

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

Sport as a Key to Educate the Human Potential

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"Tennis, football and the like do not have for their sole purpose the accurate moving of a ball, but they challenge us to acquire a new skill –something lacking before – and this feeling of enhancing our abilities is the real source of delight in the game." Maria Montessori, The Absorbent Mind, p.164

More than 6 billion people in the world are interested in sports. It is universal in its appeal to children. Therefore, sports must be part of Montessori education. Lack of movement is one of the biggest threats to health in modern societies. Technological developments contribute to a sedentary lifestyle. Obesity is a serious threat to mental health and quality of life.

Sport, in comparison to traditional physical education, offers a more concrete and culturally embedded point of interest for children. It enhances the physical, emotional, and spiritual development of children, provided that it is designed and maintained using Montessori principles. When applied to sports, the Montessori philosophy encourages children to set personal goals, strive for improvement, and take pride in their accomplishments, fostering a strong sense of self-worth and emotional well-being. This approach aligns perfectly with the human tendency for self-perfection. Such a Montessori environment enriched with sports also cultivates a sense of sportsmanship and respect for others. Here it strongly connects with the grace and courtesy that is already present in the Montessori environment.

In addition to that, in a sports environment based upon Montessori principles, competition takes on a healthier and more constructive form. Rather than pitting children against each other solely for the sake of victory, the emphasis is on individual process and effort. Children are encouraged to compete with themselves, aiming to enhance their own abilities and reach their full potential. This approach also helps children to deal with success and failure later in life. Sometimes you do or don't get that job, sometimes you do 'win' or 'lose' something or somebody and a more constructive view on competition can help children prepare for dealing with these circumstances.

To conclude, sports should be an integral part of Montessori education, as they align with the universal interest children have in them. The sedentary lifestyle caused by technological advancements poses a significant health threat, including obesity and its impact on mental wellbeing. Sports environments, based upon Montessori principles, enhance the physical, emotional, and spiritual development of the child. It fosters sportsmanship and respect for others, echoing the grace and courtesy already present in Montessori environments.

Furthermore, by reframing competition, aligning with the human drive for self-perfection, we can empower children to handle success and failure gracefully.

“Much is said today of the moral advantages of sports...because organised games, and this is most important, demand an exact use of objects and consequently concentration and a complete control of one’s movement. Games thus lead to a feeling of rivalry and animate the participant with a spirit of competition. And this, in comparison with aimless play, represents moral progress.” Montessori, Maria, *The Discovery of the Child*, page 97

ABOUT THE AUTHORS & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Ruben Jongkind and Patrick Oudejans founded Montessori Sports with the aim of using the power of sports to improve education for all children. Jip Bartels has been a professional football player, a teacher and a coach, and started Montessori Sports in Australia.
2. In November 2023, Ruben was co-presenter, with Adele Diamond, Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of British Columbia, of
3. the AMI Talk, “The Importance of Movement”.
4. Association Montessori Internationale has partnered with Montessori Sports to provide greater access to training on how to integrate Montessori principles within sports programmes. The Montessori Sports Fundamentals Certificate course is a 40-hour online AMI certified course, available on a self-paced or hybrid basis, which provides basic knowledge on how to integrate sports into Montessori environments across all planes of development. Around 1,000 students from more than 70 countries had taken the course by early 2024.
5. A TEDx Talk, “Football can change the world, but we need to change football first”, was presented by Ruben Jongkind in August 2021