

■ This effective method of teaching young children should be learned by Filipinos.

INTRODUCING THE MONTESSORI SCHOOL IN THE PHILIPPINES

Sending your child to a Montessori School, it is said, is watching him make what Newsweek calls "an intellectual leap."

Substantial claims have been raised about the concentration of psychologists and educators on teenagers and children above six years. In recent years, however, the picture has change. In the United States, there is a "re-awakening" to the "intellectual potential of early childhood education." In coincidence with this shock of recognition is the surge of Montessori schools. The popularity of the Montessori methods which are well on the way to being adapted and applied in various countries, including the Philippines, stems from the emphasis on the development of the intellect of the child in as early as two-and-a-half years old.

"Let the doctors and nurses worry about vita-

mins," Dr. Maria Montessori, founder, used to say. Teachers, she said, should concentrate on the intellectual development of the child.

The Montessori plan is based on the belief that the first six years of the child are the explosive period for assimilation, and how much mental development occurs within this period determines the performance of the child when he enters the university and his achievement in life in general. With the use of a special program of activities and sensorial materials, called "launching pad to abstract learning" and for which Dr. Maria Montessori, founder is noted for, Montessori teachers guide the kids in understanding the "complicated and confusing" world of adults.

Manila and rural areas will soon have their own Montessori schools with the establishment of a Montes-

sori center which will train teachers (and parents as well) on the famous system. A project of Operation Brotherhood International, the Center is directed by Mrs. Preciosa Soliven, who has recently returned from an observation and study program at the international centers in Peruvia (Italy) and London, under grants from the Italian Government and British Council, respectively. The teachers in turn will put up Montessori schools in the various O.B. project sites. Mrs. Soliven is currently conducting a model class consisting of 3-6 year-old children of OBI personnel and friends, and her nephews and nieces.

The model class at first glance looks no different from another nursery class. Toys, furniture, equipment are miniature; there are songs, games, rhymes, storytelling and refreshment breaks. What makes it different Mrs. Soliven says, are the individual attention given each child, followed by collective attention as soon as he gets adjusted to the group, and the sensorial apparatus.

In a word, a Montessori school is a "school-house." Here tots see and feel their homes (they iron and wash clothes, sweep the floor, twist door knobs, pour water, carry flower pots); through sensorial apparatus, they distinguish different sounds, surfaces, and forms. They have botany, arithmetic, geography, language. Mrs. Soliven stresses, lest that scares you, that the method is not to teach the child to read or write, but to prepare him for these subjects through simple approaches. In language, for instance, the kids know that words have specific sounds. They learn to hold a pencil, identify leaves, for mental pictures of countries on the map. They start to count.

The cultural activities, (botany, geography, science), says Mrs. Soliven, "are the keys to the bigger universe. You can't put the whole world before the child so you give him a globe. You can't show him the whole forest, so give him a leaf."

The Montessori school was started by Dr. Maria Montessori 70 years ago when, working with mental-

ly retarded children, she employed her own sensory materials which resulted in the kids' passing a test conducted along with normal children, with better grades. When her program was used among normal children, the achievement speed was double. Dr. Montessori then was assigned by the Italian government to work with slum areas, where children spontaneously and naturally worked with her materials. An advocate of individual freedom, she was in conflict with Mussolini. She fled to Spain where she organized a Montessori teachers training institute in Barcelona, then established another in Holland, (now run by her son Mario) and commuted for lectures to London and Germany. The method reached the United States eventually, wavered in the 1930's due to the popularity of the progressive method but picked up seven years ago and has since then enjoyed immense popularity.

Mrs. Soliven, who taught for four years in Mrs. Telly

Albert Zulueta's kindergarten in San Lorenzo village prior to her trip to Europe, said Montessori methods are applicable everywhere.

"The child is universal. The only difference is where you find him, where he is born. During the first six years, children absorb mannerisms of their parents and of people, the way they laugh, their accent. At six, they are able to absorb the culture and religion of the country. So in practical life, we give them what is found in the Philippines. Instead of a vacuum cleaner or a mop, we use the *walis*. We use the *batya*. Ideally, we should use Tagalog, but since we are preparing our kids in this class for English, then we use English."

Mrs. Soliven is holding a class for parents and teachers in May and June, after which she ~~and~~ will start her Teachers' Training class, which is open to college graduates, preferably, A.B., majoring in home economics, psychology, and child study. — *Dominic M. Torre Villas in Manila Bulletin*.