

MONTESSORI KEY CONCEPTS DEFINITIONS

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Absorbent Mind

A sensitivity in the child's mind that can absorb knowledge, experiences, relationships, and images quickly and effortlessly into its subconscious mind and this enables him to adapt himself to his society. Only the child from birth to six years has an absorbent mind which unconsciously absorbs and incarnates all experiences in its environment from age 0-3 years and then consciously from age 3-6. After 6 the learner must make a conscious effort to absorb knowledge. (Boehnlein, Haines)

Abstraction

The root of the word *abstract* means something pulled away or drawn away. In educational terms it means perceiving the essence of an idea and no longer needing a concrete representation of the idea. An example would be grasping the idea that 2 plus 2 equals 4, no longer needing to see material objects of four items. (Boehnlein)

Adaptation

Related to the idea of an absorbent mind is a special power of the young child that can be called the power of adaptation. This power is a process whereby the young child uses the environment to develop and, in so doing, becomes a part of that environment. The young child absorbs the culture of her time and place, taking in all the spirit, the customs, the ambitions/aspirations, and attitudes of a society simply by living in that society. (Haines) "Adaptation is the result of a period of indirect preparation and must not be confused with either adjustment or conformism but a force that drives the child to shape his own behavior patterns to harmonize with his environment." (Montessori, Mario Jr.)

Auto Education

Auto Education is self-education and is based on the belief that given the appropriate environment and materials with built-in control of error, children can educate themselves. (Boehnlein)

Character

The practices, manners, or conduct of humans as they relate to one another characterized by distinctive personality traits of moral consciousness, obedience, unselfishness, purposeful activity, mental focus, independence, orderliness, and helpfulness to others. (Boehnlein), Kahn)

Concentration

The action or power, working with exactness, attention, and absorption in completing a task and learning something new or repeating actions and developing awareness of the action or knowledge. Concentration engages the whole personality through deep attention. (Boehnlein)

Consciousness

The quality of being aware of something, having internal knowledge. Being alert and recognizing ideas and/or objects. (Boehnlein)

Control of Error

A method or means of providing instant feedback when the learner is engaged in using an educational material or device so the learner can correct his errors independently and allows the learner to use his reason, critical thinking capacity and his increasing capacity for drawing distinctions. (Boehnlein)

Cosmic Education/Theory/Task

The cosmic task of humans comes from a close relationship between living beings and their environment: their adaptation to its more rigid features and their contribution to maintaining the conditions necessary for the existence of their species. This is what Maria Montessori calls the cosmic task. Cosmic education [plan for the education of children 6-12 years of age], therefore, aims to help the learner understand the service that must be rendered by the individuals of each species to the environment on which they are dependent for their existence to maintain it in such a way that it will support their descendants, generations after generation. (Montessori, Mario, Jr.)

Creativity/Imagination

The use of the imagination or original ideas to produce objects or ideas that are new. Creativity is a product of the imagination and results from the mental recombining of imagined ideas in new and inventive ways. Both are dependent on mental imagery formed through sensorial experience. (Boehnlein)

Cycle of Activity

Repeating an activity which might require multiple sequential steps, and which interests the learner who repeats it many times for no apparent reason, stopping suddenly only when the inner need which compelled the activity has been satisfied, (Haines)

Education

“The Montessori approach to education follows the lines of developmental psychology and differs sharply from education as normally understood, where the emphasis is on the ends pursued and what is felt to be important to the ultimate career or occupation.” Rather it is the process by which the child may become adapted to society and the world for optimum development, not his stock of knowledge. This is the aim of Montessori’s Developmental Education. (Montessori, Mario)

Four Planes of Development

The Four Planes of Development are an overall vision of Montessori's developmental psychology and provide a framework or structure for understanding her theory of human development, ages 0-3, 3-6, 6-12, 12-18, 18-adulthood. (Kahn, D., 2022). Each plane has its own special characteristics and needs.

The planes are:

1. Ages birth to 6 years of age, the child become independent and secure, acquires language, and then begins to learn consciously around age 3.
2. 6-12 years of age the child takes in all aspects of the culture develops imagination, is interested in justice and right and wrong, and adapts to their peer group.
3. 12-18 years of age, the human searches for meaning in life, increases attachment to the peer group and personal relationships, and develops special interests and talents.
4. 18 – adulthood. Takes his/her place in the world, perhaps finds a mate and also develops economic independence. (Montessori, Maria)

Each plane has sub-divisions: 3 years of creation and 3 years of crystallization. (Baker, Kay)

Freedom/Discipline

In the Montessori classroom children are given guided freedom. They are free to choose their own work according to their inner needs, rhythm, and tempo; the result observed was self-discipline, deep and prolonged concentration, the repletion of exercises for their own sake, and urge to make a maximum effort, control of movement, a sense of order, and other phenomena. This discipline was not coerced but appeared spontaneously from freedom to work in a prepared environment that met the child's inner needs. (Montessori, Mario Jr.)

Going Out

Part of the curriculum for the upper elementary children ages 9-12 and the adolescent 12-18 which provides opportunities for the learner to experience life's realities outside the classroom. Examples are observing and participating in various occupations such as animal clinics or shelters, assisting in daycare centers or classrooms not in their own school, spending weekly time at assisted living or nursing home facilities, helping on local farms or garden centers etc. Any activity that brings the reality of social activity and life to the learner's consciousness. (Boehnlein). "Going Out includes in-depth service and research objectives and study of the intricacies of economics and the interdependency of human functions within a local community. (Kahn)

Human Development

Human Development is the process of becoming; the process one goes through after birth to reach maturity. It is both physical and psychological and is directed by an energy which has been called the *Horme*, defined as an irresistible drive which is inherent in all living organisms which urges them to assume their specific bodies and their appropriate behavior. (Montessori, Mario)

Human Needs

The basic human needs for survival are food, clothing, shelter, water, and sleep. Montessori adds participation in social life, opportunity to work, and love. (Boehnlein)

Human Tendencies

A central tenet of Montessori philosophy is that human beings exhibit certain predispositions that are universal, spanning age, cultural and racial barriers; they have existed since the dawn of the species and are probably evolutionary in origin. 'Montessori stresses the need to serve those special traits that have proved to be tendencies of humans throughout his history.' (Mario Montessori,). A tendency is a natural inclination that guides the individual to survive. These tendencies are universal and timeless, unchangeable, and intrinsic in the human. Montessori mentions 25-30 tendencies in her writings. (Baker, Kay)

Justice

According to the dictionary definition it is the fair treatment of people by laws based on the principles of fair treatment of all. Justice is equality for all without special treatment of one individual and is born from interior education of the moral sense, especially during the ages of seven to twelve when an interest in the moral side of life occurs. (Montessori, Maria)

Imagination

Is the faculty of forming new ideas, or images, or concepts of external objects or ideas not present to the senses. Imagination is the true form of intelligence in humankind according to Montessori. It is imagination that brings the human mind to abstraction. (Boehnlein)

Independence

Independence is not depending on another, but able to act and live by one's own effort. Normal developmental milestones such as weaning, walking, talking, etc. can be seen as a series of events which enable the child to achieve increased individuation, autonomy, self-regulation, and independence. Throughout development, a vital urge causes the child and young adult to continuously seek to become more independent and self-reliant. (Haines)

Interdependence

All of humanity depends on a harmonious relationship-interdependence- of individual actions that benefit society as a whole and support an organized society. Interdependence is made possible by the bond between human beings which is their common intelligence and language which makes the abstract intelligence of the community possible. (Montessori, Mario Jr).

Indirect Preparation

Indirect preparation is a process by which Montessori students engage in developmentally appropriate activities that provide a foundation for future learning. For example, each of the Montessori sensorial

materials has an indirect aim; the child grasps the knobbed cylinders with the three fingers that later she will use to grasp the writing instrument. She will have a muscular memory of that action when she is presented with the writing instrument. (Boehnlein)

Isolation of a Difficulty

The Montessori materials facilitate a transfer of non-specific knowledge; that of a general idea or principle that can later be used as a basis for recognizing special cases or applications of it. Therefore, the material is limited to the essential idea or principle to polarize the learner's attention and to eliminate all distracting factors. (Montessori, Mario Jr.)

Key Lessons/Great Lessons

"A key lesson is a new experience, skill, or concept that orients or informs and allows the human being the possibility to integrate the experience into his or her existing schema after some related physical or mental activity which alters existing schema in light of the new information. A key lesson can be given by any adult, a peer, or an experience." (Baker, Kay). The key lessons, follow the Great Lessons (see Storytelling) which give the learner an overview of an area of the curriculum and present a unified vision of multi disciplines rather than compartmentalized knowledge.

Materialized Abstraction

The Montessori materials are scientifically designed to awaken concentrated attention to a general idea or principle, helping the child acquire a concrete idea of a concept or idea laying the groundwork for an abstract idea of the principle or idea. Through a series of uses of the material the child moves from a concrete manifestation of the idea or principle to an abstract idea that with some materials results in the written expression of the principle. For example, the concrete mathematical materials teaching the concept of addition are sequenced so the child understands addition through the manipulation of objects to gradually expressing the idea in written form and then solves an addition example using the written numerals alone. The material does not in the first place teach factual knowledge but rather it makes it possible for the learner to reorganize their knowledge according to the isolated principle in the material. (Boehnlein, Montessori, Mario Jr.)

Mathematical Mind

"Among the tendencies common to all human beings there are some which are considered to be the essence of mathematics; they are the tendency to abstract, to investigate, to imagine, to reason, to create, to calculate, to measure and to use precision to be exact...Considering the achievements of mankind, certain philosophers say categorically that the human being has a mathematical mind." (Montessori, Mario)

Maximum Effort

Maximum effort is the conscious exertion of power or hard work on a job requiring time and effort—going beyond expectancy of effort. Montessori believed growth depended on the opportunity to expend maximum effort. (Boehnlein)

Mixed Ages

One of the hallmarks of the Montessori method is that children of mixed ages work together in the same class. Age groupings are based on developmental planes which are birth to 3, 3-6, 6-12, 12-18, 18 to adulthood., Because the work is individualized children progress at their own pace; there is cooperation rather than competition between the ages. (Haines)

Montessori Materials

The Montessori material when used properly serves two main purposes. It furthers the inner development of the child; specifically, the indirect preparation that must precede the development of any new ego function. Secondly it helps the child to acquire new perspectives in his exploration of the objective world. The material makes the learner aware of certain qualities of the objects, their interrelationships, existing principle of differentiation within a given category, organization sequences, and special techniques for handling the objects. It awakens in the learner the urge to exercise his newly acquired insight through endless repetition. (Montessori, Mario, Jr) The material is scientifically designed to precise exactness, is made of attractive, durable material and some are housed on low shelves in sequential order of difficulty while practical life activities are present throughout the environment such as low sinks, child sized storage shelves and drawers of replenishing materials, and various cleaning supplies. (Boehnlein)

The Montessori Method/Movement

Montessori defined her movement as an influence of the whole life of the child with its aims to be the total development of the personality, a harmonious growth of all the potentialities of the child, as well as the physical and mental development according to the laws of nature.

Movement

Movement is essential and is the basis of the human's growth and acquisition of independence. Through the child's own effort, she wills herself to refine her muscular coordination and consequently acquires increasingly higher levels of independent functioning. Because of this developmental need, children are drawn to activities that involve movement and especially to those which demand a certain level of exactitude and precision. (Haines)

Normalization

If young children are repeatedly able to experience periods of spontaneous concentration on a piece of work freely chosen, they will begin to display the characteristics of normal development: a love of work, an attachment to reality, and a love of silence and working alone. Normalized children are happier children: enthusiastic, generous, and helpful to others. They make constructive work choices, and their

work reflects their level of development because their inner needs have been satisfied. (Boehnlein, Montessori, Maria)

Obedience

Obedience is an act of will and develops gradually, showing itself 'unexpectedly at the end of a long process of maturation.' (Montessori, Maria) While this inner development is going on, little children may obey occasionally, but be completely unable to obey consistently. As their will develops through the exercise of free choice, children begin to have the self-discipline or self-control necessary for obedience. (Haines)

Observation

Observation is the act or process of looking carefully for prolonged periods of time to gain information and is a habit developed by practice. Montessori guides are trained in observation techniques as they provide the basis for the teacher to help the child further develop according to the child's needs as observed in an environment that permits them to act spontaneously. (Boehnlein)

Order

In Montessori theory order is inner order or being able to see meaning in one's existence, to find one's identity, to achieve independence, and to act in a meaningful, disciplined way. (Montessori, Mario Jr.) It is evidenced by equilibrium, serenity, and self-control. (Montessori, Maria,)

Peace

According to the dictionary it is freedom or a period of freedom from public disturbance or war. Montessori defined peace as the triumph of justice, love among humans and is revealed in the existence of a better world wherein harmony reigns. (Maria Montessori)

Practical Life Exercises

These are exercises of daily life for the preservation of the environment such as dusting, sweeping, laying a table, and care of self- leading to coordination of the psycho-muscular system and resulting in the gradual development of character since they require patience, focusing of attention and help the child become a contributing person in the community. (Boehnlein, Montessori, Maria)

Prepared Environment

The Montessori classroom is an environment prepared by the adult for learners. It contains all the essentials for optimal development but nothing superfluous. Attributes of a prepared environment include order and reality, beauty, and simplicity. Everything is child-sized to enhance the children's independent functioning at the early levels. The outdoors, a trained adult, and a large enough group of children of mixed ages make up a vital part of the prepared environment. (Haines)

Psychodisciplines

Montessori called the usual disciplines of knowledge the psychodisciplines to convey the idea that the study of the disciplines is not purely intellectual but also affects the learner's psyche and the disciplines should be studied as interrelated systems providing a view of the interdependence of all knowledge and human attainments. (Boehnlein, Kahn)

Repetition

Children were observed by Montessori to repeat activities with the materials until they seemed satisfied. She believed the education of the senses is acquired through repetition of an action and that children repeated an exercise because of an inner impulse for perfection. (Boehnlein)

Respect

A deep admiration for others' abilities or achievements is a characteristic exhibited by Montessori children and is fostered in the Montessori environment with its mixed ages, by the modeling of the teacher who respects the child's need for freedom of choice, and the modeling of grace and courtesy in all relations to the children by the guide and to each other by the children who are encouraged to help one another. (Boehnlein)

Responsibility

Is having a duty to take care of the environment and to care for others in the environment and is practiced in the Montessori prepared environment where the young children learn practical life activities to care for self and the environment and learn to use materials appropriately, returning them to their shelf place in condition for the next child's use and to move in the classroom without disturbing other's work. Social responsibility is a major component of the Montessori curriculum at every level but most especially at the elementary and adolescent levels. (Boehnlein)

Self-Construction/Self Discipline

Self-construction/self discipline is the ability to control one's feelings, to pursue what is right and to be free of the need to be controlled by another person. This is fostered in the Montessori environment by the special lesson on silence, learning the proper use of materials and their care and waiting until a material they wish to work with is returned to its place and available, , The practical life activities, especially the preparation and serving of food and meals, care of the environment, and lessons in grace and courtesy which emphasize consideration of others foster the development of self-discipline in the early years. Planning and completing self-decided learning tasks and respecting others and their opinions are fostered at the later levels of development, leading to self-discipline (Boehnlein)

Sensitive Periods

Sensitive periods are time spans in which the child is sensitive to an incredible degree to a particular activity or interest. They are universal in all children and provide the child with powerful capacities to attain specific skills. Once the skill is obtained the sensitive learning period disappears. Montessori

identified specific periods for the development of language, movement, order, refinement, obtaining culture, social cohesion, and of sensory perceptions. (Boehnlein, Haines).

Society by Cohesion

Society by cohesion is building communities with shared values enabling people to have the realization that they are engaged in common enterprise for the good the whole group The Montessori environment, with its mixed ages and freedom of choice within limits, fosters participation in society. (Boehnlein, Kahn)

Storytelling

Montessori believed the child would become more interested in learning if new knowledge was introduced through a story that appealed to the learner's imagination, had a few, clearly drawn characters with unusual qualities, in a limited environment yet full of attractive and new things. The story would then motivate the child to learn more in detail by his own research. Traditionally, there are several Great Lessons/Stories that are repeated every year at the elementary level: the creation of the universe, the coming of life on earth, the coming of humans, communicating in signs, and the story of numerals. The stories are told at the beginning of the school year to the incoming youngest age children but which the other also enjoy hearing again. (Boehnlein, Lillard)

Supernature

Supernature is the term Montessori uses to describe the nature man creates by his work on transforming his environment, taking all that exists in nature and changing it, often to a higher plane. (Boehnlein, Montessori, Maria)

Teacher

Typically, in traditional education, one who instructs but, in the Montessori, schools the teacher, referred to as guide or directress, is one who aids the unfolding of life. The Montessori teacher's role is to observe the learner and meet the learner's developmental needs rather than imposing predetermined information in a predetermined schedule. The Montessori teacher understands that a learner learns through self-activity and that learning is deeply personal. The Montessori teacher supports this with a prepared environment full of opportunity for interest to develop with uninterrupted concentration which fosters normalization. (Barrameda, Boehnlein, Kahn)

Will

Will is the ability to will, or choose to do something with conscious intent, develops gradually during the first phase of life and is strengthened through practice. The Montessori environment offers many opportunities for the child to choose. Willpower, or self-control, results from the many little choices of daily life in a Montessori school. (Boehnlein, Haines)

Work

Work is activity involving mental or physical effort to achieve a result. Montessori believed human's instinct to work was their most outstanding trait and that all work was noble, thus Montessori children

learn to value and appreciate all workers. She stated that the more the capacity to concentrate is developed, the more often the profound tranquility in work is achieved and the clearer will be the manifestation of discipline within the child. (Boehnlein, Montessori, Maria)

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David Kahn B.A. is a prominent educator and long-time leader within the global Montessori community, best known for his 40-year tenure as the Executive Director of the North American Montessori Teachers' Association (NAMTA). A specialist in adolescent education, he was a founding director of the internationally recognized Hershey Montessori School's Adolescent Community and the Montessori High School at University Circle in Cleveland. Having trained under Mario Montessori, Kahn developed the AMI Montessori Orientation to Adolescent Studies to provide specialized training for teachers of students aged 12–18. His extensive contributions include serving as the founding editor of the NAMTA Journal, producing global Montessori media, and authoring seminal works like *The Whole School Montessori Handbook*. Though he stepped down from his executive role in 2017, he remains Director Emeritus and a respected authority, focusing on innovative, land-based school models and the intersection of Montessori principles with modern psychological concepts like "flow".