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## LOVE AS A CRITERION FOR VALUATING EXPERIENCES OF MONTESSORI CLASS GRADUATES

**Abstract:** Montessori claimed that love is a key concept that cannot be defined, but nevertheless treated it as central to life and education and therefore wrote a lot about its nature. Studies conducted by the Italian researcher facilitated finding the source of love, which is the child. Consequently, the didactic system she developed is focused on the child. Feelings and emotions are a kind of ability to reflect, an element of a wider system of information processing. Attributing emotional value to specific events is a specific process of creating meanings. For research purposes, the knowledge was obtained that allowed to determine a profile of 24 feelings for school experiences as well as general and ideal feelings of Montessori class graduates, expressed as valuations. It was established whether the school as well as general and ideal experiences have a positive, negative or ambivalent value for the respondents.

**Keywords:** love, Maria Montessori pedagogy, graduates of Montessori classes

According to the assumptions of the pedagogy developed by Maria Montessori, the underlying principle of educational interactions should be love, treated as a gift, fundamental good, owing to which people look for contacts with others, enter into mutual relationships with respect and understanding. The afore-mentioned principle is put into practice in everyday educational activities especially in the form of the thought-out organization of the child's educational space, freedom of choice in the learning environment or the attitude of the teacher-educator.

## LOVE AS A KEY TO PEDAGOGY BY MARIA MONTESSORI

Maria Montessori was far from attributing a mystical or ideal dimension to love, presenting it as an illusion or unattainable value. She treated love as a powerful and triggering force of human action, the central value of human life, which arises from a human's inside, their spirit and life, which means the basic need that people strive so much to be satisfied. Love, as stressed by the researcher, is an indispensable element of life, a guarantor of peace and sustainable development of both, the human and the society, it is the glue that binds the civilization, unfortunately often not recognized, hence the lack of understanding for the idea of interdependence or coexistence in a world where the poverty of one nation does not determine the welfare of another, but the collapse of all of them. Love is able to transform individuals and entire communities, making it possible to go beyond one's "self", go through "you" and reach the dimension of "we" (Szyran, 2006). Montessori claimed that love was given to us as part of a great legacy of life. Therefore, it is the life itself, that constantly speaks, hence it should be analyzed in a life perspective. It then becomes a human reality, an eternal energy that cannot be suppressed (Montessori, 1992 p. 265). Love is the essence and key of existence, the force that connects and constantly creates the universe. Montessori recalled the words of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians – but without love, then I am nothing at all (1 COR 12:31–13:8A). It is due to love that man exists and can preserve and share what his hands and intelligence have created with others. Without love, everything he has created turns into chaos and destruction (Montessori, 1992, p. 265), which we can observe ourselves on too many occasions.

The presented views, although seem incontestable, were not fully accepted by teachers and educational activists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many contemporary educators treat them with reserve. Building a civilization of peace, a culture based on profound, real respect for another human being requires a revolution in the way of thinking, in deeply rooted patterns, and transformation of the views on the model of the school system consolidated in the public awareness (Mazzetti, 2001).

Montessori argued that love is a central concept in education, difficult to define, hence she rather wrote about its nature. The studies conducted by the researcher fostered finding the source of love, which she expressed as follows: "Of all things love is the most potent. All that men can do with their discoveries depends on the conscience of him who uses them. But this energy of love is given us so that each shall have it in himself. Although the amount given to man is limited and diffused, it is the greatest of all the forces at his disposal. The part of it which we possess consciously is renewed every time a baby is born and even if circumstances

at a later stage cause it to become dormant, we still feel for it a fervent desire. Therefore, we must study it and use it, more than any of the other forces that surround us, because it is not lent to the environment, as these are, but it is lent to us. The study of love and its utilization will lead us to the source from which it springs: The Child” (Montessori, 1992, pp. 269–270).

Montessori learned from children about human development, about the process of learning, communicating with children and showing them that they are respected and loved. She was a doctor, a scientist, an educator and a master of observation. On the basis of the observations and knowledge built based on the data collected in this way, she reformulated her personal long-term task (Obuchowski, 1985), her goal in life. She gave up her doctor’s practice and took to the organization and tasks of schools, established a new teachers’ training program and redefined the role of the educator. It was the careful observation of children in the Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Rome, and later in the “Casa dei Bambini” center in San Lorenzo/Rome, that led the Italian doctor to DISCOVER THE CHILD, i.e. to develop the psychology of child development.

### DISCOVERY OF THE CHILD

On numerous occasions, Maria Montessori emphasized that in her analyses of the upbringing process she considered the essence and conditions of the child’s development. At the same time, these analyses were not restricted to the laws relating to the relationship between activity and the next stage in the course of life (biological cycle) (Montessori, 2014, p. 43). Thus, her studies were not confined to the analyses of development phases or life stages. She carefully observed the needs and behaviors of pupils, which manifested their individual traits and properties. In this way, she referred to the autonomous life cycle being the expression of the emerging individual potential. The researcher proved that the child does not develop only as a representative of the human race, but also as a person.

Montessori used the concept of *developmental potential*. She did so in order to define the basic properties that determine what kind of a person a human being will become, what level of development he can achieve in optimal physical and environmental conditions. The child has not been provided with specific properties, but with the potential to build them. The process of internal development begins from the moment of birth, certain skills and properties are gradually formed (Montessori, 1975, p. 79), the essence and organization of the characteristics of a specific human being emerge. The child independently follows a unique plan of individual development. This child, the researcher argued based on her obser-

vations, must build an individual, concrete person, intelligence, socially useful activity, character (Montessori, 1975, p. 63).

In Montessori's theory, the development of a person is based on the continuous exchange between the developing person and their environment. Individuality (hidden potential) is shaped and improved, moving from the level of vegetative activity to a more complete and complex spiritual (mental) plan due to the environmental conditions. The child himself actively adjusts to the situations happening around him. The effort involved in creative adaptation leads to the integration of personality (Montessori, 1972). Montessori wrote that a child must give himself a form to stress becoming per se, to emphasize life, that builds himself by existing.

### LOVE OF NOBLE SERVICE

“The teacher must know and experience in her daily life the secret of childhood. Through this she arrives not only at a deeper knowledge, but at a new kind of love which does not become attached to the individual person. The moment the child reveals his true nature, the teacher will understand – perhaps for the first time in her life – what love really is, and this revelation transforms her also. It is a thing that touches the heart, and little by little it changes people. Anyone who has experienced it at least once will never be able to erase the impression it made or the love it awakened” (Montessori, 1992, p. 258).

In this way, Montessori explained that the teacher's job is to learn about the nature of the child so that she can love him. In the researcher's interpretation, discovering, building understanding and the ability to interpret the child's behavior arouse increasing enthusiasm, greater awareness and interest in further work for the benefit of children. The mentioned cycle is constantly renewed, just in the name of love for the child.

The quoted thought proves the need to implement changes postulated by Montessori: not only the metamorphosis of the teacher's role but also a deep reform of the education system, which should be founded on changing the way adults think about children. “Adults do not understand children or the youth and consequently are in a constant conflict with them. The panacea is not about acquiring new theoretical knowledge or obtaining higher cultural standards. That's not the point, adults should find a new starting point. The adult must find within himself the still unknown error that prevents him from seeing the child as he is” (Montessori, 1972, p. 15). The teacher who discovers the child, learns the secrets of her pupils, immerses herself in a special kind of love – love of noble service, love for the child's life just discovered. She writes: “There are two levels of love. Often

when we speak of our love for children, we refer to the care we take of them, the caresses and affection we shower on those we know and who arouse our tender feelings [...]. But I am speaking of something different. It is a level of love which is no longer personal or material. To serve the children is to feel one is serving the spirit of man, a spirit which has to free itself. The difference of level has truly been set not by the teacher, but by the child. [...] But now, with the manifestation before her of the child's spirit, the greatest value she can ascribe to her own contribution is expressed in the words: «I have helped this life to fulfill the tasks set for it by creation» (Montessori, 1992, pp. 258–259).

The analysis of the quotation leads to the conclusion that love makes a man capable of showing care, tenderness to a child, which are forms of kindness and self-giving. It is also possible to move to more complete forms of love. Thus, a more complete form of this feeling is the one resulting from the mission, passion, belief that the work carried out will be rewarded with seeing independent, joyful, discovering and cooperating children – implementing a project of their own development. The teacher, Montessori argued, observes an extraordinary phenomenon, which is the man and his nature. And it is not the man in his daily activities, but the man in his awakening to intellectual life, of which life the educator is to be a researcher and a guide. In this way, the researcher justified the change in the interpretative perspective of the role of the teacher, turning away from tradition and routine in favor of accepting the child as the creator of his own development.

## EDUCATION TO SERVE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Bearing in mind her experiences, Montessori encouraged teachers to recognize the observation method as a fundamental task requiring full commitment. She prepared teachers to observe the child's behavior in the classroom, ways of using didactic materials, progress in learning, type of demonstrated interests, level of concentration, pattern of the child's movement around the classroom, choices he makes, friends he chooses – these are just a few examples from the list of topics that can be observed in the classroom. The teacher collects information and then proceeds to analyze it, draw conclusions, build knowledge and better understand and gain new/better awareness. In this way, the educator conducts a self-reflective dialogue, which allows him to build professionalism in discovering the approach that a child needs. Based on careful and conscious observation, an adult can recognize what is necessary for a child at a given stage, so that the child can make a full use of its internal resources. In a reflective and non-invasive way, an adult should assist a child in the process of his self-development.

Adopting the becoming human as the highest value results in the need to recognize that the school system and pedagogical activity serve the child's values. Therefore, the most important thing that should be done for life – that is for the child – is, according to the Italian researcher, to make it possible for him to satisfy his developmental needs. Therefore, the main problem of education, the researcher wrote, is to design the conditions necessary for the child's development and to give him freedom in educating.

The basic idea in the educational concept of Maria Montessori is the idea of a properly prepared environment for the education and life of a child. It is not only about the physical environment of the school classroom, although it also supports development. Montessori clarified that when talking about the environment, one should take into account everything that a child can freely choose and use, according to his predispositions, so that he can release the hidden developmental potential. Freedom is an expression of rational love. It is an educational embodiment of respect for human dignity.

#### FREEDOM AS THE EXPRESSION OF LOVE

Montessori defined the basic prerequisites of freedom: providing conditions fostering physical development, environment where a child will be able to express himself spontaneously, freeing the child from excessive teacher intervention, offering materials necessary in the process of self-education (Montessori, 2002, p. 78). It also means that the teacher “helps the child learn by himself”, follows the child, supports, waits and observes, sees and offers help. The educator acts as a collaborator in the work of development. In this way, he serves the child with humbleness, which becomes another aspect of love in Montessori pedagogy. A teacher at Montessori school is convinced that it is for the child's sake and development that she remains sidelined by the pupil.

In the learning environment, the child experiences a special kind of interpersonal relationships based on the principle of meeting. The meeting is associated with a dual role in the pedagogical relationship. The teacher becomes a student, and the student becomes a teacher in a sense. Both subjects wish to understand what each of them thinks, what they live for, what they feel. Students can have a free conversation one with another, thanks to which they learn the values that someone else understands and implements better, they find what is common, which can be the basis for real cooperation.

To sum up, Montessori describes the environment as full of peace. In this way the child develops through self-learning, thanks to freedom and love.

## LOVE AS A CRITERION OF VALUATING EXPERIENCES OF MONTESSORI CLASS GRADUATES

Feelings and emotions are also a kind of ability to reflect, part of a wider information processing system. Attributing emotional value to specific events or situations is a specific process of creating meanings, based on mutual relations and combining various, numerous activities and events (Hermans, Hermans-Jansen, 2000, p. 34), thanks to the man's ability to experience himself as a subject and an object at the same time (see: Hermans, 1991, p. 303). Hence, the emotional significance of the experiences of Montessori class graduates has become the subject of interest of researchers.

The studies conducted with the participation of graduates of Montessori Primary School no. 27 in Lublin were of a diagnostic nature and included, among others, learning about the importance of selected areas of school and life experiences of the surveyed graduates for the development of traits of an original personality. The research question was: What is, in the temporal aspect, the affective importance of school and general and ideal experiences of Montessori class graduates? The study included 69 adolescents aged 16 to 21. The participating graduates reflected on the following situations, designed for research purposes: Recall yourself as a primary school student, in a Montessori classroom (past situation), One of your family members/close friends starts education in a Montessori class (present situation); You will be responsible for educating your own children. You assume that you choose the Montessori system (future situation). They also evaluated current experiences (How do you generally feel these days?) and ideal experiences (How would you like to feel?).

For research purposes, the knowledge was obtained that allowed to determine a profile of 24 feelings for school experiences as well as general and ideal feelings of Montessori class graduates, expressed as valuations. According to the definition, valuation is a conscious, reflective approach to an experience (Hermans, after Oleś, 1992, p. 8) Hubert Hermans is of the opinion that any valuation implies a certain pattern of feelings "which is characteristic of this specific valuation. When we know what kind of feelings are associated with a specific valuation, we know something about the valuation itself" (Hermans, Hermans-Jansen, 2000, p. 31).

The presentation of results begins with the analysis of affective patterns (due to the size of the text, summaries of the first six feelings are presented) of school situations related to education in the Montessori system (tab. 1). Feelings are an internal aspect of valuation, because – as Hermans justifies – in order to understand valuation, we need to know its affective properties (Hermans, 1991; Hermans, Hermans-Jansen, 2000, p. 57). Affective terms are divided into four groups: affect

referring to self-enhancement (S): strength, self-confidence, self-esteem, pride. Affect referring to contact and union with others (O): caring, love, tenderness, intimacy. Affect referring to positive experiences (P): joy, satisfaction, pleasure, trust, energy, security, inner calm, freedom. Negative emotions (N): helplessness, shame, fear, inner turmoil, guilt, loneliness, inferiority, anger (Hermans, Hermans-Jansen, 2000; Chmielnicka-Kuter, Oleś, Puchalska-Wasył, 2012). The experiences of the respondents will therefore be described by means of pleasant and unpleasant feelings (P and N) and expressing the basic motivational trends indicated above (S and O).

Table 1.

*Affective patterns of school experiences*

No.	Recall yourself as a student (past valuation)	One of your family members starts education in a Montessori class (present valuation)	You will be responsible for educating your own children. Your choice is a Montessori school (future valuation)
1	<b>Energy (P)</b>	<b>Joy (P)</b>	<b>Joy (P)</b>
2	<b>Joy (P)</b>	<b>Happiness (P)</b>	<b>Happiness (P)</b>
3	<b>Security (P)</b>	Pride (S)	<i>Caring (O)</i>
4	<b>Happiness (P)</b>	<b>Trust (P)</b>	<b>Inner calm (P)</b>
5	<b>Enjoyment (P)</b>	<b>Inner calm (P)</b>	<i>Love (O)</i>
6	<b>Trust (P)</b>	<b>Security (P)</b>	Pride (S)

*fonts stand for: positive feelings, feelings referring to contact and union with others (O), feelings referring to self-development (S)*

It turned out that in all three patterns positive feelings dominate (security, joy, trust, energy, etc.). Feelings describing self-maintenance and self-expansion (S) were higher in the hierarchy of feelings than those related to the desire for contact and union with others (O) in two situations: past situation (feeling describing the S group: no 8,11,12; feelings describing the O group – no 9, 14, 15, 16) and present situation (feeling describing the S group: no 3,10,11; feelings describing the O group – no 6, 14,15,16). It is different in the future situation (feelings describing the S group: no 6,11,13,13; feelings describing the O group: no 3,5,8). Feelings referring to the desire for contact with others (O) were emphasized more strongly. The resulting summaries of feelings prove a distinct way of evaluating the Montessori class in the presence of different interpretative assumptions.

Joy seems to dominate when reflecting on school situations. Gerald L. Clore hypothesizes that if the prerequisites for the occurrence of emotions include cognitive processes sufficient to formulate an assessment (or retrieve it from memory),



the course of the assessment process depends on what the emotions are focused on. If someone focuses on events, their basic affective response is pleasure or unhappiness induced by the results of events (Clore, 1998, p. 164). Joy is, therefore, the effect of evaluating the results of events as desirable due to the goals of the subject experiencing emotions (Clore, 1998, p. 168). In the interpretation of psychologists, joy increases openness to experiences which, in social situations, leads to affiliative behaviors and to reinforcing bonds with others. “The bonds and social support obtained in this way create a powerful adaptive mechanism that brings obvious benefits in the process of evolution and development [...]. No emotion strengthens the bond as effectively as joy, which brings benefits at little or no cost” (Izard, Ackerman, 2005, p. 333).

### STRUCTURE OF AFFECTIVE GENERAL AND IDEAL EXPERIENCES

When analyzing the shape of the pattern relating to valuation: *How do you generally feel these days?* (tab. 2), it can be claimed that love, related to the theme of contact and union with others (O), played a key role. Three positive feelings were valued highly in the structure in the following order: security, trust, energy. Right behind them there are self-esteem (self-enhancement – S) and tenderness (contact with others – O) (tab. 2).

Table 2.

*Emotional model of valuating general and ideal experiences*

No.	General experiences	Ideal experiences
1	<b>Love (O)</b>	<b>Security (P)</b>
2	<b>Security (P)</b>	<b>Joy (P)</b>
3	<b>Trust (P)</b>	<b>Happiness (P)</b>
4	<b>Energy (P)</b>	<b>Love (O)</b>
5	Self-esteem (S)	<b>Energy (P)</b>
6	<b>Tenderness (O)</b>	<b>Inner calm (P)</b>

*fonts stand for: positive feelings, feelings referring to contact and union with others (O), feelings referring to self-development (S)*

The respondents' mood can be interpreted from the perspective of satisfying the basic human needs, i.e. love and security. Love is among fundamental human experiences, it is a multidimensional phenomenon, because “one aspect of it is the simple human happiness of warm and cordial relations, other include attachment,

care and erotic love” (Bachtin, after Oatley, Jenkins, 2003, p. 285). Various aspects and manifestations of love play an essential role in mutual interpersonal contacts, in cooperation of people both in dyads, groups, teams, and between groups, in interacting with others (Oatley, Jenkins, 2003). The first position of the indicated affect in the hierarchy of feelings may demonstrate the satisfied need for closeness and acceptance by others due to the respondents’ belonging to social groups, maintaining friendships, having close relationships (Rathus, 2004, p. 446), reaching out to others. Love, but also trust (no 3) by others determine the sense of security (no 2). Both feelings allow you to believe that you are understood and accepted, they add new energy (no 4).

The arrangement of feelings for the pattern of ideal experiences corresponds to their hierarchy in the pattern of self-valuing as a student of the Montessori class. The highest ranking are positive feelings, among which the presence of love should be noted. The high significance of love is not surprising, because it occupies a central place in the human life, “it makes it meaningful, it is the main dynamism that motivates the man to act, it is a force that organizes human life and personality” (Grzywak-Kaczyńska, 2005, p. 363). Sense of security expresses one of the basic human needs. Energy indicates an active attitude of respondents towards each other and the environment, the ability to become involved, take action and the activity-oriented approach. Joy is described in the literature as a signal of achieving own plans, the effect of experienced satisfaction. The feeling of emotional pleasure, described above, facilitates forecasting of optimism and happiness (Diener, Lucas, 2005, p. 416). Based on the overview of the above-mentioned feelings, high-ranking in both profiles, it is possible to describe the prevailing self-potential of the authors. They are able to indicate what is important and valuable in life, they conduct a self-analysis. They are able to formulate motives for the contemporary and expected action, which is proof of having knowledge about themselves.

#### RE-EVALUATION OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCES DUE TO A CHANGE OF THE TIME AND SPACE PERSPECTIVE

A repeated measures ANOVA was performed in order to determine which feelings change the most depending on the transposition of the estimated situation<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the assumption of normal distributions in relation to the compared variables is not fulfilled, the analysis of variance will give correct solutions due to the size of the analyzed group (large sample) (after: Niewiarowski, 2007, p. 260). The Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied for the comparisons that did not meet the sphericity assumption.

The analyses of variance performed made it possible to identify the strongest main effect of valuation for the feeling of **love** ( $F_{(2,908, 197,759)} = 29,267$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0,301^2$ ). This means that valuation of school as well as general and ideal experiences accounts for 30.1% of changeability of the indicated feeling. It turns out that change in the time and space perspective has had a strong effect on the variability of the feeling of **tenderness**  $F_{(3,065, 208,451)} = 24,931$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0,268$ . This means that 26.8% of tenderness variance depends on the interpretation of events varied in terms of content. The effect of change of the evaluated situation was essential and strong for the feeling of **intimacy**  $F_{(3,109, 208,295)} = 28,694$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0,300$ . Personal experience presented in different time and space configurations here accounts for 30% of variability of the analyzed feeling.

Love turned out to be the feeling subject to the strongest differentiation depending on the experiences of the respondents. For Hubert Hermans, love is a feeling that plays a key role in systems of personal meanings. According to the author, the theme of contact and closeness with others focuses on this feeling (after Oleś, 2003, p. 353). Based on the results of own research, it can be concluded that in the case of the surveyed graduates of Montessori classes this is indeed the case. Their personal experiences are characterized by diverse, but always high intensity of the feeling naturally located in other people. The respondents are oriented to closeness, openness, compassion, which is one of the conditions for taking action together with and for other people, thus pro-social long-term tasks, which express the sense of life (Obuchowski, 1985, 1993).

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<sup>2</sup> The  $\eta^2$  coefficient is an indicator of the effect size - when multiplied by 100, it illustrates the percentage of the dependent variable's variance (feeling) explained by the research impact (time and space perspective). The interpretation of the effect size for the repeated measures ANOVA is as follows:  $\eta^2 < 0.01$  - weak effect,  $0.01 < \eta^2 < 0.1$  - moderately strong effect,  $\eta^2 > 0.1$  - strong effect (after: Niewiarowski, 2007, p. 270).

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#### MIŁOŚĆ JAKO KRYTERIUM WARTOŚCIOWANIA DOŚWIADCZEŃ ABSOLWENTÓW KLAS MONTESSORI

**Streszczenie:** Montessori utrzymywała, że miłość jest pojęciem niepoddającym się definiowaniu, niemniej traktowała je jako centralne dla życia i kształcenia, stąd wiele pisała o jego naturze. Prowadzone przez badaczkę studia sprzyjały odnalezieniu źródła miłości, jakim jest dziecko. Dlatego system dydaktyczny, jaki opracowała, jest ześrodkowany na dziecku. Uczucia i emocje to rodzaj zdolności dokonywania refleksji, element szerszego systemu przetwarzania informacji. Przypisywanie wartości emocjonalnej określonym wydarzeniom jest swoistym procesem tworzenia znaczeń. Do celów badawczych pozyskano wiedzę pozwalającą rozstrzygnąć, jaki jest profil 24 uczuć dla doświadczeń szkolnych oraz życiowych absolwentów klas Montessori ujętych w postaci wartościowań. Ustalono, czy doświadczenia szkolne, podobnie jak ogólne i idealne, mają dla badanych pozytywną, negatywną czy ambiwalentną wartość.

**Słowa kluczowe:** miłość, pedagogika Marii Montessori, absolwenci klas Montessori

