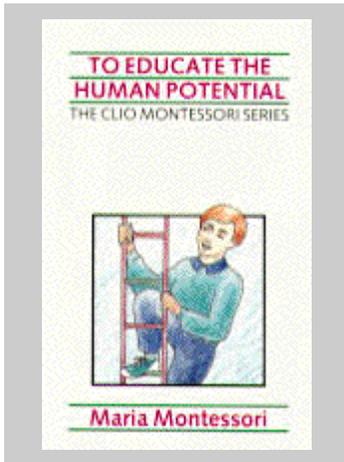




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"This book is intended to help teachers to envisage the child's needs after the age of six. We claim that the average boy or girl of twelve years who has been educated at one of our schools knows at least as much as the finished High School product of several years' seniority, and the achievement has been at no cost of pain or distortion to body or mind."

# TO EDUCATE THE HUMAN POTENTIAL

THE CLIO MONTESSORI SERIES  
VOLUME SIX

Maria Montessori

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## INTRODUCTION

This book is intended to follow Education for a New World and to help teachers to envisage the child's needs after the age of six. We claim that the average boy or girl of twelve who has been educated till then at one of our schools knows at least as much as the finished High School product of several years' seniority, and the achievement has been at no cost of pain or distortion to body or mind. Rather are our pupils equipped in their whole being for the adventure of life, accustomed to the few exercise of will and judgment, illuminated by imagination and enthusiasm. Only such pupils can exercise rightly the duties of citizens in a civilized commonwealth.

The first four chapters are mainly psychological, showing the changed personality with which the teacher has to deal at six years of age, and the need for a corresponding change of approach. The secret of success is found to lie in the right use of imagination in awakening interest, and the stimulation of seeds of interest already sown by the attractive literary and pictorial material, but all correlated to a central idea, of greatly ennobling inspiration the Cosmic Plan in which all, consciously or unconsciously, serve the great Purpose of Life. It is shown how the conception of evolution has been modified of late through geological and biological discoveries, so that the self-perfection now has to yield precedence to service among the primary natural urges.

The next eight chapters show how the Cosmic Plan can be presented to the child, as a thrilling tale of the earth we live in, its many changes through slow ages when water was Nature's chief toiler in the accomplishment of her purposes, how land and sea fought for supremacy, and how equilibrium of elements was achieved, that Life might appear on the stage to play its part in the great drama. Illustrated as it must be by fascinating charts and diagrams, the creation of earth as we now know it unfolds before the child's imagination, and always with emphasis on the function each agent has to perform in Nature's household, whether consciously or unconsciously, failure in this alone leading to extinction. So the tale proceeds till Palaeolithic Man appears, most significantly traced by the tools he used on his environment rather than by physical remains of so slight a creature. The new element of mind is brought to creation by man, and from that time the children are helped to see the great acceleration that has taken place in evolution. They learn to reverence the earliest pioneers, who toiled for purposes unknown to them but which can now be recognized. Nomadic men and settlers alike contributed to build up early communities, and by interchanges of war and peace to share and spread social amenities.

From chapter thirteen brief descriptions are given of some of the earliest civilizations, particularly with a view to their impacts on each other, showing human society as slowly organizing itself towards unity, just as, in the individual human being, organs are built around separate centers of interest, to be later connected by the blood-circulatory system and the nerves into an integrated human organism. So the child is led, by review of some of the most thrilling epochs of world history, to see that so far humanity has been in an embryonic stage, and that it is just now emerging into true birth, able to consciously realize its true unity and function.

The last chapters go back to the psychological point of view, urging on educators the supreme importance to the nation and to the world, of the tasks imposed on them. Not in the service of any political or social creed should the teacher work, but in the service of the complete human being, able to exercise in freedom a self-disciplined will and judgment, unperturbed by prejudice and undistorted by fear.

### 1. THE SIX-YEAR-OLD CONFRONTED WITH THE COSMIC PLAN

Education between the ages of six and twelve is not a direct continuation of that which has gone before, though it is built upon that basis. Psychologically there is a decided change in personality, and we recognize that nature has made this a period for the acquisition of culture, just as the former was for the absorption of environment. We are confronted with a considerable development of consciousness that has already taken place, but now that consciousness is thrown outwards with a special direction, intelligence being extroverted, and there is an unusual demand on the part of the

child to know the reasons of things. Knowledge can be best given where there is eagerness to learn, so this is the period when the seed of everything can be sown, the child's mind being like a fertile field, ready to receive what will germinate into culture. But if neglected during this period, or frustrated in its vital needs, the mind of the child becomes artificially dulled, henceforth to resist imparted knowledge. Interest will no longer be there if the seed be sown too late, but at six years of age all items of culture are received enthusiastically and later these seeds will expand and grow. If asked how many seeds may be sown, my answer is: 'As many as possible!' Looking around us at the cultural development of our epoch of evolution, we see no limit to what must be offered to the child, for his will be an immense field of chosen activity, and he should not be hampered by ignorance. But to give the whole of modern culture has become an impossibility and so a need arises for a special method, whereby all factors of culture may be introduced to the six-year-old: not in a syllabus to be imposed on him, or with exactitude of detail, but in the broadcasting of the maximum number of seeds of interest. These will be held lightly in the mind, but will be capable of later germination, as the will becomes more directive, and thus he may become an individual suited to these expansive times.

A second side of education at this age concerns the child's exploration of the moral field, discrimination between good and evil. He no longer is receptive, absorbing impressions with ease, but wants to understand for himself, not content with accepting mere facts. As moral activity develops, he wants to use his own judgment, which often will be quite different from that of his teachers. There is nothing more difficult than to teach moral values to a child of this age; he gives an immediate retort to everything that we say, having become a rebel. Mothers often feel hurt because their children, formerly all love and affection, have become impertinent and rudely domineering. An inner change has taken place, but nature is quite logical in arousing now in the child not only a hunger for knowledge and understanding, but a claim to mental independence, a desire to distinguish good from evil by his own powers, and to resent limitation by arbitrary authority. In the field of morality, the child now stands in need of his own inner light.

Yet a third interesting fact to be observed in the child of six is his need to associate himself with others, not merely for the sake of company, but in some sort of organized activity. He likes to mix with others in a group wherein each has a different status. A leader is chosen, and is obeyed, and a strong group is formed. This is a natural tendency, through which mankind becomes organized. If during this period of social interest and mental acuteness all possibilities of culture are offered to the child, to widen his outlook and ideas of the world, this organization will be formed and will develop; the amount of light a child has acquired in the moral field, and the lofty ideals he has formed, will be used for purposes of social organization at a later stage.

All other factors however sink into insignificance beside the importance of feeding the hungry intelligence and opening vast fields of knowledge to eager exploration. If we set about this task without any method, we shall find it absolutely impossible to accomplish. But we are already in possession of the secret by which the problem can be solved, having been initiated into it by the child himself in his earlier years. We are not unknown to him or he to us, and we have learnt from him certain fundamental principles of psychology. One is that the child must learn by his own individual activity, being given a mental freedom to take what he needs, and not to be questioned in his choice. Our teaching must only answer the mental needs of the child, never dictate them. Just as a small child cannot be still because he is in need of co-ordinating his movements, so the older child, who may seem troublesome in his curiosity over the what, why and wherefore of everything he sees, is building up his mind by this mental activity, and must be given a wide field of culture on which to feed. The task of teaching becomes easy, since we do not need to choose what we shall teach, but should place all before him for the satisfaction of his mental appetite. He must have absolute freedom of choice, and then he requires nothing but repeated experiences which will become increasingly marked by interest and serious attention, during his acquisition of some desired knowledge.

The child of six who has been in a Montessori School has the advantage of not being so ignorant as the child who has missed that experience. He knows how to read and write, has an interest in Mathematics, Science, Geography and History, so that it is easy to introduce him to any amount of

further knowledge. The teacher is confronted with an individual who has already acquired the basis of culture, and is anxious to build on it, to learn and penetrate deeper into any matter interest. How clearly then lies the path before the teacher; it would almost seem that he has nothing to do! He has to prepare a huge amount of knowledge to satisfy the child's mental hunger, and he is not, like the ordinary teacher, limited by a syllabus, prescribing just so much of every subject to be imparted within a set time, and on no account to be exceeded. The needs of the child are clearly more difficult to answer, and the teacher can no longer take refuge behind syllabus and time-table. He has himself to acquire a reasonable acquaintance with every subject, and even then only the outer shell of the problem will have been pierced. But let him take courage, for he shall not be without help, and a scientifically devised and tested plan.

Since it has been seen to be necessary to give so much to the child, let us give him a vision of the whole universe. The universe is an imposing reality, and an answer to all questions.

We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe, and are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity. This idea helps the mind of the child to become fixed, to stop wandering in an aimless quest for knowledge. He is satisfied, having found the universal centre of himself with all things. It is certainly necessary to centralize the interest of the child, but the usual methods today are not effective to that end. How can the mind of a growing individual continue to be interested if all our teaching be around one particular subject of limited scope, and is confined to the transmission of such small details of knowledge as he is able to memorize? How can we force the child to be interested when interest can only arise from within? It is only duty and fatigue which can be induced from without, never interest! That point must be very clear.

If the idea of the universe be presented to the child in the right way, it will do more for him than just arouse his interest, for it will create in him admiration and wonder, a feeling loftier than any interest and more satisfying. The child's mind then will no longer wander, but becomes fixed and can work. The knowledge he then acquires is organized and systematic; his intelligence becomes whole and complete because of the vision of the whole that has been presented to him, and his interest spreads to all, for all are linked and have their place in the universe on which his mind is centred. The stars, earth, stones, life of all kinds form a whole in relation with each other, and so close is this relation that we cannot understand a stone without some understanding of the great sun! No matter what we touch, an atom, or a cell, we cannot explain it without knowledge of the wide universe. What better answer can be given to those seekers for knowledge? It becomes doubtful whether even the universe will suffice. How did it come into being, and how will it end? A greater curiosity arises, which can never be satiated; so will last through a lifetime. The laws governing the universe can be made interesting and wonderful to the child, more interesting even than things in themselves, and he begins to ask: What am I? What is the task of man in this wonderful universe? Do we merely live here for ourselves, or is there something more for us to do? Why do we struggle and fight? What is good and evil? Where will it all end?

This plan of cosmic education as a foundation stone of the Advanced Method was first explained in England in 1935, and it has already proved itself to be the only path on which our feet can firmly tread in further educational research. It cannot be used with the wholly illiterate or ignorant, but it is received with joy by the child who has indirectly been prepared for it in the Montessori School. Truly it is no new idea, for it has been the natural plan wherever there has been education in the real sense of the work, though lately fallen into disuse, for children first to be taught the creation of the world and man's place in it, so far as these questions could be answered in the light of religion and philosophy. The answer was ever what it still is, 'God has set you upon the earth to work and do your duty!' This principle can now, however, be developed on a scientific plan, and be made far more attractive.

## 2. THE RIGHT USE OF IMAGINATION

The six-year-old who comes from a Montessori class, for whom primarily this further course is devised, is already possessed of many cultural interests, and has a sort of deep passion for order and even for mathematics, so often regarded as an obstacle to the average child. Moreover his hand is already controlled, possessed and directed by the mind in minute movements. The practical work done in our early schools found such public approbation that our scientific manual exercises have largely been adopted by schools professing other methods in regard to most aspects of education. In this more advanced period we continue to afford children the opportunity to learn through the activity of the hand, especially in mechanics and physics. For instance, the children learn the laws of pressure and tension by being asked to build an arch of stones, so placed as to hold together without need of cement. By building bridges, aeroplanes, railroads (calculating the curvature), they become familiar with the principles of Statics and Dynamics as part of the daily school routine, wherever our method is properly applied with full equipment. Wherever possible mechanical contrivances are introduced for every detail of practical life, so that our children may be fitted to take part in a civilization which is entirely based on machines.

In their adoption of this part of our method, some modern schools, especially in the United States, have gone too far, so that children in this intellectual stage of growth are made to occupy themselves solely with these machines, devised as they are for developing intelligence. In such schools freedom too has entered with the machines, children being allowed to choose their work, which is good so far as it goes. But whatever cannot be learnt in this way is barred out, as insignificant and negligible: mathematics and other abstract subjects are considered as beyond the child's comprehension by free and spontaneous activity. These schools based on practical work are opposed to the so-called 'old-fashioned' schools where mainly abstract subjects are taught and facts memorized; but we oppose both alike.

Personality is one and indivisible, and all mental attitudes depend on one centre. This is the secret which the small child has himself revealed to us by doing work far beyond our dreams and expectations in all fields, including the intellectual and abstract, provided his hand was allowed to work side by side with his intelligence. Children show a great attachment to the abstract subjects when they arrive at them through manual activity. They proceed to fields of knowledge hitherto held inaccessible to them, such as grammar and mathematics. I wonder how the theory arose that in order to work with the hand one must have an uncultivated mind, or that a cultivated mind consorted with manual helplessness! Must a man be classified either as a worker with his head or with his hands, instead of being allowed to function with his whole personality? Where is the logic in the view that one-sided development can be beneficial to the whole? In modern conferences highly distinguished people, who have given their lives to the cause of education, seriously discuss which is to be preferred, the practical method or an intellectual discipline. But to us the children have themselves revealed that discipline is the result of an entire development only, of mental functioning aided by manual activity. Allow the whole to function together and there is discipline, but otherwise not! Tribes, groups, nations are the results of such spontaneous discipline and association. There is only one problem, and it is human development in its totality; once this is achieved in any unit child or nation everything else follows spontaneously and harmoniously.

Being persuaded then that the whole personality must be engaged, and that it needs centralizing first by the cosmic idea, the question comes as to how and when the idea should be presented. From the smaller children who have learnt the effectiveness of an indirect approach, as by addressing older children in their presence, for in our schools the ages are, to a limited extent, mixed. When we try to show something to the older children, the younger ones crowd around showing eager interest. This interest was especially shown by a child of six towards a chart illustrating the relative sizes of the sun and the earth by globe and point. The younger children were thrilled by the realization that this invoked in them, and were unable to tear themselves away though the older child for whom the instruction was planned found it rather commonplace, and needed some other thing to arouse in him similar interest. There is a difference between such enthusiasm and mere understanding. The point and the sphere touched the imagination of the younger child, leaving him full of enthusiasm for something beyond his former limits, belonging not to the physical environment, which cannot be grasped by hand. If moreover this particular illustration left the older child unmoved, it was not that nothing had the power similarly to touch his imagination, bearing him beyond his little world into

wider realms, by great strides into the unknown universe; but he could not reach such marvels and mysteries without help. It is along this path of high realities, which can be grasped by hand. If moreover this particular illustration left the older child unmoved, it was not that nothing had the power similarly to touch his imagination, bearing him beyond his little world into wider realms, by great strides into the unknown universe; but he could not reach such marvels and mysteries without help. It is along this path of high realities, which can be grasped by imagination, that the child is led between the ages of six and twelve. Imaginative vision is quite different from mere perception of an object, for it has no limits. Not only can imagination travel through infinite space, but also through infinite time; we can go backwards through the epochs, and have the vision of the earth as it was, with the creatures that inhabited it. To make it clear whether or not a child has understood, we should see whether he can form a vision of it within the mind, whether he has gone beyond the level of mere understanding.

Human consciousness comes into the world as a flaming ball of imagination. Everything invented by man, physical or mental, is the fruit of someone's imagination. In the study of history and geography we are helpless without imagination, and when we propose to introduce the universe to the child, what but imagination can be of use to us? I consider it a crime to present such subjects as may be noble and creative aids to the imaginative faculty in such a manner as to deny its use, and on the other hand to require the child to memorize that which he has not been able to visualize. These subjects must be presented so as to touch the imagination of the child, and make him enthusiastic, and then add fuel to the burning fire that has been lit.

The secret of good teaching is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim therefore is not merely to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his inmost core. We do not want complacent pupils, but eager ones; we seek to sow life in the child rather than theories, to help him in his growth, mental and emotional as well as physical, and for that we must offer grand and lofty ideas to the human mind, which we find ever ready to receive them, demanding more and more.

Educationists in general agree that imagination is important, but they would have it cultivated as separate from intelligence, just as they would separate the latter from the activity of the hand. They are the vivisectionists of the human personality. In the school they want children to learn dry facts of reality, while their imagination is cultivated by fairy tales, concerned with a world that is certainly full of marvels, but not the world around them in which they live. Certainly these tales have impressive factors which move the childish mind to pity and horror, for they are full of woe and tragedy, of children who are starved, ill-treated, abandoned and betrayed. Just as adults find pleasure in tragic drama and literature, these tales of goblins and monsters give pleasure and stir the child's imagination, but they have no connection with reality.

On the other hand, by offering the child the story of the universe, we give him something a thousand times more infinite and mysterious to reconstruct with his imagination, a drama no fable can reveal. If imagination be educated merely by fairy tales, at most the pleasure it gives will be continued later in novel-reading, but we should never so limit its education. A mind that is habituated to seek pleasure only in fantastic tales slowly but surely becomes lazy, incapable of nobler preoccupations. In social life we find too many examples of this sloth of mind, people caring only to be well-dressed, gossip with friends and go to the cinema. Their intelligence is hopelessly buried under barriers which cannot now be removed. Their interest becomes increasingly narrow, till it is centred round the petty self, excluding the wonders of the world and sympathy with suffering humanity. There is a veritable death in life.