

Montessori's Genius: Independence

By Jennifer Rogers
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Any genius possesses rare talents of the mind and heart. They are usually awkward introverts, strange, muttering fellows who boil vast quantities of complex information down to a useful truth. Stephen Hawking fit the universe in a nutshell. Charles Darwin explained the evolution of all life through the wizened smile of a tortoise. Jonas Salk pondered millions of polio cells and created the tiny vaccination that rescued humanity.

Genius and talent are not commonly attributed to parents. Parenting is not a competitive field of inquiry, though it often feels like it is. Parents can set a good example, influence, guide, challenge and care, but the control we exercise over our children and the choices they make is finite and limited. A parent's success cannot be measured by a child's accomplishments. These truths are incontrovertible.

Parenting is now complicated in ways that are contrived, ridiculous and totally disorienting. Kids are enrolled in violin lessons before they can tie their shoes. We expect our children to compete athletically before we give them permission to cross the street. Middle school students are hustling to algebra class, but they have no idea where to look for red apples in the grocery store. Adolescents spend their days in virtual worlds, disconnected from the real people and relationships that would give their lives meaning and value.

Montessori classrooms help parents act with the intelligence of geniuses. Though they are as varied as the children within them, every authentic Montessori classroom offers kids one simple gift: independence. We notice Montessori kids because they work with resilience and joy, believing they are participating in something wonderful and worthwhile. They are learning how to read, write and calculate. More importantly, they are self-sufficient. They can function independently in a complicated world.

Montessori parents are ordinary people chatting with ordinary kids in cluttered kitchens. Their fine parenting is revealed in private conversations, secrets whispered in language young people can comprehend. The benefits of a Montessori education become magnificently public when children act with confidence, motivated by years of good memories and experiences of success. These fortunate kids are vibrant and strong, inspired by great varieties of dreams that pull them forward from within.

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Mrs. Rogers has a bachelors degree in religious studies and English from Albion College and a Master of Theological Studies from Candler Seminary at Emory University. A mother of three children growing up in Montessori classrooms, Mrs. Rogers lives with her family in Northbrook.