

THE MONTESSORI OPTION

by Graeme A. Menzies

If your career involves travel, you are probably concerned about the effects a move will have on your child's education. In an effort to minimize the sometimes disorienting effects of a move, many parents choose to enrol their children in the American schools which dot the globe, or they opt for a boarding school. For younger children (age three to twelve), there is a third option which merits consideration: Montessori schools.

One of the great advantages of Montessori schools is that – regardless of their geographic location – they utilize identical materials in the classrooms and exercise the same educational philosophy. So a move from a Montessori school in Ottawa to a Montessori school in Sydney, Australia will not involve a drastic change in educational environment or system. For a youngster, that's important.

The system of education, as many are aware, was developed by an outstanding Italian woman, Maria Montessori. What many people are unaware of, however, is just what a remarkable woman she was, and how great her contribution to childhood education has been.

She quickly became an international figure and was awarded such honours as the French Cross of the Legion of Honour, and the Dutch Order of Orange. She was nominated no less than three times to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and was presented with honorary degrees from many universities.

A true scientist, Maria Montessori developed much of her educational system through observation. Immediately following graduation from medical school, she was appointed to the psychiatric clinic of the University of Rome; it was there that she observed the

ward for the so-called "defective" children. She concluded that the children -- deprived of physical and mental stimulation -- would be doomed to an unenviable and unnecessary future of inadequacy unless something was done to treat their malady.

The method Montessori developed almost a century ago is now often referred to as the didactic method. "Didactic" comes from the greek word didaktikos meaning "something designed or intended to teach". Montessori classrooms focus education on the use of these hands-on didactic materials; the teachers strive to oversee the child's individual and natural pursuit of knowledge. "Help me to do it myself" is what Montessori interpreted as the child's basic learning desire.

A FINAL WORD

Before you enrol your child in a Montessori school, make certain that the school has been certified by, and is affiliated with, a recognized board of professionals such as the Association Montessori International (AMI). The AMI is the international organization founded by Maria Montessori which monitors the quality and professionalism of Montessori schools and their instructors; it has also maintained representatives at the UN since 1986, and has repeatedly been invited to be a member of the Non Governmental Organizations (NGO). There are also other reputable Montessori organizations, such as the American Montessori Society, which differ slightly in the method of education they use but are nevertheless reputable.

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