

Montessori, M., Her Method of Education

Dotoressa Maria Montessori: Her Method of Education. By an Infant's Headmaster (London); Philip & Tavey Ltd.

„The fame of Dr. Maria Montessori and her system reached England about 1912 ... It has revolutionised the work of the Infant School in a dozen years.“

P.B. Ballard, London County Council, Divisional Inspector

Dottoressa Maria
Montessori

Doctor of Medicine (University of Rome) ;
(D.Litt. Durham).

Her Method of Education.

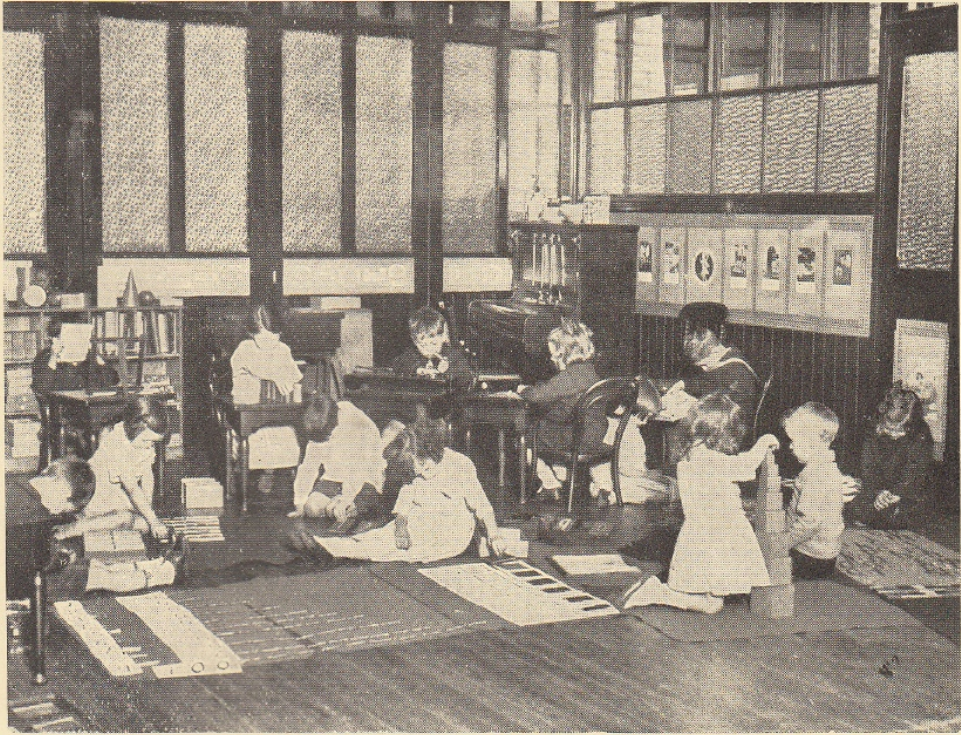


By an
Infants' Headmistress
(LONDON)

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CORNER OF A CLASS-ROOM

DR. MONTESSORI

AND HER

METHOD OF EDUCATION

BY AN INFANTS' HEADMISTRESS
(LONDON)



An Abridgment reprinted by courtesy of "Education"

"It is probable that the last ten years will prove to have been one of the most important germinal periods in the history of education in this country. It argues no ingratitude to the great name of Froebel and his thousands of devoted followers to connect the new impulse, which is everywhere at work in our schools, more directly with the doctrine and labours of Maria Montessori than with any other single source" . . . T. P. NUNN, *Professor of Education in the University of London*.

"The fame of Dr. Maria Montessori and her system reached England about 1912 . . . It has revolutionised the work of the Infant School in a dozen years." . . . Dr. P. B. BALLARD, *Divisional Inspector, London County Council*.



Introduction.

Nine years ago Dr. Montessori held her first training course in this country, and has since followed it with four others held in alternate years. Hundreds of students have attended her lectures,

The first woman student in the University of Rome to take her medical degree, Dr. Montessori began to study children's diseases and proceeded to concentrate on the problem of the feeble-minded. She became conversant with the work previously done in this direction by Itard and by Seguin. She learned the value of applying physiological as well as psychological principles for the relief and education of those in her care. She reviewed the child's growth with reference to the doctrine of evolution, and made use of the spontaneous tendencies towards development. For two years, and with marked success, she directed a school and taught children who in the elementary schools in Rome had been considered hopelessly deficient.

Both Seguin and Itard emphasised what is now generally recognised—that education, to be successful, must be carried on in an atmosphere of kindness and sympathy. This doctrine Dr. Montessori put into practice and made peculiarly her own. From the education of the deficient she turned her attention to that of the normal child, and in 1906 organised an infants' school in a model tenement in Rome, using these newer methods.

It has been said that Dr. Montessori has discovered no new principles. Even if this be so, she has entered into the inheritance left her by her great educational predecessors with a special fitness for the task, and has not left the field as she found it. Where others have suggested, she has insisted, and has evolved a logical method for the good of the child and the betterment of education. She has considered the child as a whole and in relation to home as well as to school life, and has always emphasised the importance of interesting not only the teacher but the parent.

The Environment.

The teacher, who should be specially trained for her work, must understand the child's development in biological lines. Her duty is to study the individual and to interpret his reactions to his surroundings. In the world the child has to adjust himself to an adult environment; in a Montessori school the environ-

ment is prepared to fit the child. It must contain small and light furniture which he can easily move, pictures that he can take down, dust, and put away; small basins in which he can wash, and light jugs from which he can pour water. Cups and plates for the meal which is eaten in school and flowers for decorations should be provided. Cupboards must be easily accessible, and there should be receptacles for the child's individual possessions.

The beauty of cleanliness and order must be apparent to the youngest, and he should be encouraged to appreciate it. A garden where the child can work is very desirable. Important as the environment undoubtedly is, Dr. Montessori warns her students that, while it can modify, it cannot create. Within the environment the child has free choice of work, using the educational material and carrying out the exercises of practical life. The early work is concerned with the education of the senses. Exercises are repeated over and over again, and the children delight in the repetition.

The Five Stages of the First Period.

The elementary material is presented in five stages. At first, the child learns to move seats quietly, to use the dressing frames and to work with the three sets of solid cylinders. He begins to concentrate on work and to make his first comparisons and sense judgments. When he has completed this, he uses material dealing with dimensions, the cubes, the prisms and the long rods. The child has now to control his material, whereas in the cylinders the control was within the apparatus. The tactile sense is developed by means of touching rough and smooth surfaces. This exercise can be looked upon as a preparation for writing.

At this stage colour, with grading of shades, is introduced. Language is taught with all sense training exercises, *e.g.*, with the cubes, the words large, small, larger and smaller, largest and smallest. These words, involving ideas of comparison, are left with the child so that he may apply them himself as occasion arises. The exercises of practical life are rising and taking seats in silence and walking on a line.

In the third grade, sound and weight boxes are used; the exercises dealing with gradations. Plane wooden geometric insets afford touching exercises, and when these are used with the three series of corresponding geometric cards, give practice in sight recognition. The practical exercises comprise washing, dusting, dressing and handling objects.

In the next stage, setting tables, arranging the room and care of the person are dealt with. The child learns to walk with freedom and balance, to control movement, to move noiselessly and to keep silence. All sense exercises are repeated, and, in addition, recognition of musical notes is introduced by the use of duplicate bells.

A definite step towards writing, involving the use of paper and pencil, is now taken. The child follows the outline of geometric metal insets and fills in the design with a coloured pencil. This eventually leads also to simple designing. He traces sandpaper letters and murmurs the appropriate sounds. He is not merely dependent upon the visual image, but has the aid of muscular memory. He is given sandpaper figures which he uses with the divided rods and with counters for learning the terms odd and even; he counts with wooden spindles. A moveable alphabet is used for composing words.

At the fifth stage water-colours are used for design and later drawing from nature is begun. Arithmetic is continued with the divided rods. Objects are labelled with names and prepared reading slips are presented. Practice is given in reading and writing words and sentences. This completes the work of the first period.

The Second Period.

The programme of work for the second period consists of exercises based on knowledge gained from using the elementary material. In the region of arithmetic, bead bars replace divided rods for addition and subtraction exercises, and the number frames are used to teach notation. Table boards and sachels

are used for building and for memorising tables and for simple exercises in division. The long and short frames are used for addition, subtraction and multiplication sums. For division there is a special apparatus of tubes and beads coloured according to place value. Geometry is taught by means of divided insets and prepared albums. There are insets for teaching the value of simple, vulgar and decimal fractions.

For the further study of English, lists of compound words are made with loose letters of two colours; boxes of words are introduced for exercises giving early ideas of grammar. Grammar commands and trays are provided for exercises in parts of speech and charts for analysis. At this stage, simple composition exercises are written by the child, who should be able to read fluently from books. Throughout his school life Dr. Montessori expects a child to work to the utmost of his ability. Her exercises—carefully graded in increasing difficulty—are presented at a rate which varies with the intelligence of the individual, but which allows every child thoroughly to grasp every step. She endeavours to train him in habits of concentrated thought preceding action, as a preparation for life.

The Method Applied.

Although the work is graded, the apparatus may be presented in varying order, following the progress of the child, who is free, within limits, to choose his own work. Moveable furniture is helpful, and most infants' schools, whether large or small, have chairs and tables provided, at least for the youngest children.

In some schools, where existing conditions appear to be entirely suitable for the introduction of this method, experiment has been considered impossible on the ground of expense. In practice, however, this is found no great obstacle. The material is very durable, and frequent renewal is unnecessary. It is seldom found necessary to purchase the entire apparatus at one time, nor is it always the best procedure. It is quite practicable to buy the elementary apparatus and add the advanced material as need arises.

Later Effects of Early Training.

Group work forms part of the system, and when the infants' school is left for the junior school, the greater adaptability of the child should prevent waste of time in the continuance of his education, particularly in those schools which make provision for any individual work. Even where group work and class work methods are entirely used, the careful early training given by a competent Montessori teacher should enable the child to proceed at a good rate in his new surroundings. He has learnt to concentrate on work, to examine his problem and arrive at conclusions. He has acquired habits of order and thoroughness. He has learnt self-control and obedience, and is already beginning to realise the helpfulness of co-operation. He has been encouraged to measure himself against his work, not against his neighbour, yet by seeing more advanced work going on in his class he has been shown the necessity for further progress. During his stay in the infants' school he has been allowed every possible opportunity for physical freedom, with the object of helping him towards the possession of mental and physical health.

Application of the Method to the Subjects of the Curriculum.

A very definite branch of the work deals with the teaching of language. Conversation is freely carried on when children arrive at school. Greetings are interchanged and incidents that have occurred outside the school are recounted. Dr. Montessori has noted how much her children had to relate on Monday mornings. The teacher has many occasions for talking with individual children, but when presenting work she carefully avoids superfluous explanations.

In preparation for the reading of books Dr. Montessori teaches a large number of words, and from the beginning associates meanings with words and content with sentences, thus preparing the way for work in more advanced stages, when private study from text-books becomes necessary.

The exercises with the grammar apparatus not only give a foundation in the knowledge of grammar, but lead to the formation of sentences and the beginnings of written composition.

In the matter of arithmetic, the steps cover counting and notation, with place value, number groups, tables, addition, subtraction, multiplication and division signs, exercises and sums, following work with apparatus. Knowledge of coinage (learned from real coins), with money sums and measurements with yard stick, measures for liquids, etc., are included. In testing the results of sums children are encouraged to use the apparatus for verification. Problems are given after a facility in the use of figures has been acquired.

Drawing is developed from earlier exercises with metal insets. It is associated with colour and the use of pastel and brush is taught. Children experiment with design and begin to draw from memory and from Nature.

From an early age Dr. Montessori gives definite instruction in music. Children are trained to recognise gradations in sound, ear training is given with exercises involving the matching of notes with bells. Composition of scales and, later, time and tune are dealt with. From the beginning staff notation is taught. Rhythmic exercises and singing are a daily feature in all class-rooms. In schools where this method is used, no difficulty should be found in providing for children of from three to five years, or in the formation of a separate nursery class within the school, where such is necessary, in order to counteract the bad effects of a poor environment.

The Montessori method is particularly valuable in preparing a child for a course of study—as opposed to a course of lessons or lectures—on definite lines. Very young children learn to investigate their difficulties, and show a preference for continuous and even arduous attempts to solve difficulties for themselves. It often happens in a Montessori class that a child, having been shown a first step, pushes on and on at one subject, prepared to attempt for himself much that, judged by general standards, would be considered too far advanced. This eagerness for advancement and confidence in ability should prove of the greatest value to the child or teacher faced with a group of new subjects, such as geography, history, and literature.



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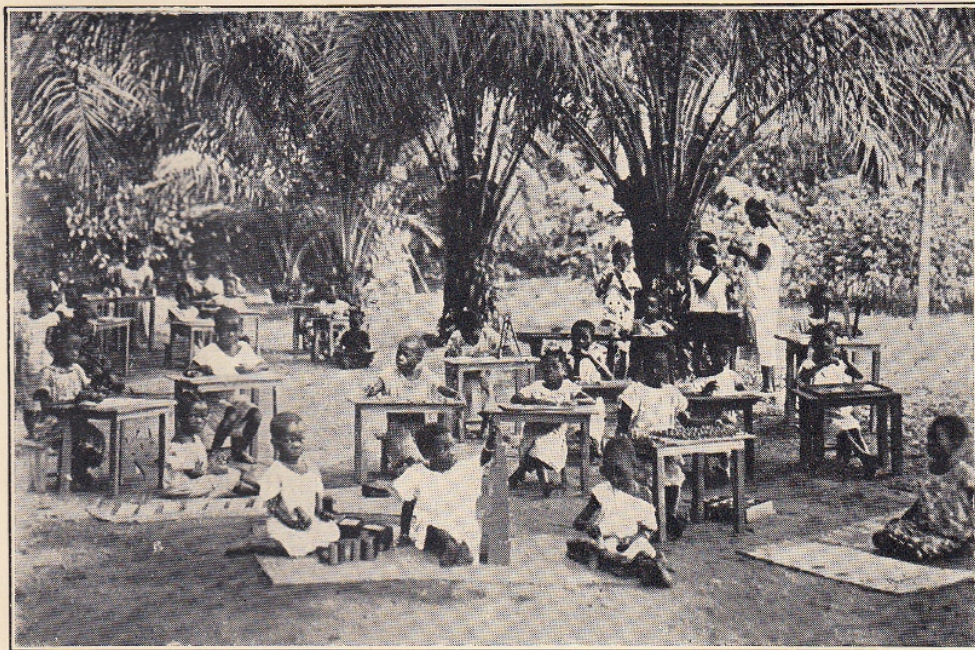
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Messrs. Philip and Tacey, the appointed manufacturers and distributors of Montessori Material for the British Empire, have just issued an official list containing illustrations and descriptions of every piece of apparatus. This guide is a well-printed book of thirty-six pages containing excellent photographic reproductions of every detail. For those schools which use the Montessori method entirely this list is essential and it is also valuable for those schools which adopt parts of the system. A Copy will be sent free of charge on receipt of a postcard mentioning "The Schoolmistress" to Messrs. Philip and Tacey, 69-79, High Street, Fulham, London, S.W.



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