

# Maria Montessori

## *Some Quotations on Education*

### **Education should fit the child, not vice versa:**

“The adult has not understood the child or the adolescent, and is therefore in continual strife with him. The remedy is not that the adult should learn something intellectually, or complete a deficient culture. He must find a different starting point ... In their dealings with children adults ... look upon the child as something empty that is to be filled through their own efforts, as something inert and helpless for which they must do everything, as something lacking an inner guide and in constant need of direction. ... But if a child has within himself the key to his own personality ... these must be delicate powers indeed, and an adult by his untimely interventions can prevent their secret realization ... .” (1936)

### **Cognition and movement integrated:**

“One of the greatest mistakes of our day is to think of movement by itself, as something apart from the higher functions. ... Mental development must be connected with movement and be dependent on it. It is vital that educational theory and practice should become informed by this idea. ... Watching a child makes it obvious that the development of the mind comes about through his movements. ... Mind and movements are parts of the same entity.” (1967, 141-2)

### **Choice:**

“These children have free choice all day long. Life is based on choice, so they learn to make their own decisions. They must decide and choose for themselves all the time. ... They cannot learn through obedience to the commands of another.” (1989, 26)

### **Intrinsic motivation, not extrinsic:**

“The prize and the punishment are incentives towards unnatural and forced effort, and therefore we certainly cannot speak of the natural development of the child in connection with them.” (1912/1964, 21)

“The secret of success is found to lie in the right use of imagination in awakening interest, and the stimulation of seeds already sown.” (1948/1967, 1-2)

### **Spontaneous self-development:**

“By leaving the children in our schools at liberty we have been with great clearness to follow them in their natural method of spontaneous self-development.” (1912/1964, 357)

“All we have to do is set the energy free. ... When we speak of freedom in education we mean freedom for the creative energy which is the urge of life towards the development of the individual. This is not the casual energy like the energy of a bomb that explodes. It has a guiding principle, a very fine, but

unconscious directive, the aim of which is to develop a normal person. When we speak of free children we are thinking of this energy which must be free in order to construct these children well.” (1989, 12)

**Meaningful-to-student context:**

“Education, as today conceived, is something separated both from biological and social life. All who enter the educational world tend to be cut off from society. ... People are prepared for life by exclusion from it.” (1967, 10-11)

**Social voluntarism and win-win:**

“Our schools show that children of different ages help one another. The younger ones see what the older ones are doing and ask for explanations. These are readily given, and the instruction is really valuable. ... The older ones are happy to be able to teach what they know. People sometimes fear that if a child of five gives lessons, this will hold him back from his own progress. But, in the first place, he does not teach all the time and his freedom is respected. Second, teaching helps him to understand what he knows even better than before. He has to analyze and rearrange his little store of knowledge before he can pass it on. ... [So] everyone achieves a healthy normality through the mutual exchange.” (1967, 226-8)

Schools can make a “contribution to the cause of goodness by removing obstacles” (1965, 189).

**The teacher as provider of structure, guide, and “policeman”:**

“Freedom in a structured environment.” (1965)

“The children in our schools are free, but that does not mean there is no organization. Organization, in fact, is necessary ... if the children are to be free to work.” (1967, 244)

“It is true that the child develops in his environment through activity itself, but he needs material means, guidance and an indispensable understanding. It is the adult who provides these necessities. ... If [the adult] does less than is necessary, the child cannot act meaningfully, and if he does more than is necessary, he imposes himself on the child, extinguishing creative impulses.” (1956, 154)

“Do not apply the rule of non-interference when the children are still the prey of all their different naughtinesses. Don’t let them climb on the windows, the furniture, etc. You must interfere at this stage. At this stage the teacher must be a policeman. The policeman has to defend the honest citizens against the disturbers.” (1989, 16)

**Scientific method applied to education:**

“Scientific pedagogy” (1912)

**Bibliography:**

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**Context:**

These quotations are compiled to work with Stephen Hicks's video lecture on Objectivism and Montessori, which is Part 12 of his Philosophy of Education course.

The lecture is available at <http://www.stephenhicks.org/publications/philosophy-of-education/> and Youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationPhilosophy>).

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