My daughter has been attending a Montessori Pre-school since she started in the Toddler’s program, and for the past four years I have been asked by parent’s of my daughter’s friends if I intend to keep her in Montessori or if I will transfer her to a traditional school. I have spent countless hours during “play date” time, at the park, at the swimming pool, at the playground, discussing with parents the apparently subtle and yet so dramatically deep difference between the way in which traditional learning methods expose children to knowledge and the Montessori method of education.

I have also engaged in a few conversations with my daughter, who is now a Kindergartener, explaining such difference to her, in lieu of some of her friends leaving Montessori school to attend a traditional school, and her wondering of how do such schools work, and if there are any differences. Incredible as it might be, and with no intention to insult anyone, my sense after having this conversations with adults and with my daughter is that my daughter really gets this difference, whether as adults keep struggling to grasp it.

The reason for this “understanding” comes perhaps, precisely because my daughter has been and continues being educated in the Montessori method, and most adults have not.

Coupled to these recurrent conversations is the fact that I am about to receive my degree as a Doctor in Education, and I am fascinated by how humans learn, interact, grow and transform their lives through their learning experiences. I try to learn as much about Montessori and I am so amazed by the beauty and simplicity of this methodology, developed by the genius doctor Maria Montessori, that I am passionately working towards taking this education for free to low-income children around the world, through a Non-Profit work that I am honored to lead¹. This context has exposed me to learning about different methodologies and to be in the constant lookout for relevant and related information.

A few weeks ago, I found a graph on social media that lead me to discover Dr. William Glasser (1925-2013), an American Psychiatrist notable for developing what he coined as “reality therapy” and “choice theory”, a framework for applying psychiatry that focuses on personal choice, personal responsibility and transformation, and whose research has been applied to broader social issues such as education, management and societal relationships, to name a few.

¹ www.educatefromtheheart.org
In his research, Dr. Glasser discovered that we learn and remember:

- 10% of what we read
- 20% of what we hear
- 30% of what we see and observe
- 50% of what we hear and see
- 70% of what we discuss with others
- 80% of what we do and
- 95% of what we teach to others

Analyzing the graph and reading about Dr. Glasser’s explanation on how we learn, made for me so crystal clear the reason why Montessori education works so incredibly well: it was designed by a neuroscientist that knew precisely how the human brain works on its different developmental stages, and it generates the results that equate to the difference between knowing something and understanding it very well, between repeating by memory, what has been told and actually manipulating it in the form of a concrete object that the child can touch, feel, see, smell, lift, move, observe and interact with.

What sets so completely apart the Montessori method of education is that it encompasses the entire pyramid of learning, not just on one or two instances of the learning experience, but routinely, on every lesson, and in every day. A Montessori child reads, hears, sees, discusses, but most importantly, a Montessori child interacts personally with the lesson itself, getting to know it in a concrete way that is perfectly aligned with its brain capacity, and even more amazingly, a child in a Montessori classroom is exposed to children of different ages and levels of development, and each child has the opportunity to show, explain and teach the lesson to their classmates, in an interaction that presents itself spontaneously between them and with no other agenda than the joy of discovering and exploring together, in a setting that has been carefully and meticulously designed to provide such experience and interaction: the unique Montessori classroom.

Montessori education is not a discourse that the child receives, is an experience that the child absorbs through his or her senses, the most fascinating method for an impactful learning, one that truly “makes sense”.  

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2 AnaMaria is a Professor, doctoral student, writer, consultant and public speaker in the topic of Transformational Leadership, and her doctoral research explores the topics of Transformational Parenting and Teaching. She has a BS in Industrial Engineering from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, an MBA from Harvard Business School and is currently a candidate to Ed.D. in Transformational Leadership from Insight University.