

Important events in the life of Dr. Montessori

- 1894 Became Doctor of Medicine
- 1896 Represented the women of Italy at a conference in Berlin
- 1896-1906 Held a Chair in hygiene at a women's college in Rome
- 1898 Gave birth to a son, Mario Montessori, and sent him to a family in the countryside of Italy
- 1899 Addressed Pedagogical Conference in Turin, stressed benefits of education of children with learning disabilities
- 1900 Represented at the Feminist Conference in London, attacked the exploitation of children in the mines of Sicily
- 1901 Enrolled in the University of Rome as a student of psychology and philosophy
- 1904-1908 Professor of Anthropology in the University of Rome. Her first major publication, "Pedagogical Anthropology"
- 1909 Publication of "The Method of Scientific Pedagogy as applied to Infant Education in the Children's Houses"
- 1913 First international training course
- 1914 Visited the United States and was a guest of Thomas Alva Edison. Formation of American Montessori Society under the presidency of Alexander Graham Bell
- 1918 Education Society of London sent Mrs. Hutchinson to take a course under Dr. Montessori. Course was considered a "Rhapsody" by the Department of Education
- 1919 Given a royal reception on her first official visit to London
- 1922 Appointed inspector of schools by the Italian Government
- 1925 International Montessori Congress, Helsinki
- 1929 Founded the Association Montessori Internationale in Amsterdam
- 1932 International Montessori Congress in Europe

- 1939-1947 Makes India her home. With the help of her son she conducts 16 Indian Montessori Training Courses, laying a foundation for the Montessori Movement in India
- 1947 Reestablishment of the Opera Montessori in Rome, Italy
- 1948 Visits India again
- 1949 Appoints Albert Max Joosten as her personal representative to conduct the Indian Montessori Training Courses. Conducts the First International Training Course in Pakistan. Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize
- 1951 Conducts the International Montessori Course in London. Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for the second time
- 1952 Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for the third time. All three occasions the Nobel Prize eludes her. Dr. Montessori passes away. Interred at Noordwijk-aan-Zee in the Netherlands

"Scientific observation has established that education is not what the teacher gives; education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences that occur within the environment. The task of the teacher becomes that of preparing a series of motives of cultural activity, spread over a specially prepared environment, and then refraining from obtrusive interference. Human teachers can only help the great work that is being done, as servants help the master. Doing so, they will be witnesses to the unfolding of the human soul and to the rising of a New Man who will not be a victim of events, but will have the clarity of vision to direct and shape the future of human society."

-Dr. Maria Montessori

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A SALUTE TO ITALIAN & ITALIAN AMERICAN WOMEN



HONORING DR. MARIA MONTESSORI

AN INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED EDUCATOR AND PHYSICIAN
- 1870 -1952

Dr. Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori is best known for her innovative method of educating children from birth to adolescence. Her philosophy is still in use today in a large number of public as well as private schools throughout the world. The essence of the Montessori method consists of teaching students ways to develop their own skills at a pace they set for themselves.

Maria Montessori was born in 1870 in Chiaravalle, Italy to Alessandro Montessori and Renilde Stoppani, niece of Italian geologist and paleontologist Antonio Stoppani. At the age of thirteen she attended an all-boy technical school in preparation for her dream of becoming an engineer. But as the first woman to graduate from the University of Rome La Sapienza Medical School, Montessori became the first female doctor in Italy. She was a member of the University's Psychiatric Clinic and became intrigued with trying to educate the "special needs" or "unhappy little ones" and the "uneducatable" in Rome. In 1896, she gave a lecture at the Educational Congress in Torino about the training of the disabled. The Italian Minister of Education was in attendance, and was so impressed by her arguments he appointed her the same year as director of the Scuola Ortofrenica, an institution devoted to the care and education of the developmentally challenged. Montessori accepted, in order to have the opportunity to prove her theories. Her first notable success was to have several of her eight-year-old students apply to take the State examinations for reading and writing. The "defective" children not only passed but had above-average scores, an achievement described as "the first Montessori miracle." Montessori's response to the success of bringing these challenged children to the level of "normal" children was to study even further the potential of normal children.

She was asked to start a school in Rome, and Casa dei Bambini (Children's Home) opened on January 6, 1907. In this child care center in an apartment building in a poor neighborhood she focused on teaching the students ways to develop their own skills at a pace they set for themselves. This "spontaneous self-development" articulates that when the child is ready to learn new and more difficult tasks, the

teacher guides the child's first endeavors in order to avoid wasted effort and the learning of wrong habits. It has been reported that the Montessori Method of teaching has enabled children to learn to read and write more quickly and with greater facility than has otherwise been possible. The Montessori Method of teaching concentrates on quality rather than quantity.

The success of this school sparked the opening of many more, as well as a worldwide interest in Montessori's methods of education. By 1917 there was an intense interest in her method in North America. In 1925, Dr. Montessori was invited by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini to introduce her ideas throughout the Italian national school system. But by 1934 Montessori had found the brutal totalitarianism of Fascism incompatible with her sensibility, so she moved to Spain. When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 she moved to the Netherlands.

In 1939, the Theosophical Society of India extended an invitation, which Dr. Montessori accepted. She was accompanied on the journey by her only son, Mario Montessori. This trip heralded the beginning of her special relationship with India. When World War II forced her to extend her stay in India she made the international headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, Chennai, her home. With the help of her son she conducted courses called the Indian Montessori Training Courses. These courses laid a strong foundation for the Montessori Movement in India. In 1949 when she returned to the Netherlands she appointed Albert Max Joosten her personal representative and assigned him the responsibility of conducting the Indian Montessori Training Courses. Joosten, along with Swamy S R, another of her disciples, continued her work and ensured that the Montessori Movement in India was on a sound footing.

Her success in Italy led to international recognition, and for over 40 years she traveled all over the world, lecturing, writing and establishing training programs. In later years, 'Educate for Peace' became a guiding principle that underpinned her work.

Montessori lived out the remainder of her life in the Netherlands, which now hosts the headquarters of

Association Montessori Internationale.

Maria Montessori died in the Netherlands in 1952, after a lifetime devoted to the study of child development.

Between the 1920s and 1950s interest in the Montessori Method in America had waned in large part due to the publication of a booklet entitled "The Montessori System Examined" by William Heard Kilpatrick, a follower of John Dewey. But in the 1960s Nancy McCormick Rambusch contributed to the revival of the method in America by establishing the American Montessori Society; at the same time Margaret Stephenson came to the US from Europe and began a long history of training Montessori teachers under the auspices of the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI).

Montessori's Contributions

Aside from a new pedagogy, among the premier contributions to educational thought by Montessori are:

- instruction in 3-year age groups, corresponding to sensitive periods of development (example: birth-3, 3-6, 6-9, 9-12, 12-15 year olds, with an Erdkinder (German for "Land Children") program for early teens;
- children as competent beings, encouraged to make maximal decisions;
- observation of the child in the prepared environment as the basis for ongoing curriculum development and presentation of exercises for skill development and information accumulation;
- small, child-sized furniture and creation of a small, child-sized environment (microcosm) in which each can be competent to produce a self-styled small children's world;
- creation of a scale of sensitive periods of development, which provides a focus for class work that is appropriate and uniquely stimulating and motivating to the child, including periods for language development, sensorial experimentation and refinement, and various levels of social interaction;
- the importance of the "absorbent mind," the limitless motivation of the young child to achieve competence over his or her environment and to perfect his or her skills and understandings as

they occur within each time period. The phenomenon is characterized by the young child's capacity for repetition of activities within sensitive period categories (Example: exhaustive babbling as language practice leading to language competence);

o self-correcting "auto-didactic" materials (some based on work of Jean Marc Gaspard Itard and Edouard Seguin).

Montessori's Influence

A conference in Rome in January 2007 heralded the start of a year of celebrations for children and schools around the world. Dr. Montessori's innovative approach was that "Education should no longer be mostly imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities."

What followed worldwide has been called the "discovery of the child" and the realization that "...mankind can hope for a solution to its problems, among which the most urgent are those of peace and unity, only by turning its attention and energies to the discovery of the child and to the development of the great potentialities of the human personality in the course of its formation."

The efficacy of Montessori teaching methods has most recently been demonstrated by the results of a study published in the US journal, *Science* (September 29, 2006), which indicates that Montessori children have improved behavioral and academic skills compared with a control group from the mainstream. The authors concluded that "when strictly implemented, Montessori education fosters social and academic skills that are equal or superior to those fostered by other types of schools."

The Montessori method of education that she derived from her experience has subsequently been applied successfully to normal children and is quite popular in many parts of the world. Despite much criticism in the early 1930s-1940s, Montessori's method of education continues to be applied and has undergone a revival. In some places it is still subject to criticism, but the Montessori Method is practiced on six continents and throughout the United States.