

Historical overview of montessori method



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ALPNA KUMAR Section 1, Part 1, Lesson 1 August 8, 2012 Lesson 1: Historical Overview of Montessori Method Write a chronological overview (time line) of Maria Montessori's life and work. Indicate the life events you feel were most significant in her development of the Montessori Method of education.

Describe how Montessori developed her approach. Include the factors occurring at that time in the world that contributed to the method's popular acceptance.

Education being a necessary part of our lives, there has been several ways to teach a child and thus creating a teacher dominant learning. But, it was about a century ago when a revolutionary thought " teacher within" came to existence. It was the one woman who changed the world with her new innovative method of teaching and would break the stereotype in teaching method. This was Maria Montessori who developed Montessori Method of teaching with a firm belief in the motto " Within the child lies the fate of future".

Montessori Method focuses on the idea that children learn best when they are placed in an environment full of learning activities and given the freedom to work on their own. Montessori model believed that children at liberty to choose and act freely within an environment prepared accordingly would act spontaneously for optimal development. Montessori education is characterized by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child's natural psychological development, as well as technological advancements in society.

Although a range of practices exists under the name " Montessori", the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the American Montessori

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Society (AMS) cite these elements as essential [1, 2]: Mixed age classrooms, with classrooms for children aged 3 to 6 years old by far the most common, student choice of activity from within a prescribed range of options, a "constructivism" or "discovery" model, where students learn concepts from working with materials, rather than by direct instruction and specialized educational materials developed by Montessori and her collaborators.

To understand Montessori Method it would be necessary to know how it came to existence and what the underlying principles behind this method are. Maria Tecla Artemesia Montessori was born on August 31, 1870, in Chiaravalle, Italy. Her father, Alessandro Montessori, 33 years old at the time, was an official of the Ministry of Finance working in the local state-run tobacco factory. Her mother, Renilde Stoppani, 25 years old, was well educated for the times and was probably related to Italian geologist and paleontologist Antonio Stoppani.

Her father did not believe that women should receive higher education. However, her mother, fully supported Maria in all her endeavors. Montessori's was educated as a doctor, but went on to start her own preschool. She believed children should not be treated as receptors of knowledge from the teacher, but instead should be leaders of their own learning. Her philosophy has been embraced in schools around the world [3]. Maria Montessori was always a little ahead of her time. At age thirteen, against the wishes of her father but with the support of her mother, she began to attend a boys' technical school.

At that time schools had very few teaching supplies, like books and writing supplies. Children had to learn everything by memorization. Girls were

taught skills like sewing or knitting, while only boys were encouraged to study math, science, and other technical subjects. Maria fought for her right to study math and science. She was supported whole-heartedly by her mother to continue studying these subjects, and her father grudgingly permitted her to do so. Maria originally intended to become an engineer, but her interests soon shifted to the field of medicine.

Her desire to become a doctor was unprecedented for a woman in Italy at the time. Maria was allowed to attend medical school only after the intervention of the Pope. Because her attendance of classes with men in the presence of a naked body was deemed inappropriate, she was required to perform her dissections of cadavers alone. In addition to the isolation, she found she had another problem. She was repelled by the smell of the anatomy hall. When this became too complicated she tried smoking herself. Due to all these challenges, her interests turned to pediatrics and psychiatry.

This would be the beginning of her lifelong work with children [4]. After graduating from the University of Rome in 1896, Montessori continued with her research at the University's psychiatric clinic, and in 1897 she was accepted as a voluntary assistant there. Maria opened her own medical clinic to treat children. In 1897, she became an assistant doctor at the psychiatric clinic of the University of Rome. She began visiting asylums for mentally challenged and handicapped children. Maria observed that the living conditions for these children were miserable.

The patients were kept like prisoners in dark, bare rooms with nothing to stimulate them. She observed that it was not the medical problem but rather pedagogical one. It was this time when she came across the work of two

French doctors Edward Seguin and Jean Itard's experiments to educate defective children. Maria observed these children picking up crumbs off of the floor and playing with them. She realized that the children were using the crumbs as toys. Maria realized that these children needed a special school that would meet their needs.

While working at the asylum, Maria was introduced to the methods and materials developed by Jean Itard and Edward Seguin, who had trained defective children years before. Later she would use a similar approach to work with normal children. Keeping a busy schedule, Maria had little outside social life. She became close friends with her colleague, Giuseppe Montesano with whom she had an illegitimate child. They never married, and in 1898 she gave birth to her son Mario. Fearing that news of her child would ruin her reputation and career, she felt forced to send him to the countryside and could not visit him very often.

Deprived of being with her son, her desire to work with children increased. She designed new teaching materials like shapes to hold, laces to tie, beads to thread, and letters to feel. She believed that they learned better through their five senses first. Maria noticed that the children were interested in the letters, which they thought of as new toys. These children began to write letters with chalk on a board. She began to wonder if the teaching methods she used would work with typically developing kids [5]. In 1907 Maria started her own school, Casa dei Bambini, in the slums of the San Lorenzo district of Rome.

A few bankers who were building cheap housing for the poor and homeless granted her a single room where she had to teach 50 impoverished children

from the slums. Maria was asked to keep an eye on these children while their parents were. Maria kept observing and experimenting with these kids. She brought in light, child-sized furniture and tools for these children and taught them grace and hygiene. She had low open shelves and cabinets made for this classroom so that the children could choose and reach materials by themselves.

Children were even given responsibilities like preparing and serving their own snacks and tidying up the classroom. Maria prided herself on the independence of her students. She wrote, " The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, ' The children are now working as if I did not exist. '" Using the three-dimensional letters, the 4 and 5-year-old children from the slums were teaching themselves how to read and write. This was considered a miracle, because until that time, children were never taught to read or write before the age of six.

Many people began to flock to the Casa dei Bambini to witness the " miracle". They could not believe that children from the slums had such grace and good manners, and were reading and writing at such an early age. These underprivileged children showed that they had the potential to become respectable citizens of Italy instead of thieves and criminals. Many people saw the children working and learning in harmony and realized that the Montessori Method of education had the ability to cure the social ills of society.

Due to the success and popularity of the Montessori Method in Europe, other countries like China, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, and the United States by 1911 applied the Montessori Method eagerly to their educational systems.

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Montessori's books were translated into 23 languages to meet the overwhelming international demand for her teaching method. Unfortunately, Maria Montessori was forced to leave Italy because she refused to support the Fascist regime of Mussolini. Upon the invitation of Mahatma Gandhi, Montessori travelled to India with her son in 1939 to train teachers.

She stayed there for seven years. For her lifetime of commitment to the education of children, Maria was nominated for the Noble peace Prize in 1949, 1950 and 1951. After dedicating her life to the education of children, Maria Montessori died in Holland in 1952. Maria Montessori passed away over 50 years ago, but her legacy lives on to this day. Montessori's revolutionary ideas about children and their instinctive desire to learn have transcended time. Montessori schools operate worldwide now, and even schools that do not label themselves "Montessori" are using some of her methods to teach children.

If her methods are used correctly, every child can reach their potential to the fullest. As Montessori herself once said, "Free the child's potential, and you will transform him into the world".

Bibliography..... [1]"AMI School Standards". Association Montessori Internationale-USA (AMI-USA). [2]"Introduction to Montessori". American Montessori Society (AMS). [3]<http://www.biography.com/people/maria-montessori-9412528>. [4]Kramer, R. - Maria Montessori: A Biography - New York: Putnam, 1976. [5]Barbara O'Connor, Sara Campitelli - Mammolina: A Story about Maria Montessori - Carolrhoda Books, 1993.