
MoRE - Montessori Research Europe Newsletter

2

December 2011



Interpreted readings (Lemonia Montessori School, Rome, Italy)

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Editorial Clara Tornar

Dear members,

this newsletter – the last of the year 2011 – contains several contributions bringing some indications which have been triggered by the informal meeting recently held in Bratislava: in particular, I am talking about short contributions, which may give some useful inputs to start a discussion/debate that would take into account research issues, and education/training questions, as well.

Among the several points discussed during the above mentioned meeting, I would like to ask you to pay attention, in particular, to the e-environment we have set up to enhance the communication among the members of our community, as well as the questionnaire aimed at collecting the data concerning the studies carried out in the past, and those still in progress, that will be stored into an archive.

I do believe that the opportunity to get this information is an indispensable step to start future research collaborations on topics of common interest. We will have the chance to discuss our common research interests in order to individuate methodological tools that might be shared.

One aspect that makes it particularly difficult to generalize the results of different studies, even when they are aimed at analyzing the same research object, is the existence of differences among the adopted methodologies, and this makes it impossible to compare the results.

Please, I am asking you to complete the questionnaire by the middle of next month (February 2012), thus we can complete the data entry into the archive, and provide you with a database which will be available by the next Spring. To this end, you are going to receive a new email containing the instructions to enter the website where you will find the questionnaire.

I hope you will enjoy this newsletter and I send you my warmest wishes for a Happy New Year 2012!

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Contributions

Montessori Pedagogy in Sweden, Some Glimpses

Eva-Maria Ahlquist
(Sweden, University of Stockholm)

In 2008 Swedish Montessori teachers got their own organization, named the Association M.E.R (Montessori Education and Research) where all possible questions and topics concerning the pedagogy were to be discussed. Since then, several pedagogic cafés and seminars have been arranged every year - meetings between active teachers and researchers as well as educators in Montessori pedagogy. This year, M.E.R. has arranged cafés and seminars in three Swedish cities on topics such as dance and creativity, practical work done in schools to integrate Montessori Education with the new curriculum, invited researchers have presented research on cognition and understanding (Professor Peter Gärdenfors) and about how children use language to make sense of science. A report from travels to Hershey Montessori School in Ohio was also presented at one café, as well as a development project carried out at Senior Level in a school situated north of Stockholm, with the aim to approach an urban variant of *Erdkinder*. We have asked the teachers in charge of the project to write a report to M.O.R.E. about their work, and the report is presented below.

A new number of the annual magazine distributed to all the members of the association, this year considers the scientific foundation and development of Maria Montessori, since it is a recurrent issue among both Montessori teachers as well as persons with less knowledge about the pedagogy. We consider it to be important to discuss Maria Montessori's scientific foundation, her view on children, the role of the teacher and the aim of her method since Sweden, as well as large parts of the world, seems to want to set the clock backwards to a time when school was characterized by pedagogy of mediation and reproduction.

Montessori left the world of University and developed her pedagogy as an independent researcher. Without going deeper into the reason for this, one could suspect that her ideas were too radical for her time and that she, due to that, was not fully understood. Today we find ourselves almost a century later at a time when humanism is supposed to characterize school and education. This thought lead on to the role of the teacher. In

the magazine thoughts on the role of the teacher, as it is described in one of Maria Montessori's books, are presented. There is much to discuss, first and foremost the question of didactic tools and about the structure and organization of teaching. In this context it becomes important to interpret what Maria Montessori wanted to say, as her texts are not always clear, sometimes even ambiguous. However the main point is clear: Maria Montessori showed that teaching must be changed from pedagogy of mediation to pedagogy where every individual child is allowed to grow and develop.

Even though Montessori must be said to be among the pioneers of progressive education, there have been pedagogic precursors before, after, and in her time with similar ideas. Reading the steering documents for Swedish public school, it is obvious that it for long has been influenced by the ideas of progressive education. During the 1960s the leading concept was MAKIS; Motivation, Activity, Concretion, Individualization and Collaboration. Later, in 1994 the curriculum spoke of children being active constructing their own knowledge.

However, we must ask where we are heading today. The present education debate has focused on restoring order in the classrooms, something that Montessori teachers consider to be matter of course and not something that should be the main argument of an educational debate, but unfortunately have been interpreted as an argument to reintroduce pedagogy of mediation. Traces of this debate can be seen in the new curriculum of public school, Lgr 2011, where "teaching of full class" is inscribed.

But hopefully the pendulum will swing back again, and the magazine also brings up new research in cognition, where a new progressive wave, focusing inner motivation and learning for understanding, is on its way. The Swedish cognition researcher, Peter Gärdenfors recently published a book called "The desire to understand", a notion that constitute the foundation of Maria Montessori's method.



Working with the Universities in the UK

John Clarkson
(United Kingdom, Kent and Sussex Montessori
Centre)

In contrast with several other European countries

(and the USA in particular) Montessori training organisations in the UK have had very few contacts with university departments and there are very few Montessori lecturers. However, pioneering work has been carried out by the Kent and Sussex Montessori Centre (KSMC), who developed the UK's first ever Montessori degree programmes, and this is currently being continued with the development of an MA Education (Montessori) which has some taught modules but which focuses on an action research project in the participant's own school or setting.

KSMC was initially a local sub-centre of the London Montessori Centre (LMC) but became an independent institution in 1997 and on becoming independent it sought accreditation of its courses. They approached the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE), the premier international accreditation agency for Montessori training, which is approved by the US Department of Education. This accreditation was conferred in 1997 and has been maintained ever since. KSMC is now the only training centre in the UK to meet MACTE's standards and achieve accreditation status. One of KSMC's lecturers is currently serving as a member of MACTE's Board of Directors.

KSMC also sought university accreditation at that time. Initially this was through the University of Brighton. The university granted the early childhood diploma course 120 Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) points at UG level 1, which is equivalent to 60 ECTS points at level 5 of the EQF. The university did not demand significant changes in the syllabus or assessment processes, after it became clear that KSMC's stance was that trainees were introduced both to Montessori and mainstream pedagogies and expected to make a reasoned evidence-based choice when these were in conflict. The institution was spot-checked (they received a phone call one day to say that a team of six inspectors were on the road and would be with them within the hour!) and accreditation was conferred. With the University's support, in 2000 KSMC transferred their accreditation to the Open University, who are still accrediting the Early Childhood course now.

In 2001 the UK introduced a new level of qualification (the foundation degree) which was effectively a qualification endorsing the satisfactory completion of work leading up to, but not including, the final year of a degree. The foundation degree is comparable to an associate degree in the USA, and took in the old Higher National Diplomas. In 2007 KSMC started

negotiations with the University of Greenwich to approve a Foundation Degree in Early Years (Montessori) and teaching commenced in September 2008.

The syllabus consisted of five modules, which were largely taught concurrently. One module related to the development of professional practice and was assessed by a portfolio. Another focused on child development. As all the participants had already taken initial Montessori training (and were doing the foundation in one year - the Montessori diploma being accepted as year one of the FdA) the teaching focused on the years 0-3 and the KSMC baby and Toddler Diploma course was integrated into the degree. Another module centred on the topics of safeguarding children and inclusion. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, every student completed an action research project in their own school or kindergarten. The aim of each project was to bring about change and improvement in their setting or school.

The results for this course were exemplary. There was a 100% pass rate and a nil drop-out rate. Most of the students from the FdA group went on to do the newly approved BA Honours in Education (Montessori). Modules included a major emphasis on leadership and management, further work on child development, an advanced module on child protection procedures, a module of working with gifted and talented children (which included an introduction to the Montessori primary materials) and a practitioner research project. Again there was a 100% pass rate (with 50% gaining 'good honours' and no-one failing to be awarded honours) and only one drop-out (due to pregnancy issues).

A second cohort for the FdA also achieved a 100% pass rate with no drop-outs, but Greenwich University ran into financial pressures and, at the last minute, demanded that all cohorts should have a minimum of 70 students. This was impossible to achieve, but fortunately KSMC was able to work with City College Norwich to deliver the University of East Anglia FdA with a Montessori orientation. This cohort is currently completing their studies and a new group will start in January 2012.

In the meantime KSMC is working with another university to develop and deliver an MA Education (Montessori) degree. Final approval is pending so full details cannot be released but it is anticipated that there will be six taught modules, followed by an action research project. These are projected to be:

1. **"Getting to Grips with Montessori Research"** which introduces the corpus of Montessori research, looking at both process and product empirical research, and also begins to develop skills of critical reading and self-critical writing.
2. **"Freedom: the Pedagogy of Liberation"** looks at the concept of freedom, which Montessori saw as a paramount value, studies it in the context of other writers, e.g. Paulo Freire, and considers the question of whether this is the key feature of Montessori authenticity.
3. **"Universality and Inclusive Praxis"** It is often assumed that the Montessori Method has universal applicability. This module considers the situation across ability levels and between different societies.
4. **"Critical Issues in Montessori"** looks at current issues in Montessori. These issues include the place of ICT, role play, fantasy, creativity, free flow & using outdoor spaces.
5. **"Personalized Learning for Gifted and Talented Pupils"**.
6. **"Leading and Managing Change for Improvement"** which is a module specifically preparing for the research project next year, and involves undertaking an change-readiness audit at the participants' school or kindergarten.

Each module will involve attendance for one weekend, at a historic study centre in South East England with good rail and air links, followed by a blended learning programme with internet back-up. This is scheduled to commence in September 2012 and further details can be found on the KSMC website www.montessoricentre.com

All the higher level qualifications include an action research (or a practitioner research) module. Action research is the preferred model of educational research for KSMC as it focuses on the lived experience of the researchers and their commitment to working for children. The emphasis is on practical improvement of the researcher's own setting or practice and, crucially, the method allows for considerable flexibility of approach if observations show that alterations to the methodology would enhance the children's experiences, even if the research is already under way.

The KSMC is headed by Marianne Clarkson, a member of the Executive Committee of

Montessori Europe. She states that "working with the universities has not been easy or straightforward, but I believe it is important because Montessori is a high-quality approach to education, and its status in the UK is not very high. Having higher level qualifications will not only deepen and extend practitioners' knowledge and practice, but it will also lead to a better status for the Montessori approach generally".



Modern Aspects on *Erdkinder*

Christina Erlandsson
(Sweden, Montessoriskolan i Norrtälje¹)

In the modern urban world, the question is sometimes asked whether *Erdkinder* is relevant. Does the development of adolescents benefit from getting to know a cow? At *Montessoriskolan i Norrtälje* we believe so. Maria Montessori thought that a good way for adolescents to grow self-confident was for them to be needed by others. The work on a farm offered a brilliant opportunity to "learn by doing" in a small community and thereby grasping the relevance. In Sweden, what you teach in school is strictly regulated. Still, how you teach is a task for the pedagogues.



Erdkinder cooking

In Norrtälje, we have during the last two years, aimed to establish *Erdkinder* at our school. The *Erdkinder* project started off after instructions from

¹ *Montessoriskolan i Norrtälje* was established 1998 as an answer to demands from Montessori pre-school parents. The school is today educating about 200 pupils and employing about 35 persons.

Eva-Maria Ahlquist and Per Gynther, leading Montessori researchers at the Stockholm University. It is a process and we do not claim to be full-scale. We have focused on one class at the time and will after New Year start up the third generation. Our school is situated in the centre of town, but fortunately there is an old beautiful farm in our neighborhood, municipally owned and inhabited by cows, sheep, horses, goats and hens. At the farm, we organize farm days for our *Erdkinder* class at least once a month when they chop wood, feed the cows, cuddle with the lambs, plant trees and learn more about hunting.



Erdkinder in the forest

Later in the classroom, we connect the practical farm day to the theoretical knowledge regulated by the Board of Education. The question is why?

When Maria Montessori developed her thoughts about the pedagogy for adolescence, farm life could very well be a future occupation. Today, society looks somewhat different and our basic needs are provided to us as products or services. Does that make *Erdkinder* irrelevant? At *Montessoriskolan i Norrtälje* we believe it makes it even more important. Without the understanding of how food gets on the table, without the knowledge of how valuable clean water is, without the skills in keeping warm and building healthy houses, how can the pupils grow into adults protecting the Earth? The Earth is today threatened as a result of consumer decisions influencing our resources. In many places around the world, peace is threatened as a result of limited resources. Being a human is of course so much more than being a consumer. Still, our power to protect the environment lays today in our

power as consumers of products and services. *Erdkinder* provides unique emotional experiences and practical skills in respecting the circle of life, skills that are useful today and might be even more important in the future after “peak oil”. Now is the time for *Erdkinder*.



The Competent Use of the School Library: a Montessori Approach

Monica Salassa
(Italy, University of Roma Tre, Centre for Montessori studies)

Introduction

In 2009 the Centre for Montessori Studies has realized a video-documentary showing how, in a Montessori school of Rome (Italy), original procedures are activated thanks to a project for the school library management involving children attending the elementary school. The experience was undertaken in the Montessori school at via Lemonia (founded in 1957 by Flaminia Guidi, one of the first students who attended a Montessori's training course), a separated unit of the 101° Didactic Circle “Don Filippo Rinaldi” including a “House of Children” and a primary school with a total of about 220 children. The project group was coordinated by dr. M. Salassa under the supervision of prof. C. Tornar, with the cooperation of few Montessori teachers. Concerning the research products, a poster was presented by Dr. M. Salassa at the 38th IASL International Conference 2009 held at the University of Padoa, under the thematic area “Learning outcomes and competent use of the school library”, and a paper by the same author was included in the Conference proceedings².

Abstract

In a Montessori school the Library is entirely managed by children attending the 3rd, 4th and 5th grade. The school Library main purpose is to give children the essential instruments to help them experience a competent use of it playing an active role.

² Salassa M. (2009), “The competent use of the school library: a Montessori approach”, Poster session, in: *Preparing pupils and students for the future. School libraries in the picture*, 38th Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship, 2-4 september 2009, Abano Terme-Padova, Conference booklet and proceedings edited by Donatella Lombello and Luisa Marquardt in collaboration with Cristina Uroni, IASL-International Association of School Librarianship, p. 40-41.

At the same time, it is important, from a Montessori point of view, to provide children with a variety of books to be consulted, offering each child the possibility to construct independently his own path to knowledge acquisition, at his own pace, through cultural means able to support its imagination ("Imagination is the great power of this age", M. Montessori, 2009).

The school Library, offering to children a wide range of books on different subjects, sets itself as a privileged learning environment in which the competent use of available resources allows children to come to contact with those "seeds of cultural interests" which, according to Montessori, will sprout later in their minds as they further develop (M. Montessori, 1948).



The school library environment

The Library has got its own rules: to consult or borrow books the child must get a personal card as "Library's competent user" while the child who wants to become "Librarian" must get a special licence. From a social and educational point of view, one of the most interesting aspects is that examiners are older children who already got the "Library competent user" or the "Librarian" licence.



The examination to become a librarian

The independent action of the children within the Library environment is possible thanks to the cataloguing work previously carried out by the

teachers: each book is assigned to a genre, each genre is associated to a letter and a colour, each book has got its own number. A brief bibliographical description of each book is put on a catalogue card reporting basic information for its easy identification: author, title, publisher, genre, number, letter and colour.



The cataloguing of books



The check of the catalogue cards

The video realized by the Centre for Montessori studies shows in practice the daily life of the school Library in collaboration with the teachers and pupils of such Montessori elementary school of Rome. It shows the peculiar position the school Library assumes within the general configuration of the school indoor spaces and highlights the activities that children play in order to achieve a competent, self-responsible and social use of the school Library within a Montessori environment.

As a consequence, the purpose to put children into learning conditions able to facilitate the achievement of the Library competent use as a learning outcome, highly stimulate teachers to reflect on their professional practice. According to the Montessori approach described, teachers are put in front of the need to change their attitude towards the way to conceive of school Library and young learners.



The restoration of books

In fact, it is up to teachers to previously arrange a well prepared environment according to the child developmental and learning needs, to respect and facilitate the independent action of the child, to respect and facilitate a working method based on the child's free choice, to facilitate and support the child sense of responsibility and self-confidence pointed out by Dr. Montessori in her writings.



The self-managed borrowing of books

In the learning environment a school Library managed according to the approach described creates a wide range of learning and growth opportunities so that children become the main actors in building their own knowledge, being able to develop skills in a learning climate based on collaboration, exchange and mutual help.

References

- Montessori, M., (1948). *To educate the human potential*. Kalakshetra, Adyar.
Montessori, M., (1973). *From childhood to adolescence*. Schocken books, New York.

Reading suggestions

This section aims to quote documents selected according to the interest and curiosity that the theme

they are dealing with may raise. The selection is done considering only resources freely available online.

Sims, P., (2011). "The Montessori Mafia", *The Wall street journal*, <http://blogs.wsj.com/ideas-market/2011/04/05/the-montessori-mafia/>

Garner, R., (2010). "The school that turned to Montessori to beat gangs", *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/the-school-that-turned-to-montessori-to-beat-gangs-1920114.html>

Giroux, D. [et al.], (2010). "Using the Montessori approach for a clientele with cognitive impairments: a quasi-experimental study design", *International journal of aging and human development*, <http://baywood.metapress.com/app/home/contribution.asp?referrer=parent&backto=issue.2.4;journal.12.292;linkingpublicationresults.1:300312.1>

New members

GERMANY

Patricia Eck

Patricia Eck received her diploma in Biology and her first state examination in Chemistry and Biology as a teacher for secondary school. Actually, she is working on her dissertation at the Johannes-Gutenberg University Mainz in Germany. In her qualitative research project she examines the transfer of the Montessori main principles at the passage from primary (age six to ten) to secondary school (age ten to sixteen or nineteen) documenting the pupils daily learning-process in two different schools.

Contact: peck@students.uni-mainz.de

Events

2012 Montessori International Conference, Rome, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 February

"Actuality of the Montessori Education System. Global Perspectives and Intercultural Aspects".

Maria Montessori developed a pedagogical model among the most widely known at an international level.

What are the scientific reasons for the actual pedagogical support of its proposal? The conference intends to respond to this question presenting the international research framework

developed around the scientific pedagogy of Maria Montessori and discussing the many implications that Montessori pedagogy plays in the enhancement and development of the socializing dimension of human interactions towards open and intercultural cooperation. Finally, will be presented the Montessori experience carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with its thirty-year's experience of a Montessori Nido.

Organizers

Ministry of Foreign Affairs; ANINSEI Confindustria Federvarie; Centre for Montessori Studies, Department of Educational Design, University of Roma Tre.

Venue

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Piazzale della Farnesina, 1.

Speakers/presenters

Prof. Clara Tornar, University of Roma Tre, Italy.
Dr. Eva-Maria Ahlquist, Stockholm University, Sweden.
Dr. Gudula Meisterjahn-Knebel, Montessori Europe Association, Germany.
Dr. Fabrizio Lobasso, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italy.



2012 Montessori Summer Seminar, Amsterdam, AMI Head office, 26-31 August

The 2012 Montessori summer seminar offers the participants an intellectual and challenging journey through today's Montessori landscape. Taking a very broad perspective of how Montessori principles can be applied in a multitude of situations, the participants will enjoy getting an in depth view of the latest developments in neuropsychiatry (executive functions), the empowerment of communities, and Montessori school settings. A unique part of the programme is a Montessori history day, which will make insightful connections between the past and the present, demonstrating the brilliance of Montessori principles.

Organizers

Association Montessori Internationale; AVE.IK

Venue

Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) Head office, Amsterdam.

Speakers/presenters

Dr. Steve Hughes, USA.
Prof. Adele Diamond, USA.
Ruben Jongkind, Johan Cruyff Foundation, Netherlands.
Lynne Lawrence, AMI, Netherlands.
Liene Hendriksen, Netherlands.
Fred Kelpin, Netherlands.

Next issue: June 2012. Deadline for contributions: May 30th, 2012



Editorial board

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In this issue, Montessori Erdkinder pictures courtesy of Christina Erlandsson; Montessori Lemonia school pictures courtesy of Lorenzo Di Giorgio.