

## Montessori: A Brain Friendly Method that Prepares Leaders for the 21' Century

by Judy Dempsey

How could it be that an educational method devised over 100 years ago could be preparing children for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? As odd as it sounds, this is most definitely true. Dr. Maria Montessori was a scientist who was light years ahead of her time. Her colleagues of today, scientific researchers of brain development, continue to confirm what she discovered at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century without the benefit of current technology. Scientists of today use cutting-edge technology to track and test brain development of young children and are finding results similar to those that Dr. Montessori used as the basis for her educational and philosophical methods. In general, Dr. Montessori stressed the importance of exposing children to appropriately stimulating and nurturing “hands-on” environments at an early age, approximately three years or younger. Her lifetime of scientific observations confirmed her belief in the importance of positive early experiences leading to optimal development in all areas.

So, what does this have to do with children being prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Well, quite a bit. Dr. Montessori's method is based on creating learning environments that are designed for the development of the whole child. The basis for this environment is scientifically sound and results in children far exceeding academic standards set by most traditional methods. Montessori educators are very well trained in brain development in young children and because of this, we know what young children can do. Children as young as three or four are capable of reading and enjoying mathematical concepts at a very early age if it is done in an appropriate manner, not with textbooks or workbooks.

This early intellectual development of the child is very exciting; however, it is not the only area that interests Montessori educators. Montessori environments are designed to develop the social, emotional, physical, and moral aspects of the child. Students are encouraged to be independent thinkers, problem solvers, and respectful guardians of all life. We encourage students to communicate effectively and respectfully rather than aggressively when life becomes difficult, as it always will at times. We teach children how to adapt to change, how to ask for what they need, and how to find it. We want our students to discover the gift that they were born with and use it joyfully, creatively, and passionately. We then work to nurture that all-important self-esteem so that all of this work is possible; for if a person does not believe in himself, a productive, happy life is very difficult. All of these experiences result in a very different type of young person emerging from our Montessori classrooms. If you do your research, you will find that what businesses are looking for today are young people who are able to collaborate, who can work with all kinds of people, who are creative and think “out of the box” and who care about the big picture. Our young Montessori students are all of these and more. So, to those of you who thought Montessori was a dinosaur, think again! Our students are standing out as one of the few groups of students who are actually being prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.