

And now: Montessori!



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Credo

This book simply had to be written. Its music was singing in our minds, and these words wanted to be heard. Of course, Maria Montessori's own words are still more than sufficient in themselves. And yet, we want to breathe new life into them. We believe that a Montessori upbringing is highly relevant to the times we live in, and we are keen to tell people about it. We share our enthusiasm about a view of the world, of the child and of learning. With contemporary knowledge and experience we can give flesh and blood to this view, which is more than 100 years old.

There are some things in Montessori education which affect us deeply. We want to mention them here, and we would like to preserve them. Having trust in other people is a great basis for relationships and upbringing. Montessori wrote very specifically about trust in the development of children and of people. The power, the will for growth is embedded in every person. This power can only be a good power. This trust invites people to respect others. Perhaps the word respect loses some of its value every time we mention it, but we keep talking about it. Respect means that you accept others as they are and that you believe in the good intentions and especially: you take others seriously. All your actions radiate respect and trust. All your actions affect the other person. You ask yourself: Who is the other person? What is he telling me? And what does he need? This is something we need to use in our education. You reflect on what you've done or are going to do; you are aware of the moment of decision and you make a choice.

And now: Montessori! unites your own experiences with modern insights, and connects to the answers of Maria Montessori; we call it the Montessori style. The Montessori style provides frameworks, vision, inspiration and a handhold. At the same time it leaves you plenty of space for your own interpretation, and it's up to you to show your personal colours. Individuality, structure, inspiration, power to learn and trust: they are important words in our story. We help you discover that the Montessori style is a strong brand, and we expect you will feel at home with it.

The active attitude and comprehensive knowledge of the educator are distinctive features of *And now: Montessori!* Besides trusting and understanding the child, the educator will also stir, stimulate and challenge the child to become his or her own teacher. You help the child grow into a responsible person who lives his life in connection with others.

We therefore dedicate this book to all those who hold the Montessori body of ideas dear: parents, students, infant school teachers and teachers. What we want is to jointly help children do it themselves, learn to do it themselves, so they end up being able to do it themselves.

Be open to surprise.

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Opening The background

Maria Montessori wrote her first book, *The Montessori Method*, at the start of the twentieth century. The subtitle *The discovery of the child* was added to this in 1948. More books and lectures followed. *The Montessori Method (1907)* became the guideline for an educational model with an explicit role for upbringing. More than one hundred years later, in the twenty-first century, it's not only the Netherlands where there are countless Montessori schools; her body of thought has spread all over the world and you see Montessori schools for primary and secondary education, Montessori crèches and Montessori child centres everywhere. How did this happen? How did her vision manage to remain alive and stand up to all the changes over time? We answer these fascinating questions by linking an old body of thought with new research and experience. And it turns out that Montessori education fits perfectly in the twenty-first century and is even trendy.

We pay a lot of attention to contemporary developments in this book. What is important? What kinds of things work in upbringing and in education? We show you how they come back in the Montessori upbringing and education. We show you that it works.

In this book we talk about the Montessori style. It was a deliberate decision to give it this name, because we want to emphasize the importance of how upbringing and education are interwoven. We realize that the word style might evoke some unintended associations. For us style means your attitude as well as what you radiate, and how you think as well as how you feel.

As educators we are permanently aware of our own position. We continue to learn and develop, and we also submit ourselves to long hard self-scrutiny. It makes us proud to be able to present the Montessori upbringing and education as the most contemporary form available.

The Montessori style

We wrote this book for students and teachers who want to train in the Montessori style, who want to work in a Montessori child centre or do teaching practice there. It is also for parents whose children attend a Montessori child centre and parents who are looking for a school and wondering whether their child will learn enough at a Montessori school.

What does it mean for you to choose Montessori? And what does it mean for your child?

Some concepts within the Montessori style of upbringing and education are interpreted in a specific way. We tell you about them, so that you can try them and see whether the Montessori style suits you. Children from 0 to 18 years of age can enjoy Montessori education all around the world. This means that you see similar features everywhere in the world which are all based on the same basic underlying idea. The well-known Montessori words *Help me do it myself* are given shape in a universal manner: through the upbringing and the education.

It is important for every person and every growing child to gain experience themselves, to think up their own solutions and make their own mistakes. This is because: *No man exists who was not made by the child he once was* (Montessori, 1953). If the child is given help in everything and swamped by the initiatives of the educators, it is deprived of the opportunity of going and searching itself, of exploring the world (Hendriksen, 2012). A child has no need of only being 'served', it needs something much more essential: it needs to be able to do the things itself! That is the reality and that is the purpose of the education. *And now: Montessori!* is intended for all those who work with children and it addresses both upbringing and education.

Chapter 1, pages 19-20

Montessori found that you can distinguish three major stages of life in the development up to 18 years of age (0 to 6, 6 to 12 and 12 to 18 years), and that you can even speak of three different psychological types. The older child is clearly different to the pre-school

child it once was, and as an adolescent it will be different again. The different psychological phases coincide with major physical changes. Montessori always looks for connections and similarities: she looks for the correlation between the physical and the psychological.

Nicole is 6 years old. She is at primary school and boy, it sure means hard work. She likes it, all those new tasks and her own things. But after half a year at school she finds it hard to work any more; she just doesn't have any energy. Her parents are worried and ask for an interview at school.

During the interview, the teacher also tells them that Nicole is not showing much initiative and most of all, she seems to be so tired. Then Nicole's mother sighs: *Nicole is growing so fast too; she could do with new clothes every month.* The teacher smiles and says: *I get it now: all her energy is going into growing.*

The teacher and the mother actually give the answer together: Nicole is growing. That takes energy. She had enormous power for learning, and that will come back. You can trust the child.

Although children are generally distinguished as infant, toddler and pre-schooler in the period from zero to six years, there is a single psychological type. When a new phase starts, a new child seems to appear, and that is the big change which is observed. The period from zero to six years is a stormy phase in which the child develops very strongly. From six to twelve years is a period of some peace. Within this period, you can make a further distinction between the child of six to nine years and the child of nine to twelve years. Then puberty comes along with its own strong dynamics. The alternation between phases of calm and dynamism can extend throughout the rest of one's life.

Obviously, the one child will enter a new phase at a different time than another child. It is up to you as the educator to determine the approximate phase of the child, through observation and knowledge of the areas of development. You adapt your pedagogic and didactic actions accordingly.

Peter is almost 3 years old and goes to the day-care centre two days a week. He really likes it; there are lots of other children and Miss Irene is so nice. In the group there are cupboards and tables and ... a lovely red line has been drawn on the ground, which Peter just loves.

Today Peter comes in, stops in the group and looks. For a long time. Then he turns to Miss Irene and says: *I'm going to learn to go on one leg.* He goes to the line, carefully lifts one leg and takes a step. He doesn't get the hang of it straight away; he carries on. He practises.

Peter has mastered various motor skills in the first three years of his life. For instance, he learned how to walk without any problems; this learning seemed to happen automatically. Now, with the progression to a new phase of development, he sets himself a task: he wants to learn how to hop, he wants to *go on one leg*. Peter has set himself a goal and he is motivated to practise and repeat. The educator recognises this and gives him the space.

Each phase in the development requires something different from the educator, in the way he thinks and the way he acts. One aspect remains the same however: the observing attitude of the educator.

Montessori (1937) says the following about this: *The modern teacher must be an enthusiastic observer of the biology and psychology of the growing child and through that, of the person.*

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inspiration in creation

