

AMS POSITION PAPER



MUSIC IN EDUCATION

The goal of Montessori education is to develop to the fullest the three aspects of the child's nature - body, mind, and spirit. Learning music happily involves all three of these dimensions and can, therefore, be a highly integrating force in the development of the child's personality. Music-making involves a physical activity (moving, singing, playing), produced by mental direction (matching a pitch or rhythmic pattern), to convey a sentiment or idea (a manifestation of the spirit).

Since music is language - the movement of sounds through time to express an idea - its assimilation by the child follows the same sequence as that of the mother tongue:

- Absorption through listening, before the speech mechanism is expressive;
- Mimicry/babbling/articulation of first words, phrases, and sentences;
- Written and read language

This sequence gives us a powerful tool, like a pedagogical outline, for preparing the "musical environment" for the young child.

Because modern neurological research tells us that the ear begins to function in utero about the fifth month of pregnancy, an expectant mother can expose her developing fetus to music before birth through singing and rocking. The newborn needs a matrix of silence into which musical sounds are introduced (rhymes and ditties, repeated again and again) and stillness into which rhythmic movement is introduced (bouncing, pat-a-cake, rocking, clapping). The parents are initially the most effective persons to do these activities with the child, for they involve bonding (the touching of the infant's skin, the sound of the familiar adult caregiver voice), thereby inducing security and health. Parents who sing and dance with their children are giving them the message that music-making is a natural, daily activity - a tonic for the body, mind, and spirit.

When the child enters a Montessori preschool environment, the use of music as a spontaneous expression continues, and the teacher gradually introduces the "elements of music" in a more structured way.

- 1. Rhythm:** Beginning with the walking on the line and progressing to other natural expressions of movement, such as running, skipping, and galloping, the child begins to associate certain rhythmic figures with bodily movements. Also, through the use of echoes, both verbal and rhythmic (clapping, tapping knees, snapping), children acquire a vocabulary of simple rhythms.
- 2. Pitch:** Through daily singing of songs, nursery rhymes and fingerplays, children begin to acquire a sense of pitch. The Montessori bell material affords the child the opportunity to hear musical sounds in isolation - to match, grade, and name them. Work with both the pentatonic and diatonic scale patterns gives exposure to different pitch relationships, which are the building blocks of melody.
- 3. Timbre:** Children are introduced to the instruments of the orchestra, with their various tone qualities, and learn the names of the instruments and their respective sounds.
- 4. Intensity:** Children hear pieces with different gradations of volume, a quiet lullaby, a strong march.
- 5. Form:** Children realize through listening to selected music that there is a form to music, just as there is a form (syntax) to language.
- 6. Culture:** As teachers introduce music, whether vocal or instrumental, its place and time of origin is given so children begin to relate music to history and geography.

When the child moves into the Montessori Elementary level, all the above elements are continued in more detail, with the addition of notation. Using the movable staff material and the tone bars (transposer), the child learns how to make permanent the tunes he/she has invented. This notation

material performs the same function in music that the movable alphabet does in language. Increasingly, music is allied to its cultural roots and is studied as an expression of ethnicity and as part of the fabric of a given culture at a particular time. The children study the heroes and heroines of music and make timelines of composers to discover how musical forms and styles have evolved through the ages.

What is the expected result of a thorough experience of music from birth through the school years? The philosopher Susanne Langer has said, "What discursive symbolism - language in its literal use - does for our awareness of things about us and our own relation to them, the arts do for our subjective reality feeling and emotion - they give inward experiences form and thus make them conceivable." Concurrent with emphasis on the developing cognitive skills must go attention to the child's affective life, the inner thoughts and feelings. Through regular exposure to the great music of the past and present, the child has touchstone with his/her own inner life of the spirit.

The American Montessori Society, through its training and professional growth programs, fosters within the corps of teachers the knowledge with which to make available to the children the musical experiences that are every human being's birthright.

The American Montessori Society (AMS) is a nonprofit education society founded in 1960 whose purpose is to help children develop their potential through the educational principles of Dr. Maria Montessori. This includes the following: developing Montessori programs, accrediting schools, granting credentials, encouraging research, organizing seminars and symposia, and promoting all other areas which relate to the dissemination of Montessori philosophy.

