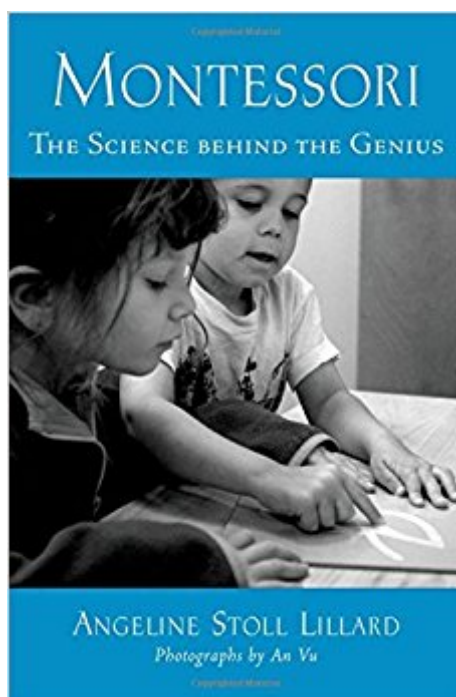


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Montessori: The Science Behind The Genius



Synopsis

One hundred years ago, Maria Montessori, the first female physician in Italy, devised a very different method of educating children, based on her observations of how they naturally learn. In *Montessori*, Angeline Stoll Lillard shows that science has finally caught up with Maria Montessori. Lillard presents the research behind eight insights that are foundations of Montessori education, describing how each of these insights is applied in the Montessori classroom. In reading this book, parents and teachers alike will develop a clear understanding of what happens in a Montessori classroom and, more important, why it happens and why it works. Lillard, however, does much more than explain the scientific basis for Montessori's system: Amid the clamor for evidence-based education, she presents the studies that show how children learn best, makes clear why many traditional practices come up short, and describes an ingenious alternative that works. Now with a foreword by Renilde Montessori, the youngest grandchild of Maria Montessori, *Montessori* offers a wealth of insights for anyone interested in education.

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Customer Reviews

I was familiar with the basics of Montessori education before I read "*Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*". I have been drawn to it ever since I first heard about it because it feels more natural and right than traditional public school. I read this book in an effort to understand the system better and to be able to defend my choice to well-meaning but critical friends and family. I was not disappointed. Lillard first compares traditional education with the Montessori system, pointing out

how each came to be and how they have evolved over time. She then looks at what she considers to be the eight principles of Montessori education. Each is explained in depth, compared in depth with traditional education, and then research is provided in support of each principle. In her research, Lillard discovered that none of Montessori's central points have been disproven, many have been proven, and several are in need of further research. Pros: This book cites many, many scientific studies. It is well-written and easy to understand. There are many examples (and pictures) of specific materials used in Montessori education. It provides a solid explanation of many of the important principles of Montessori education. Cons: The book is a little wordy and uses too many previews, summaries, and reviews for my taste. The last chapter contains a section called "Frequently Asked Questions and Concerns about Montessori" that I wish was longer and more in depth. What I would really like to find is a debate between pro- and anti- Montessori educators. While I really enjoyed this book and learned a lot from it, I came away thinking that Lillard's assessment was too good to be true. If Montessori education is really as wonderful as she (and I) think it is, why is it not more popular?

As a former Montessori student, I've been amazed at how other children develop learning methods in classroom experiences across the U.S. With our educational system in flux, how about looking to Maria Montessori and her teaching philosophies that she developed a century ago. I may hold a biased view for Montessori learning. However, Montessori believed that the 'factory method' of schooling was outdated. Believing that children have blank slates for learning, she created learning techniques and environments that develop concentration, independent thought, motivation, curiosity, and self-discipline for life's choices. After reading this book, I'm in full agreement with her teaching methods. Lillard explains the history and theories behind Montessori education in-depth and with strength. She explains the importance of our relationships and environments within the classroom and our homes, and she explores the knee-jerk arguments against Montessori education. If you're working or raising children, you'll be way ahead of the game with this thorough and insightful book. I wanted to explore the foundations of how I learn in life, and Lillard answers my questions. I'm not only more knowledgeable about how I learn, but also I'm more aware how intelligence is developed and the possibilities of how our youth can learn in today's world. Add to your building blocks of knowledge, and explore Montessori methods... This is a supreme read.

Most of the schools for most of the kids are boring or to put it in another way, they are the killers of innovation. Even the most curious kid with an insatiable desire and a healthy dose of intellectual

energy knows what it feels like after 5-10 years of schooling, some even remember vivid accounts of how their energy was sucked out of their souls. It is a cliché to say that education is very important but then what kind of radical reforms we witnessed during the last 100 years? I don't have any particular expertise in the field of education, pedagogy or child development, but I spent a lot of time studying cognitive science, was involved in psychology research, and practically taught kids how to program (heck, I even read *Mindstorms: Children, Computers, And Powerful Ideas* from Papert long time ago!). I'm not a foreigner to Piaget and read from books from and on Vygotsky. But I heard about Montessori only about a few months ago (well, to be fair I must admit that Papert's book mentions Montessori, only in one page, in a single sentence and negatively). If Montessori method of education was something very new, or just a few years old, or even one or two decades old, I would not consider my situation very odd. Or if the method of Montessori was put to use only in a few schools in a few distant countries I would forgive myself for my ignorance. But to my surprise I learned that Montessori method is about 100 years old and put to test daily in many countries including many European ones as well as USA (some of the most famous names in my field turned out to be educated in Montessori schools: Larry Page and Sergei Brin (founders of Google), Jeff Bezos (founder of .com), Will Wright (the inventor of "The Sims"); read "The Montessori Mafia" from The Wall Street Journal for more information). I'm so much thankful to Dr. Lillard for presenting a highly readable yet scientific, evidence-based account of this wonderful method of education. I'm yet to witness a Montessori school in practice and I did not send my child to such a school, so maybe I should keep the skeptic inside me very alive. But if half of what Lillard describes is true then I'd say it'll be very difficult for me to choose any other type of education for our child. "Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius" answers almost all of the questions that a parent or a researcher can ask. And whenever there is a concrete answer you are provided with relevant results from scientific literature. If your question is still open to discussion, if there is no conclusive evidence then Lillard does not hesitate to state this, too. She also stresses a few points from Montessori methods which are almost proved to be false by scientific research (but these points are very few, Lillard shows that a very big part of Montessori method is supported by the evidence). There are other books explaining or advocating Montessori method but I believe no book yet surpassed this book in terms of scientific rigor. Thanks to the comprehensive overview by Lillard, I can clearly see the problematic points of mainstream educational methods and how negatively they affect children. I can also easily see how Montessori method solves a lot of those problems without introducing them to begin with. Many times I found my self marking pages from the book, smiling to myself and thinking "yes, that's the way it should be!". If you think your child, or any child is

something more than an empty vessel waiting to be filled by "knowledge" by a teacher, if you ever said to yourself "if only they let me be engaged with whatever I was interested in so that I could learn much more and have fun", if you think that a human being's destiny is probably something more than trying to fit into stereotypes and find herself of a fine 9-to-5 job, if you ever thought that accomplishing something beautiful, overcoming a real challenge was a feat in itself and you did not any extrinsic motivation for it, your inner drive was the source of greatest pleasure... Well, then you owe yourself to read this book. This book may not change your life, or maybe you'll never have the option of sending your child to a Montessori school for this or that reason. But one thing for sure, this book will completely change the way you look at and think about educating children and preparing them for life. And every minute of it will be well spent.

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