

The relationship
between discipline
and obedience in the
montessori method
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Dr. Maria Montessori has always been a trailblazer.

Aside from the personal firsts she has achieved throughout her life, she seems to be one of the firsts whose life mission consisted in “normalizing” children who in the first place are potentially “competent beings who should be encouraged to make maximal decisions” (Wikipedia, “Maria Montessori”)

A normalized child is characterized by love of work, concentration, self-discipline, and sociability (Zener; Deviations, Normalization, Concentration” slides 20-22). It is within this process of normalization that a child could well develop discipline and obedience, characteristics that manifests the developed will. In this paper, we shall look at the concepts of discipline, obedience, and will in the Montessori philosophy, and later on show how these three concepts are interrelated with each other. In the end, we wish to show that these three characteristics are interdependent of each other.

Discipline was defined by Montessori as” not a fact but a path, a path in following which the child grasps the abstract conception of goodness with an exactitude which is fairly scientific” (“The Montessori Method” 353).

Actually, for Montessori, the external characteristics of discipline are the very characteristics that other people consider as discipline. Consider this example: A very surprising result of this discipline came to our notice during the examinations of the teachers who had followed my course of lectures.

These examinations were practical, and, accordingly, groups of children were put at the disposition of the teachers being examined, who, according to the subject drawn by lot, took the children through a given exercise.

While the children were waiting their turn, they were allowed to do just as they pleased. They worked incessantly, and returned to their undertakings as soon as the interruption caused by the examination was over. (Montessori, "The Montessori Method" 348). In this particular example, children made use of their time well by working, i.

e., by probably engaging themselves in painting, writing, counting, or some other useful endeavor, while waiting for their turn. They did not exhibit the characteristics of an undisciplined child who wrecks havoc and plainly disrupts what could be disrupted. They also gladly obliged when they were asked by the teacher to do a particular task.

Upon the completion of the assigned task, the children were observed to return to their original work. This gives us a picture of a relatively serene and quiet environment where children are not at each other's toes but are either working independently or cooperatively with each other; an environment where students obligingly follow the teacher's direction when asked to participate or do a particular task. This seems very much like the ideal disciplined primary school classroom. Actually, the difference between the Montessori Method and the traditional one lies not largely in the manifestations but in the very source and essence of what discipline is. [1] Actually, for Montessori, discipline is not attained through universally utilized means such as severe repression, sermonizing, or by commands ("The Montessori Method" 348-349).

It is not something that comes from without; instead, it is something that springs from within, from one's innate life force (horme [Zener; Rohr, 10]), <https://assignbuster.com/the-relationship-between-discipline-and-obedience-in-the-montessori-method-and-how-discipline-and-obedience-are-linked-to-the-development-of-the-will-essay/>

from one's natural predispositions. It is first characterized by a keen interest at a particular work which later on is characterized by some form of concentration. This could very well be observed in a prepared environment where children are allowed to explore and learn according to the well-prepared materials of the teacher who passively observes the first manifestations of the children (Montessori, "The Montessori Method" 86-91; MCI, "The Montessori Teacher" slides 9-18). In a Montessori classroom where a favorable learning environment is simulated by the materials present in it coupled with simple rules enforced by the teacher, students are normally observed to take interest in these educative devices, trying to figure them out themselves, sharpening their senses and capacity for logic and analysis, being caught up in the experience of learning and requesting for the teacher's attention when necessary. In this environment, children learn to take interest in a particular task, to exhibit concentration leading towards actions that are ordered and purposeful. Furthermore, a disciplined child is also characterized by a certain rest, a certain calmness.

This child does not multiply his nervous energy by engaging in aimless actions (Montessori, "The Montessori Method" 354). Instead, because of repetition and eventual facility in doing a particular task, a disciplined child engages in acts that are purposeful. This child, according to Montessori, has developed self-discipline.

It is puzzling at first why chapter 5 of "The Montessori Method" entitled, "discipline" consists mainly of discussions on liberty and independence.

Liberty (or sometimes referred to as freedom) is many times related to the

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will's capacity to act on certain desires. It is, for the teacher, to "avoid the arrest of spontaneous movements and the imposition of arbitrary tasks" (Montessori, "The Montessori Method" 88). It is plainly allowing the child to express and manifest herself and intervening only to direct good from bad. Independence, on the other hand, is defined as not needing or depending on others for the performance of an act. This means parents not serving the child when the child could clearly perform the act on her own. This also means not cutting short the child's efforts to perform an act, not to provide obtrusive interference (as long as the act is no bad) (Montessori in The International Montessori Index, "Dr.

Maria Montessori"). Being free and independent, simply, is allowing the child's will to express itself in the process of learning new tasks and knowing more things about the world. Now, after all that has been said and done, what does this have to do with discipline? Actually, we could notice that discipline in the sense of having an interest in work and the concentration for it leading towards a certain calmness due to mastery not only of the task but of the child's actions, assumes freedom and independence. The discipline we have talked about above could never happen if the child is not allowed to make self-expressions and is hampered at the slightest sign of inefficiency. In this sense, the free expression of the will underpins the attainment of discipline. Obedience, on the other hand, refers to what many people perceive as obedience, i. e., the act of obliging to another person.

In the classroom, usually, students are obedient to their teachers. Now, it must be noted that obedience, for Montessori, is a direct result of discipline.

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This means that obedience can only happen when students are capable of following what is being asked from them (Montessori, "The Montessori Method" 367), when they have attained a capacity to do an act after enough concentration and repetition. Now, obedience would not also be possible if the child did not learn to sacrifice. Sacrifice is learned in the classroom through lessons on zero, for example, when a child gets no object to learn the concept (Montessori, "The Montessori Method" 365; Montessori, "The Silence Game"), or when a child patiently serves other children in a school dinner. These and other school-facilitated exercises on silence and sacrifice teach the child to develop her will-power, an all important aspect if obedience is to take place. It is only upon the presence of discipline and will-power initiated sacrifice is obedience possible. It is only through this that a child could move on from the first stage of obedience to the third stage, from the stage of spiritual disorder when the child does not know how to obey to the stage when the child would probably want to do the command but many times cannot or does not succeed in the act (Montessori, "The Montessori Method" 368), and finally to the stage when swift response to the request, and even "shows enthusiasm" in the performance of the act (the enthusiasm directly correlated with the amount of mastery the child has in the performance of such an act) (Montessori.

"The Montessori Method" 369; MCI, "Montessori Philosophy" slides 40-41).

[2] It is only through the acquisition of this sort of obedience could a child's psycho-embryonic life (Rohrs, 9) gradually improve towards a holistic sort of development (The International Montessori Index, "The Montessori Method")

that a Montessori education ultimately aims for. In the Montessori Method, <https://assignbuster.com/the-relationship-between-discipline-and-obedience-in-the-montessori-method-and-how-discipline-and-obedience-are-linked-to-the-development-of-the-will-essay/>

obedience necessitates discipline. In both instances, the will is necessary, either in the form of freedom and independence that is most needed to develop discipline, or in the form of the necessary will-power in the development of obedience. As such, we could notice that these three characteristics are interdependent of each other. REFERENCE LIST " Dr.

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“ The Secret of Childhood: Normalization and Deviations.” Michael Olaf Company. 28 March 2007 http://www.michaelolaf.net/lecture_secret.html.

[1] One of the few manifestational differences would probably be the amount of activity present in a Montessori classroom which is not necessarily present in a traditional classroom. There are many instances that children will be working independently on their chosen task, not on homogenously assigned tasks. Children would be seen standing or walking every now and then to get or return the materials they use. They may also have short talks with each other, as long as such talks are not disruptive. These are not the events in a traditional classroom where activity is hampered by default.

[2] It is interesting to note the parallelism between the stages of a voluntary act and the stages of the obedience: The process of mastering or at least doing a voluntary action seems to have three stages. The first stage refers to that stage when a child is able to do something but cannot reproduce the act at will. The second stage refers to the stage when “ some action on the part of the will is present” in the act of producing or doing something (Montessori, “ The Montessori Method” 368). Lastly, this refers to the stage when the child could produce the act at will (Montessori, “ The Montessori Method 368). Now, such stages of the willful act could be paralleled to the act of being obedient. The first stage refers to the stage when the child simply does not know how to obey, the stage of spiritual disorder.

The second stage refers to the stage when the child would probably want to do the command but many times cannot or does not succeed in the act

(Montessori, “ The Montessori Method” 368). The third refers to the child’s <https://assignbuster.com/the-relationship-between-discipline-and-obedience-in-the-montessori-method-and-how-discipline-and-obedience-are-linked-to-the-development-of-the-will-essay/>

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