

Preface

The Montessori Foundations for the Creative Personality

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The first and most recent dedicated Montessori “creativity” journal was published by the North American Montessori Teacher’s Association (NAMTA) in 1978. The journal was twenty-nine pages in length; the articles were limited in number—a music article by Martha and Sanford Jones, an art shelf article by Nel Weniger, a general creativity article by Tillie Sullivan, and an editorial article by David Kahn entitled the “Case for Montessori Creativity” about Montessori, her self-awareness of her genius, and her principles for understanding the creative personality. The article was to make the case for Montessori and creativity, combatting the terrible prejudices that seem to say that Montessori education suppressed the child’s will to create—that it operated in too structured an environment. Today, the AMI journal is a collaborative product of AMI and NAMTA, replete with archival articles from AMI’s renovated archives, with 250 pages of text and colour photographs from schools around the world, backed by Montessori researchers and enhanced by documented support for Montessori education from eighteen months to eighteen years. We need to mark and celebrate this progress. The Montessori contribution to creativity is evolving and continuing to evolve.

Creativity today is not just about art, originality, inventiveness—if we look deeper into the Montessori literature it is about the formation of the entire developmental continuum and the whole child. This theory is also about Maria Montessori’s theory of the unconscious beginning at the beginning of life, related to the dynamics of the Absorbent Mind. In *The Secret of Childhood* she writes:

Anything must emerge, so to speak, by its own energies; it must spring forth and strike the mind, evoked by what we call chance. Often there is no one more incredulous than the person to whom this happens; he rejects the new fact just like everyone else. The novelty must present itself again and again, before it is finally seen, recognized, and eagerly received. Then indeed the eagerness with which he who perceives it welcomes the new light, cherishes it, enthuses over it, and dedicates his life to it may make others believe that it was his creation. Our difficulty lies in perceiving; in convincing ourselves of something new; for the gates of our apprehension are closed against novelty. Our mind is like an aristocratic drawing-room which is closed to people without credentials; to gain admittance it is necessary to be introduced by someone already known. We must proceed from the known to the unknown. Whereas what is new, must break down the closed doors, or else creep in at a moment of relaxation when the door has been left ajar. Then the novelty produces amazement, and ultimately a revolution.

What Is the Montessori Revolution around Creativity?

Montessori tells us that the teacher must realize that a child’s learning is radically different from adult learning. The teacher is part of a paradise lost where the first years of creative acquisition are deeply submerged and beyond conscious analysis. What Montessori then defines for the unconscious is not the swirling mass of instinct, not the underlying source of psychopathology—as the neo-Freudians so frequently equate. Montessori speaks about the teacher and the prepared environment and how they must aid the child in the mining of the unconscious ore. Montessori education is the processing of obscure global riches which lie beneath the surface in the child’s work.

It is here that so much commentary on “creativity” devotes itself—the role of the unconscious in child development. (See Phyllis Pottish-Lewis, page 61.) The unifying prepared environment evokes the unconscious mechanism to create an individual creative mind that synthesizes order and builds a lifetime motivation for innovation.

The article that follows is a result of a review of the literature around a changing Montessori perspective due to the recent revelations of the powers of the adolescent and the creative leap into social ideals of the amazing human being entering adulthood. This is a conclusion which aligns with all the planes of development, indicating that the creative personality is the endpoint (most important aspect) of all Montessori education and that there is no other educational experience that can compare to it. The authors write:

The personality that is cultivated by eighteen years of Montessori education will hold a sense of usefulness and awareness of the human community and will forever carry an understanding of one’s ‘many-sided powers of adaptation’, which is the Montessori creative personality.