

Montessori and me

Charlotte Stokes, a Montessori teacher and mother of three children, talks about how the Montessori philosophy has influenced her parenting.

I first encountered the Montessori method when looking at nurseries for my eldest son to attend. While at an open day at a Montessori nursery I was struck by the beautiful, ordered environment; I wanted to know more and so I began training to be a Montessori teacher focusing on the three to six year curriculum and became immersed in a very different education system.

However, as a mother, what marked out the Montessori method for me was that it offers children the opportunity to concentrate undisturbed, which is essential for the child's self-formation in every area of development. (Lillard et al, 2003, p.72).

The term ADHD is flung all too eagerly at the child seemingly unable to be calm, but perhaps the children of today are never given the chance to concentrate? Paula Polk Lillard speaks about a sensitive period, a window of opportunity for a child to be allowed to develop his/her concentration right from being a newborn. (ibid, p.37).

When I became pregnant for a third time with my son Finn, I determined to give him this opportunity. This is where I came across the zero to three year Montessori curriculum. I read about the adult's role in preparing an environment to give opportunities for concentration in the first few weeks of life, a period of crucial and rapid development. (ibid, p.25-27). I learnt of the Munari mobile, and made one myself after finding instructions on the internet. The result was brilliant and easy to make. One day after Finn was born I placed the Munari within his vision. He immediately noticed it and turned his head to watch it. After this, I would often place him beneath it and he would focus on it whilst remaining quiet but alert; this encouraged him to concentrate. I changed the mobile as Finn became familiarised to it, and as his development progressed I introduced the Gobbi mobile. This mobile encourages a baby to reach out and bat the spheres with his hands, and so making him aware that he is

able to affect his environment through movement. I also found wonderful grasping rattles to encourage early work with his hands.

It is never too late to introduce a child to the Montessori method. It is a way of life that is surprisingly accessible and can be practised at any time and any location. I live in an urban area where nature and quietness have taken a backseat. Despite this the Montessori method has made me think differently about parenting and made me slow right down to my children's pace. I learned that it is possible to create islands of calm and real learning in a sea of traffic jams, television and school runs. Often when I take Finn for walks in his stroller he would be still

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and stare at trees or his hands and, as advised in some of my reading material, I just let him be.

Another example of this is allowing my three year old daughter to walk home from her nursery at her own pace. As it is autumn she stops many times to look at and collect the fallen leaves on the pavement. I say nothing, giving her precious time of quiet slotted into our busy lives. She stops to stare at the tree branches and colourful leaves billowing in the wind. After a while she turns around and smiles at me. When I ask her if she is ready to go she replies, “Oh, mummy, I was enchanted.” We both laugh, and on the rest of the journey home she chats constantly, seeming to glow and be more alive for her fifteen minutes of being allowed to look, touch and wonder.

My appeal to all parents is to take what you can from Montessori's teachings. Show your child little, natural things. Allow quiet reflection and concentration that even in the busiest of cities could be as simple as turning off the television more or even



Finn watching the munari mobile

allowing your child to finish that puzzle in silence without distraction for ten minutes.

Once you begin to look, you see that the opportunities are everywhere and I strongly believe that such periods of reflection make for calmer, happier and brighter children. ■

References

Lillard, P. P.; Jensen, L.; (2003) *Montessori from the start*, New York, Schocken

Further reading and resources

Understanding the human being, by Dr. Silvano Montanaro

People Under Three by Elinor Goldschmeid and Sonia Jackson

Montessori from the start by Paula Polk Lillard and Lynn Jensen

www.montessori.edu/homeschooling.html

www.etsy.com/shop/pinkhouse for the lovely grasping toys mentioned.

www.etsy.com/shop/goosedesigns# for the gobbi

www.atelier-montessori.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Munari-mobile-montage.pdf

and www.atelier-montessori.co/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Munari-mobile-calcul.pdf

for the instructions and layout of the Munari mobile

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