child he breaks it or throws it away." The sad aspect of this behaviour of adults is the tyranny, which the child feels, of being stopped in every attempt on his part to be active: he is being thwarted in his natural yearning for physical and mental activity; he undergoes the torment of being repressed at every turn.

The mother or the nurse may be unconscious of her tendency to repress the child continually. But the fact is there. The child's yearning to use its eyes, ears, hands, legs and limbs, its striving to master the details of its environment, to apply its mind to the surrounding objects and to gather knowledge directly from things of these matters the mother or the nurse is unaware or ignorant.

Another serious matter is the superfluous help which is given to the child. Such help is an actual hindrance. Every good mother assists the child to dress, combs its hair, takes it for a walk and does many other things for the child. Some mothers say: "It is our duty to do everything we can for our child. The more we do for the child, the better mothers we are." We wish to point out that beyond a certain point every help given to a child is an obstacle to its development.

There was a mother who was much admired by everyone. This mother used to say that until her children were twelve years old she always bathed them herself. People said "What a wonderful mother!" In those days it was not realized that it was not enough to merely supply the physical needs of the child; that the most important need was the need of helping the child to help himself. It was not then realized that the child needs to be independent, that such aids and props were not conducive to giving the child that independence which is necessary for its growth and development.

Giants patronizing and helping pygmies will end in a short time by reducing the pygmies to utter incapacity and helplessness. The kindness of the giants will become the bane of the pygmies. We must give children service that assists development and not service that obstructs development.