



ISLAMIC
MONTESSORI
nurturing the child's natural interest

Islamic Montessori

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MONTESSORI AT HOME

Mother of 3 Anouchka shares
her tips on removing
obstacles from the home

ACTIVATING YOUR DORMANT FITRAH

Layla Graham talks
about the transformation
of the adult guide in
Montessori





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REMOVING OBSTACLES FROM HOME

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ACTIVATING YOUR DORMANT FITRAH

Our deen outlines the fitrah of the human being from birth as being pure and possessing a natural compulsion towards knowing and working towards our purpose; worshipping our Creator. Montessori's practice of adult transformation is, as Muslims, to awaken our true instincts of submission to Allah.

from the editor

Assalamu alaiukm everyone,

Welcome to the first edition of the new Islamic Montessori magazine.

It has been 18 years since I graduated as a Montessori educator. At the time I was the only hijabi Montessorian that I knew! I felt so passionately that Montessori was inline with Islamic education and a way to move the Muslim ummah forward. In the early days, I faced a lot of resistance from the Muslim community, I was even told that I am deviated from Islam through following Dr Montessori's philosophy on the development of the child. But I knew a day would come when others would see the beauty of Montessori and how it fits perfectly within our Islamic teachings.

Today, there are so many amazing Muslim Montessorians all over the world. There is so much knowledge and expertise amongst us, incredible voices that need to be heard and so much we can share. As visible practicing Muslims, we may not have access to many of the opportunities and audiences available to other Montessorians, that's why a hub for Muslim Montessorians is so important. This is a place for collaboration, expression and sharing our experience as Montessori educators and parents.

I've been dreaming about creating this magazine for many years, a place where we can come together as Muslim Montessorians to share our experiences and expertise. Our intention is for this to be of benefit to the Muslim Ummah, preparing our children for success in this life and the next. Although this first issue is far from perfect and can do with lots of improvements, I hope that you do enjoy it.

May this magazine be a source of good knowledge benefiting us all in this life and the next.

Ma'asalama,
Nusaibah Macadam

P/S: If you are a Muslim Montessori educator and want to contribute to this magazine, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Nusaibah
Nusaibah Macadam
EDITOR

MONTESSORI: EDUCATION FOR LIFE

by Margaret Dillane
Photos by Rumi Montessori

“Whatever an education is, it should make you a unique individual, not a conformist; it should furnish you with an original spirit with which to tackle the big challenges; it should allow you to find values which will be your road map through life; it should make you spiritually rich, a person who loves whatever you are doing, wherever you are, whomever you are with; it should teach you what is important, how to live and how to die.”

(“Dumbing us Down” – John Taylor)

Education in the current climate appears to be moving increasingly toward instrumentality. Early years schooling finds itself caught within a straight jacket of technicist pressure, early years development matters, and achievement tables, as well as the burden of related managerial bureaucracy. Within this climate there is a concern as to whether the holistic, inclusive, individualised and affective theory of learning at the heart of Montessori education can survive.

It would appear that the children of the 21st century are under ever increasing pressure to succeed. This ‘success’ seems to be measured in terms of tangible achievement rather than in the development of the ‘whole child.’ More concern is expressed about the development of the three ‘R’s (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and preparation for entrance assessments than for the less tangible dimensions of education such as spiritual, moral or creative development.

With increased emphasis placed on reading, writing and arithmetic little consideration is given to the spiritual or emotional growth of the child. This is encouraged perhaps by the emphasis which has been placed on measurable attainment by the government through the adoption of league tables, national targets in the core subjects as a tool for guiding educational change. The fears of parents about the future of their child are fed by the media and thus the focus for schooling becomes removed from dimensions of education, which cannot be measured.

Consequently, it seems like a difficult task to encourage parents to look at the spiritual and emotional development of their children rather than their academic achievements.



Picture from
Rumi Montessori

Furthermore, in my work as a Montessori Assessor, I have been faced with good Montessori schools that are falling increasingly under the influence of new Government initiatives on measurability and academic attainment. Clearly the requirement to prove success in terms of measurability is becoming more and more difficult to escape from if Montessori schools are to survive in such a climate.

Unfortunately, as a result of academic pressure Montessori education is now rarely being used for the development of the 'whole child', rather that it is now an instrument for teaching children reading, writing and arithmetic for the purposes of the fee-paying parents while adhering to new Government initiatives.



One of the main issues contributing to this situation is that across the world today there are many different interpretations of the Montessori method in existence. These schools exist without the control of one single united governing body monitoring the correct use of the original concept underpinning the Montessori method of education, and by extension, Montessori nursery schools are being set up without any controls on how the method is being used. Consequently, the Montessori Method is subject to corruption and academic attainment where schools are under pressure to compete for pupils where academic attainment is the ruling force.

The realisation that Montessori education should be subject to corruption and change for reasons of competition and measurable attainment should be a cause of great concern amongst Montessorians today. It flies in the face of all that Dr Montessori was seeking to achieve in the education of the 'whole child' and undermines the very essence of Montessori education.

From my experience, I have found evidence to suggest that the spiritual and holistic dimensions of the Montessori Method of education are being scaled down in order to allow for new Government initiatives in early years. Also, I feel there is a necessary urgency in examining the spiritual dimension of Montessori education before this distinctive element of Dr Montessori's pedagogy is subsumed and lost.

Indeed, the idea of nurturing the spirit remains in theory the essential goal for Montessori schools, yet the extent to which teachers within these schools understand and perceive this vision is uncertain. The fear is that the emphasis on the spiritual growth of the child is being lost due to the increasing pressure of achievement.

Dr Maria Montessori strongly believed in the child as a 'unique individual' with an 'original spirit' that guides and allows the child to develop at his/her own pace. She believed, as John Taylor has stated in the above quotation that education; 'should make you a person who loves whatever you are doing, wherever you are, whomever you are with....

Montessori believed that children form themselves in relation to their environment; therefore, she regarded education as beginning from birth. She believed that education should not be forced on a child rather she believed in the 'natural unfolding' of the child and therefore set up the prepared environment with this concept in mind. The environment in a Montessori classroom is prepared to allow this natural unfolding to take place, where each

child is seen as an individual and treated with the respect that this precious time of life deserves. This is something we must hold onto if we are to be advocates of the Montessori philosophy in its entirety.

Montessori believed that the 'natural unfolding' follows a specific path, which must be aided by the adult. This she believed can only be achieved by observing and following the child's natural development. Montessori saw her method as 'education for life' and therefore focused on the development of the 'whole' child in relation to their environment. Montessori believed that children have a natural ability to learn and given the correct environment this learning will naturally take place according to the child's own time table and not a time table designed or implemented by the adult. Therefore, as adults we must ensure that we are not falling into the trap of timetables, agendas personal or otherwise.

Montessori often stated;

"Every useless help to a child is an obstacle to development"



Picture from
Rumi Montessori

She believed that the adult who is not prepared to understand the uniqueness of the child becomes the greatest obstacle to the child's natural development. She believed that the adult must prepare herself for the task of working with the child in a way that she is the facilitator, the go between for the child and the environment and not the teacher imparting her knowledge. She saw the role of the adult as one of unobtrusive observer tailoring the child's individual learning according to her observations thus guiding the child to their natural learning allowing the child to build a confidence and self esteem that will last a lifetime.



Picture from Rumi Montessori

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margaret Dillane has 35 years of experience in working and running a Montessori Children's House and mentoring and training Montessori students. She is now offering Montessori consultation and in-house training in all areas of the Montessori curriculum.

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As Montessorians, parents, educators it is our duty to remember that learning is a natural process gifted to all at the moment of conception therefore, something that we must guard and protect for our future generations.

“The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education.”

Albert Einstein



Picture from
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SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MONTESSORI AND PROPHETIC EDUCATION (PART 1)

by Nusaibah Macadam
Photos by Rumi Montessori

The search for the best way to educate and nurture a child is a familiar struggle for many parents and educators, and perhaps even more-so for parents of Muslim children - who seek a method of education that not only provides an opportunity for academic excellence, but one that also successfully instils a strong belief system, at its very core.

We as Muslim educators aim to enable our children to reach their full potential not just in this world, but in the afterlife too. The search for the perfect model for Islamic education has led many Muslims to explore the Montessori method. These parents and educators have found a unique compatibility

between the Montessori method and their religion, and have been inspired to adapt the model to suit their needs.

Over the last 18 years as a Muslim Montessori educator, I have had the opportunity to delve deep into the Montessori philosophy, examining the connections between what was revealed in the Quran, the example of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and what Maria Montessori discovered about the secret of how humans develop. What I have found in my research is that Montessori education is prophetic in its nature and mirrors the advice of our beloved prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Here are three key similarities between Montessori and prophetic education, giving you a deeper insight into why

Montessori education is a great fit for the Muslim child.

The Starting Point of Education is the Fitrah of the child

Montessori is a system of education that seeks to develop the child's natural interest, curiosity and their natural love for learning. It is a child centred approach where the main focus is on unlocking the potential within the child. The core of the Montessori philosophy is actually to work with the fitrah of the child, keeping in line with how children naturally learn and develop.

Dr Montessori came to her conclusions about the development of the human being through detailed scientific observations of the child. She

wanted to understand how a child naturally develops and how we can best support the natural unfolding that takes place. By humbling herself and sincerely seeking guidance from God, she was able to observe the phenomena of human development.

Since Dr Montessori was observing the fitrah of the child, unknowingly, what she was witnessing was Allah's ﷻ incredible creation and how Allah nurtures and guides the child's development. What she observed was the mechanisms Allah ﷻ installed in the child so that they can reach their full potential. Since Montessori education is based on the fitrah of the child, this provides Muslim educators with the perfect platform for holistic Islamic education.

Education for the Bigger Picture

Montessori education is more than a method for instruction of academic studies. Dr Montessori saw that there was more to life than learning to read and write, she saw education as 'an aid to life'. Dr Montessori believed that the universe was interconnected and that there is a purpose behind everything in the world. She realised that we are all connected to each other and have a clear purpose on this earth. Our life is to fulfill that purpose. Dr Montessori said *"the purpose of life is to obey the occult command which harmonizes all and creates an ever better world"*.

In the Quran Allah ﷻ makes the purpose of our life very clear. In surat al-Dharyyat we are told

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

'I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me.'

The purpose of our life here on earth is to know and recognise Allah in everything around us, to worship Him and show thankfulness to him. If this is the purpose of life, then surely Islamic education must be focused on cultivating the love of Allah and developing a recognition of the purpose of life; which Montessori education is all about.

Since Montessori education is all about the bigger picture and actualizing our purpose in life, this method provides an excellent platform for educating our Muslim children for success in this life and the next.

Every Child Is Born With A Boundless Potential

Dr Montessori believed that each child is born with boundless potential. Dr Montessori used the term NEBULAE (clouds of dust and gases that form stars and solar systems) to describe this infinite potential innately present in all children from birth, giving the child the opportunity to develop into anything that the s/he pays attention to.

“The purpose of life is to obey the occult command which harmonizes all and creates an ever better world”

(Dr Maria Montessori)



Picture from
Rumi Montessori

This idea of boundless potential is not new to us as Muslims, Allah ﷻ tells us in the Quran;

﴿لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَن تَقْوِيمٍ﴾

"We have indeed created humankind in the best of molds" [9]

Allah ﷻ has created the child in the best of forms. The great scholars explain, Allah ﷻ created mankind with a boundless good potential to become the best version of themselves possible.

The great scholar, Al-Ghazali tells us,

"Knowledge exists, potentially in the human soul like a seed in the soil; by learning, the potential becomes actual." [7].

Al-Ghazali is indicating that this boundless potential is already there within the child but it's through learning and developing that potential becomes something real. This is why education in the right way is so important. Just like a plant that is nurtured well will bare beautiful flowers and wholesome fruit, so too, a child who is nurtured in the correct way will grow up to be someone amazing and of benefit to the world insha'Allah.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nusaibah Macadam is a certified Montessori teacher for ages 3-12 years with more than 18 years of experience. Nusaibah is the principal of Rumi Montessori school in Malaysia where they provide a model Islamic Montessori education for children aged 3-12.

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Picture from
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"Knowledge exists potentially in the human soul like a seed in the soil"

IMAM AL GHAZALI





Picture from
Layla Graham

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ADULT GUIDE: ACTIVATING YOUR DORMANT FITRAH THROUGH NORMALIZATION

by Layla Graham

Photos by Layla Graham & Rumi Montessori

As I began my course of study to become a classroom director for children ages three to six, I had certain assumptions and expectations regarding the content I'd be presented as a trainee. The very first activity we partook in was a mindfulness exercise in total silence. Wow, okay, I thought to myself as I was instructed to close my eyes and keep my body as still as possible. Little did I know that from that day

on, I would embark on a spiritually transformative journey that not only prepared me for guiding children, but that also awakened within me a deep love for my deen.

As a Muslim Montessorian, I struggled to think back to the very moment I found the striking resemblance between Islam and the Montessori method, and I realized it was when as a trainee, I was first introduced to

“Not only prepared me for guiding children, but that also awakened within me a deep love for my deen.”

the phenomenon that Dr. Montessori herself stumbled upon entirely by chance: *normalization*.

Dr. Montessori said of normalization:

“Normalization is the single most important result of our work.” (The Absorbent Mind, 1949)

So, what is normalization? It is the marvelous consequence of the removal of “defects” from a child’s character and behavior. Defects such as temper, tantrums, fatigue, clinginess, apathy, boredom, lying, and aggression are all considered “defects” or “deviations” by Dr. Montessori that can be erased by the process of normalizing the child.

Through multiple experiments and observation of hundreds of children around the world, Montessori discovered that by preparing the environment and providing mentally-stimulating, purposeful work, these “defects” in the children essentially vanished, and were replaced by the ability to immerse themselves in deep concentration, a great sense of order and calm, and most wonderful of all, immeasurable joy.

Montessori’s conclusion was that **“the disappearance of these defects made us understand that they are acquired, not real characteristics”**.

Every negative adjective one can use to describe the behavior or character of a child is the result of a defect they have acquired. Through normalization, the child’s true nature of joy and a favorability towards purposeful work is revealed. In other words, a child normalized is a child that personifies the fitrah of the human being.

What can we as adults learn from the normalization of children when it comes to our own spiritual development?

Allah tabaraka wa ta’ala says in Suratul Dhariyaat:

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

“I have only created Jinn and Men that they may serve Me.”

Our purpose here on earth is to worship our Creator. Every action we do is either to carry out this divine purpose or not.

The joy that normalized children experience is a result of two things; 1. Freedom to choose and 2. Purposeful work. Allah tabaraka wa ta’ala granted us both in our free will as human beings and in the Islamic rituals mapped out by the Shariah of the Noble Qur’an and the Sunnah of our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The defects and deviations we suffer from are directly linked to our suppressed and dormant fitrah. By choosing to practice our deen and subscribing to the Islamic way of life, we normalize ourselves and activate our fitrah, our true human nature, and experience profound contentment and joy.



Picture from
Rumi Montessori

Similarly, as Muslims who strive to return to the state of fitrah by busying ourselves with acts of good, recitation of the Qur'an, and the study and application of the Sunnah, we begin to experience a longing to respond to the call of Allah ﷻ and recognize that each command and ruling was set in place for our own benefit and from Allah's love for us, His creation. Deviation from the word of Allah ﷻ does not cause harm to Allah ﷻ, but to our own selves.

Dr. Montessori wrote in her published works on the transformation of the adult guide, during training, we are obliged to let go of biases, prejudices, and any premature assumptions made about the children under our care. We are instructed to continuously observe the children and use our findings to solve problems to restore normalization.

So, what of our natural state of Al Fitrah?

The divine design of our spirit leads us to understand that instinctually, we find security, belonging, and solace in tuning into our fitrah. If preparation of the environment and involving young children in purposeful works leads to their normalization, perhaps we can look towards our environments and towards the things we do on a daily basis to normalize our lives, rid ourselves of spiritual "defects", and activate the fitrah which leads to happiness to obey one's Creator, and the profound joy in seeking His pleasure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Layla Graham is an instructor of Qur'an and Al-Qa'idah An-Nooraniyyah, as well as an Early Childhood Montessori Guide. She grew up in northern New Jersey and currently runs Al-Kitaab Al-Muneer, a Qur'an and Arabic afterschool program that utilizes the Montessori method to foster love of the Qur'an in young children. This year, she is set to launch a Montessori materials company, Prime Learning Resources, that will cater to the special needs of Qur'an and Arabic educators, as well as educators seeking a decolonized version of the cultural subjects. Layla is mother to two boys who are the inspiration behind her work.

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Picture from
Rumi Montessori

THE MONTESSORI GARDENER

by Elham Abdel-Baki
Photos by Elham Abdel-Baki



Picture from
Elham Abdel-Baki

Due to Covid-19 and the lockdown in the past few months here in the UK, many changes occurred in my life but one of these changes contributed to a series of realisations, one of which is the similarities I found between gardening and the Montessori method.

I've never been into gardening. In fact, I was notorious for killing off all house plants that crossed my way. Now with the lockdown, I decided to turn my house back garden into a little plot as my desire to add fresh home-grown vegetables and fruits to our table as well as the extended period of free time fueled this desire even more.

As I started to read and educate myself on gardening, sowing, weeding and harvesting my plants, I noticed so many similarities between caring for plants and caring for little children, these similarities are also so visible

in the philosophies I follow in educating my children; Montessori and also in the teachings of our beautiful religion, Islam.

Parenting and Gardening

As parents and teachers, we usually approach caring for and upbringing children with one of two mindsets, the gardener or the carpenter. This metaphor was presented in a book titled 'the Gardener and The Carpenter' (Gopnik, 2016) where Alison Gopnik says that parents of today's society often follow one of two models of parenting. The carpenter model behaves like a carpenter, chiselling away at a piece of wood to achieve a certain end-goal, in the case of childcare and education it's a certain kind of person with certain and a specific outcome.

The carpenter model believes that he or she has the power to transform a block of wood into a table for example, all they have to do is to follow exact steps and the outcome is certain to be what they had in mind in the first place. Whereas the gardener model, on the other hand, does not believe he or she has the full control and single-handedly can create the plants and trees.

The gardener parent and educator model is different from the carpenter in that the child is not considered as a blank slate that needs to be formed and moulded. Instead, gardeners are providing the right environment for the plant to thrive by pulling out the weeds and making sure the plant gets enough water and sunshine knowing he or she can't control the outcome of the plant and watching with excitement to see what unfolds.

To be a Gardener

The gardener model resembles how we are encouraged to raise our children as Muslims, we are there to educate them, provide support and guidance but we cannot guarantee what path they will lead in life and we are only rewarded for the effort not the outcome.

A good gardener just works on creating the right conditions in which plants have the best chance of flourishing, he/she can't coerce a plant to flower before it's ready or a fruit to ripen on cue. The same notion has been advocated by Maria Montessori through the care to prepare the right environment for the child to thrive and flourish which is very prominent in many of her writings such as:

"We cannot know the consequences of suppressing a child's spontaneity when he is just beginning to be active. We may even suffocate life itself. That humanity which is revealed in all its intellectual splendour during the sweet and tender age of childhood should be respected with a kind of religious veneration. It is like the sun which appears at dawn or a flower just beginning to bloom. Education cannot be effective unless it helps a child to open up himself to life."

(Kostelnik & Grady, 2009, p43)

Once we embrace the gardener model of parenting and educating our children, we are freed from the stress and anxiety the end-goal model holds for us. Instead of focusing on what the child will achieve, we will be focusing on what can we do to support the child reaching his/her utmost potential.

Growing a beautiful garden takes constant dedication, attention and effort. Just like caring for the child starting from setting a plan for the child's learning that's in line with our values, knowing the different seasons of interest the child goes through which Montessori called "planes of development" (Montessori, 1988) to disciplining the child and helping him/her overcome negative habits in loving ways like pruning a tender plant so it can flourish and grow.

"Once we embrace the gardener model of parenting and educating children, we are freed from stress and anxiety the end-goal model holds for us."



Photo source:
pixabay.com



Picture from
Elham Abdel-Baki

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Picture from
Zainab Shamis

WORDS OF COURAGE FROM ONE MONTESSORI PARENT TO ANOTHER

by Zainab Shamis
Photos by Zainab Shamis

The similarity between being a Montessori teacher and being a Montessori parent is that you enter both thinking that you know what you are going to teach the children in your care, and very quickly realise that you are, in actual fact, the student, and the child is the teacher.

Maria Montessori said,

“Children are human beings to whom respect is due, superior to us by reason of their innocence and of the greater possibilities of their future.” (Dr Montessori’s Own Handbook (1965) p.133)

Their closeness to the natural environment and their distance from the negative effects of being socialised places them as spiritually more advanced than the adults in their world.

“Children are human beings to whom respect is due, superior to us by reason of their innocence and the greater possibilities of their future.”

I offer some words of encouragement to you, whoever is reading this, in the hope that in those moments of worry, of feeling that you are not reaching your potential or that you cannot afford to implement Montessori in the way you think it should be, you can take courage. To the sleep deprived but hopeful parents, who may feel guilty and lacking. To the well-meaning but new to the approach, perhaps having felt that Montessori didn't welcome you or represent your children. I hope, with love, that this helps in some way.

With two children under 5, my expectations have reduced dramatically in terms of what I expected our Montessori life to look like. I hoped for beautiful shelves, we rarely work at them now. I hoped for excelling in mathematics but we have hardly touched on that area for spending our hours painting and drawing. We are talking so much more than I imagined about so many different subjects, imaginary and real, giving me incredible snapshots of the magic that is within a child's mind.

The first classroom is in the home, and that home is totally specific to you. It can be so tempting to ask around, look at others' homes and measure yourselves up against them. However, it is like comparing one country to another. The weather is different, the timings are different, the food, the words, the people and the way they love each other is different.



Every home is unique, and is made up of racial, religious and cultural identity - these will form the foundation for where to go. Knowing where you have come from is a perfect guidepost for the future. Explain what is involved in your culture and religion. Delve into racial history that has adversely affected you as a family and those who came before you. Share photographs, stories, letters over inclusive preparation of traditional family meals. Speak freely the languages which reside in your home, even introducing new languages here and there. Perhaps there are

annual events and festivities which will bind your closeness and employ empathy with others who have other celebrations during the year. By valuing what you have and who you are, your children in turn feel valued with what they contribute too.

Having an environment where love is abundant, joy is openly expressed and emotions are acknowledged can bring depth of connection and speed of growth that surpass any toy or activity that money can be spent on. You do not need to have a specific family set up - perhaps you co-parent or your children have siblings



Picture from
Rumi Montessori

“Each and all of us want to be seen and heard in our wholeness.”

who live in different homes. There are many ways in which a family is shaped, but as your child grows, ask them what they love, what they do not enjoy, who they are inspired by and what sparks their imagination, to connect with them and in turn follow them and their learning. Each and all of us want to be seen and heard in our wholeness.

The best place to start is where you are and with what you have, and as much as it may feel important to buy tools or books to get you going, take courage in what you have at your fingertips in your home and what you can borrow or share with other families who are approaching parenting in a similar way.

Observe to learn, explore to experience, show joy to be joyful. You are their first and most important role model – you have the strength and the power to guide your children into their light and whole self with love and connection.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Whilst expecting her first child, Zainab set up The Montessori Studio, to allow Montessori to become more accessible and demystify some of the ‘elitist’ stereotypes of this way of learning, particularly to those for whom looking after young children feels like a whole new world. 9 years and two of her own children later, she has gone from nursery settings to home-schooling to teaching parents how to implement the Montessori approach in their own homes.



“Observe to learn, explore to experience, show joy to be joyful. You are their first and most important role model – you have the strength and the power to guide your children into their light and whole self with love and connection.”

Zainab Shamis

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REMOVING OBSTACLES IN YOUR HOME BY ANOUCHKA

Instagram: @montinouchka

As I contemplated what my starting point should be for my

Montessori writing adventures, I tried to go back over the past year and analyse how I got to this point. I decided a few months ago to take the plunge and officially start homeschooling my eldest child using the Montessori philosophy as my guide. What is it that made me confident enough in my abilities to take on this huge responsibility?

I stumbled upon the Montessori method shortly after giving birth to my youngest, just over a year ago now. I was faced with having

“What is it that made me confident enough to take on this huge responsibility?”

to raise three children under the age of three, with the middle one having both learning and physical disabilities, and I searched the internet for child development books. I was particularly interested in children with special needs, as I could already tell my daughter and youngest son were fast absorbing all the experiences I was exposing them to, whereas my middle son didn't seem very interested in much at all. And so I came across the story of a woman that developed a revolutionary philosophy with the help of lots of beautifully special children like mine.

As I delved deeper into the story of Maria Montessori and found that she had used her work with these special children to then improve the lives of all the children she came across, I realised this method might well be ideal for our family. We have a real mix of developmental stages, as well as learning and physical abilities. Furthermore, the philosophy centred on guiding the child towards



Picture from
Anouchka Van Den Doel

physical and mental independence, which sounded very attractive to me at a time when I had three little human beings that were all very much dependent on me for their every day wants and needs. I then did what everyone does these days when they come across a new idea, scour social media for like minded people!

This leads me onto the part of the story where I "meet" someone I am now very privileged to call a friend and mentor. Nusaibah at Rumi Montessori took me under her wing and, through her courses and personal guidance I have made it all the way to the point where I feel I can commit to educating my children at home, within the structure provided to us by another female role model. Alhamdulillah.

So, what were the first steps I took once I started to try and apply this philosophy within my home? Well, I mainly started by removing obstacles. I observed my children and tried to identify which parts of their existing daily routine they might be able to complete independently if it wasn't for the obstacles of an adult centred household. The changes were very small yet very powerful:

In the kitchen, I added a small and light step stool for my daughter to be able to wash her hands, access some water when she is thirsty and clean her dishes after she finishes a meal. It also allows her to grab items such



Picture from
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as juice packs and fruit out of the fridge, as well as giving her access to the counter to cut up an apple or help me with preparing one of our three daily meals. All this from a little plastic step stool!

In the living room I removed all toy 'bins' and significantly reduced the amount of toys available at one time. I opted instead to store most of them away from view and put in place a rotation system where I replace toys that haven't been played with in a while with "new" ones. I also curated our toy stash and removed any toys that really didn't

acquire any active participation by the child. This left me with a much smaller amount of toys that could be displayed in a much more orderly way for my children to clearly see and actively play with.

In the bathroom, based on the success of the stool in the kitchen, we purchased the exact same stool and guided our daughter on how to use the bathroom entirely independently. We ensured everything she needed was within her reach and gently moved away from always come in to help her.



Picture from
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She recently started to take her own showers and has gone from being someone that hated having her hair washed to someone that wishes to do so daily.

In the bedroom, we rearranged the wardrobes to allow all the children access to their own clothes. This was also mirrored in the corridor where, prior to the current pandemic, the children became increasingly independent and willing to get themselves ready for a trip outside.

But, I would say that out of all the obstacles we have removed, the most impactful one was to remove screens from our childrens' lives completely. Now this may sound extreme or unattainable to some of you. Maybe even damaging! But it has changed our daily so profoundly positively that I would ask you to give it a temporary try, just for the sake of proving me wrong!

The increased calm and productivity that emanated from this relatively small change is certainly worth an experiment. My children no longer have source of mindless entertainment and eventually weaned off of the over stimulation this came with. Their minds are finally free to focus on their inner teacher as Maria Montessori calls it, no longer is that voice being drowned out by the shouting and flashing of screens.



Picture from
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anouchka is a 31 year old Muslim mother of 3 young children living in London. She is a student at the Rumi Montessori school and works to apply her new found knowledge to the upbringing and home schooling of her children. She occasionally documents aspects of her journey on Instagram @montinouchka.

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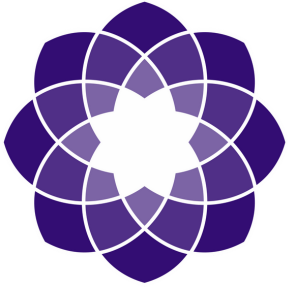
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