



Finding Motivation

the Montessori Way

ACTION GUIDE

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KidsTalk

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With Maren Schmidt, M. Ed.

Our questions:

- Can we really motivate others?
- How can we find our own motivation?
- How does motivation work in the Montessori Way?

What is motivation?

From *Wikipedia*: Motivation is the psychological feature that arouses an organism to action toward a desired goal and elicits, controls, and sustains certain goal directed behaviors.

From the *New Oxford American Dictionary*: the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way.

External rewards or punishments rarely motivate our behavior for the long term.

Motivation is an individual and internal process. The only true motivation is self-motivation, or intrinsic motivation.

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan: self-determination theory, an overarching construct of human motivation and personality that focuses on how an individual's behavior is self-motivated and self-determined.

Three deep human needs:

- The need to be able to direct our own lives;
- The need to grow, learn, and create new ideas, experiences and objects;
- The need to have a sense of purpose to make our lives and the lives of those around us better.

Deci and Ryan call these needs *autonomy, competence and relatedness*.

Daniel Pink in his book, *DRiVE*, used the terms *autonomy, mastery and purpose*.

Montessori terms are *independence, self-construction and meaningful activity*. Three ways to describe the same needs.

Fundamental Needs

According to Montessori philosophy human beings have two types of *fundamental needs*—physical and spiritual.

Physical needs include the following: air, food, light, movement, protection from danger, sleep, sexual expression, shelter, touch and water.

Spiritual or psychological needs include the following: acceptance, appreciation, becoming, belonging, celebration, closeness, community, consideration, contribution, emotional safety, empathy, honesty, love, reassurance, respect, support, trust, understanding, warmth, movement, exercise, creativity, exploration, orientation, inspiration, laughter, fun, contemplation, silence, ability to choose dreams, goals and values, ability to create self worth, ability to create meaning, ability to create an authentic person, and ability to create personal integrity, beauty, harmony, peace, repetition, precision and exactness.

Human beings have certain *tendencies* toward behavior. These include tendencies toward activity, becoming, belonging, exploration, orientation, order, communication, imagination, exactness repetition and perfection. As you can see, human tendencies and fundamental needs have some overlap. And we can get needy pretty quickly!

Each of these fundamental needs and human tendencies relate to one or more of the needs of autonomy, mastery and purpose.

Montessori Philosophy: Four Planes of Development

First Plane:	Birth to 6 years
Second Plane:	6 to 12 years
Third Plane:	12 to 18 years
Fourth Plane:	18 to 24 years

Sub-stages in Each Plane

- First three years: rapid growth
- Second sub-stage: slower and more stable growth

First Plane of Development

Birth to 6 years: Early Childhood

- Movement
- Language
- Refinement of sensory perceptions
- Social relations
- Order

Second Plane of Development

6 to 12 years: Elementary

- Moral reasoning
- Use of the imagination
- Group dynamics
- Getting out of the narrow circle of family and close friends
- Using a developing sense of right and wrong

Third Plane of Development

12 to 18 years: Adolescence

- Rapid physical growth
- Sexual maturation and boundless energy
- Developing abilities to abstract, conjecture, predict and create
- Strong and often harsh self-criticism
- Need to be with peers and accepted
- Need to be individually mentored by an adults who are not their parents
- Need to understand what am I good at? And what am I good for?
- Need for meaningful work that contributes to adult communities
- Need to express new interests, thought, and emotions
- Need to acquire flexible and inquiring habits of the minds
- Need to develop a personal vision

Fourth Plane of Development

18 to 24 years: Young Adult

- Need to go out into the world and create his or her own experiences
- Takes on the challenge of deciding to start college
- Creating new experiences through relationships and travel, and beginning career and married life
- The new adult emerges

With these concepts of fundamental needs, human tendencies, and the four planes of development, *Montessori prepared environments*—consisting of people, tools, ideas and nature—are *perhaps perfect places*

for children to meet their innate needs for autonomy, mastery and purpose.

Which leads us to these two questions:

- *How can we find our own motivation?*
- *How does motivation work in the Montessori Way?*

AUTONOMY: The need to direct our own lives

The four essential components necessary for autonomy to thrive, according to Deci and Ryan, are having decision-making authority about task, time, technique and team.

Properly prepared Montessori classrooms have these basic components:

1. Adults professionally trained in Montessori philosophy, methods and materials for the age group they are teaching
2. Specially prepared environments with a full complement of Montessori materials based on three-year age groupings
3. Children's free choice of activity within a three-hour protected work cycle.

Task. Children in Montessori classroom environments are given the freedom to choose their tasks.

Time. Children in a Montessori environment are also given time. Three hour protected work period and deep time for a multi-age classroom.

Technique. Children in Montessori environments are allowed to find their own method of working with the materials. There are a variety of materials to aid the child in having many ways of doing and learning.

Team. Montessori environments of all ages have a fluidity of small work groups.

MASTERY: The need to grow, learn, and create

In the words of Dr. Montessori, "The role of education is to interest the child profoundly in an external activity to which he will bring all his potential."

The prepared environment of children and adults, lesson materials, underlying principles, as well as the outdoors, calls the child interests, while providing the appropriate tasks, time, techniques and team that lead the child to mastery.

Three Laws of Mastery. Pink refers to the three laws of mastery. Mastery is a mindset. Mastery is a pain. Mastery is an asymptote.

PURPOSE: The need to have a reason to make life better

“To be a help to life” is the Montessori call to action.

Montessori teaching techniques promote autonomy and mastery, creating powerful learning for children in a Montessori environment. Tapping into a sense of purpose, though, brings one’s abilities to a higher level.

Purpose is found in our Montessori classrooms by the offering of self-selected challenging activities that passionately engage the intellectual, the physical, the emotional and the social aspects of our children.

We must prepare!

To be a help to life we need to observe, nourish, protect and strengthen our children by tapping into the powerful intrinsic motivation that exists from birth. It shouldn’t surprise us that our Montessori schools are uniquely positioned to help our children gain autonomy, mastery and purpose for a life well lived.

To support and nurture the child’s development of intrinsic motivation we need to protect and implement these ideas at school and at home:

- Respect of the child and the child’s work in self constructing an adult of his or her own time and place
- Create special learning environments for children that are full of meaningful activities in order to aid this self-construction.
- Have prepared teachers in our environments, teachers who are professionally trained in Montessori principles, theory, methods and techniques. The adult is the most important part of the child’s environment. We should be prepared to fully take on that job.

- Provide a full complement of Montessori materials and use the principle of limiting the materials in order to enhance creativity and other executive function skills.
- Use Montessori techniques that include individual and small group lessons, observation of the child at work, and many more.
- Provide at least one uninterrupted three-hour (or longer) work period each day. For elementary aged children we should provide two three-hour work periods each day.
- Protect the child's freedom to choose meaningful activities within that work period.
- Offer multi-age groupings in accordance to Montessori principles that include planes or stages of development as well as being aware of natural human tendencies and sensitive periods of development.

Our job is to prepare the environment so that each child can develop intrinsic motivation in order to live a self-determined life.

Properly prepared Montessori environments allow each child to find autonomy, mastery and purpose.

Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose The Keys to Intrinsic Motivation The Montessori Way!



"If you want someone to do a good job, give them a good job to do."

Frederick Herzberg

In properly prepared Montessori programs, we give children a good job to do.

Maren Schmidt

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