



# Maria Montessori



## A Study on Fantasy

### Montessori: Theory and Terminology

**Sensitive Periods** - genetic windows of development; the child is naturally predisposed toward activities in the sensitive period and seeks mastery in that area (i.e. sensitive periods for walking and language acquisition)

**Spontaneous Activity** - the freely chosen activity of the child; this is activity that is not structured or directed by the teacher; the student engages in the activity of his/her own accord; spontaneous activity does not include disordered activity

**Role of the Teacher** - not a director, as in traditional classrooms; rather, provides an environment in which the students can direct themselves; is an active observer, closely monitoring the students' progress so as to be able to provide them with those materials best able to meet their needs at a given time

**Also important is the relationship of the imagination, creativity, and fantasy.** It's important to note that these three are not synonymous terms; in fact, Montessori does not connect creativity and imagination with fantasy at all. For Montessori, reality and truth should be the starting point for the imagination, from which springs creation. Creation, then, will be based not in fantasy, but in the truth, for as she says, "The more perfect the approximation to truth, the more perfect is art." (Spontaneous Activity in Education, 252). For Montessori, fantasy is a departure from truth and reality.

### Background to the Study: Montessori and Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street

Montessori observed that children's minds are naturally inclined toward fantasy; however, Montessori discouraged this inclination. In order to understand the seeming discrepancy between Montessori's desire to encourage children's natural interests and her desire to suppress fantastical

tendencies, a study was conducted to explore precisely what Montessori did believe about fantasy and in what ways (if any) it was to be allowed for in childhood. Specifically it was to be seen whether her perspective on fantasy was illustrated in the 1947 movie Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street. To conduct the study, it was first necessary to determine what Montessori herself believed about fantasy in the classroom, as well as how her beliefs on fantasy are being applied in Montessori classrooms today. It was hypothesized that the mother in Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street does not employ Montessori methods of education because although she promotes a strong tie to reality, she does not allow her daughter to discover things for herself; rather, she imposes her own thoughts on her daughter.

### **Findings of the Study:**

#### **Montessori's Position on Fantasy:**

1. Maria Montessori saw no use in children's fantasy/pretend play.
2. Montessori was specifically against adult-directed fantasy/pretend play.
3. Although Montessori does not provide a clear cut answer for all circumstances, from her writings, it can be concluded that she believes teachers SHOULD intervene when they witness fantasy/pretend play in the classroom.

#### **Montessori Classrooms Today:**

Most teachers, despite Montessori's own stance on occurrences of fantasy in the classroom, choose not to intervene when they witness pretend play occurring.

#### **Conclusion:**

From the writings of Montessori and observation of Montessori classrooms today, it seems that permitting the child's growth through his/her own spontaneous activities is much more primary to a Montessori education than the absence of fantasy. So although it's true that neither Montessori nor the mother in Miracle on 34th Street encouraged fantasy play in early childhood, at least by today's interpretation, this objection to fantasy does not seem to be a core requirement of a Montessori education. Therefore, because the daughter's environment does not resemble that of a Montessori education with regard to other, more important elements, it can be concluded that the mother does not use Montessori methods of education.