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Double Issue 2014

Montessori visiting Sweden in 1950. The photo was taken at the reception at Grand Hotel, Stockholm

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Editorial Eva-Maria Ahlquist

Dear members of MoRE,

I am grateful that I have been asked to take over the editorial work for the MoRE Newsletter. First I like to thank Professor Clara Turner who successfully has been the editor from 2011 and conducted the paper for three years. During this period there were many interesting articles and news presented and the paper got a new suitable layout. When the idea of the paper arose in 2007, the aim was to be able to grasp what is going on in the field of Montessori education and research in Europe.

In Lund at the annual Montessori Europe conference we had a meeting where we discussed a development of the MoRE newsletter. There was an agreement that the newsletter should not just concern the Montessori community; it should aim for a larger readership and reach the academic world. But is it necessary to cut the more informal part to the determent of academic quality? Of course not! It is possible to combine two different publications by letting one part cover Montessori news from different parts of Europe, information about new publications, reports from conferences, professional issues, development in Montessori education, important local research projects, etcetera, and the other part covering peer reviewed scientific articles.

In order to get a better grasp of what is going on in different parts of Europe, we will open up for a collaboration where one person from each country will be responsible to send a report to the editor of the newsletter. For the scientific part an editorial board has to be organized. This matter will be discussed further.

This double issue contains interesting contributions from our members in Europe. Paola Trabalzini presents an article where she is examining the theme Practical Life at San Lorenzo with a link to the Erdkinder concept. You will also find a report by the by the same author on Montessori education in Italy. I believe we all feel that there is a need for articles on Montessori education in academic publications. I am therefore happy to give a short review of an article in Routledge written by Christina Stringer. She analyses the concept of Learning to learn and refers it to Montessori's work. Iwona Sikorska presents a related theme. Her article published in this newsletter has the title How to help children think. You will also find a presentation of the book Learning in Montessori Classroom – in Search of Quality in Education edited by Beata Bednarczuk and Dorota Zdybel and a presentation of the book And Now: Montessori! by Jaqueline Hendriksen and Esther

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Pelgrom. The MoRE Newsletter will in addition give you some information about new matters concerning Montessori education.

Finally, I sincerely thank all members for the contribution to the MoRE Newsletter 2014.

I wish you all a pleasant reading and send you all my best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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Contributions

Montessori education in Italy

Paola Trabalzini, Department of Human Studies, Lumsa University

In Italy a renewed interest in Montessori Method and Pedagogy is taking place. It occurs in the academic context as well as among families looking for a school of quality.

The texts published in the last fifteen years concerned the following spheres:
the educational path and the scientific and social activity of the young Montessori, with particular attention to her feminist commitment and to her struggles for civil rights. Studies were carried out as well about the relationships between Montessori and politics, for instance with fascism, and studies about the relationships between Montessori and the Italian culture of the twentieth century both as far as the idealistic culture is concerned and the catholic one. In addition a number of studies emphasized that the fundamental issues in Montessori pedagogy link up to topics of the current educational view such as: organization and management of the learning sphere, individualized approach, directive versus non directive relationship between teacher and pupil, real motivation, creativity and so on.

Recently unpublished texts by Montessori have been made known to the public such as: The diary of Maria Montessori's first voyage to the United States, with the preface by Carolina Montessori (2014); articles about religious education, edited by Fulvio De Giorgi (2014) and *Psichogeometry*, edited by Benedetto Scoppola (2012).

In relation to the difficulties that the traditional school is passing through with regard to the organizational aspect as well as to the cultural identity, in Italy there is a demand from parents for alternative educational experiences. Furthermore it is worth to underline the publication of "Vita dell'infanzia" magazine wished by Maria Montessori and present in the Italian publishing context since 1952. "Vita dell'infanzia" is renewed both as to the contents and graphic arts. The aim is to listen to the needs of those operating in the school, to give the opportunity to young and competent people in Italy to express their views, to give value to the big capacities of those working lifelong at the Montessori Method, to host the work of the academic world willing to transform the discoveries carried out by the research into concrete educational practises.

The situation of Montessori schools
From a census carried out by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) in cooperation (Convenzione) with the Opera Nazionale Montessori (ONM), institution founded by Maria Montessori in 1924 providing Montessori teacher training and the dissemination and application of the Montessori method in Italy, it turned out that in the school year 2009-2010 the number of public and legally recognized Children's houses (age group 3-6) and Elementary schools (age group 6-11) were 104 while the teachers involved were over 900. To these schools the following have to be added: 30 private Nursery schools (age group 0-3), 18 private "Children's houses" and Elementary schools. In the last years the request also for Middle schools (age group 11-14) by Montessori educational institutions has increased; in this direction experimentations are being carried out in Milan, Perugia, Rome, Como, Castelfidardo (Province of Ancona), Castellanza (Province of Varese).

Teacher training
The ONM is recognized by the Ministry of Education as "organisation credited for the training"; according to its Statute, approved by law by the Ministry itself, ONM officially represents the Italian Montessori movement.

Since 1990 the ONM, in accordance with the law 16-2-1987 No. 46, has drawn up a special agreement with the Italian Ministry of Education in order to define the conditions for the carrying out of the Montessori method in public schools, to which ONM has to provide technical assistance as to the educational-methodological support to teachers for the correct application of Maria Montessori's educational method.

Since 1986 ONM holds a Montessori training school for trainers. ONM organizes three types of Montessori training courses: for assistants to infancy (age group 0-3) duration of the course 300 hours, for children's house teachers (age group 3-6) duration of the course 500 hours and for elementary school teachers (age-group 6-11) duration of the course 550 hours. It is MIUR that authorizes ONM, through ministerial decree, to organize courses for children's house and elementary school teachers. These courses are carried out under the supervision of MIUR that through an inspector appointed by the Regional Schooling Office. Regular controls are taking place of the course. The inspector takes part in the examination commission and undersigns the diplomas issued by ONM. The diploma is essential to teach in Montessori schools.

Moreover courses for Assistants to infancy are organized also by the Centro Nascita Montessori (Montessori Birth Centre) founded in Rome in 1961 by Adele Costa Gnocchi (1883-1967) one of the first Maria Montessori's students.

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The Centro Nascita devotes itself to the observation and study of the newly-born, to the research on child's development and on the child's relational world during its first years.

From the current year at the LUMSA University in Rome, inside of the degree in "Planning and management of educational services" the Montessori course for "Assistants to infancy" it is organized by ONM. It is made possible because there is a cooperation (Convenzione) between ONM and LUMSA.

Universities organize Montessori Masters, some in cooperation with ONM such as the Universities of Bologna, Foggia, Milano-Bicocca. In these cases an agreement between the University and ONM has been arranged. According to the said agreement, a Montessori training course is implemented inside the Master.

At the University of "Roma TRE" the Centro Studi Montessori (Montessori Study Centre) has its headquarters. It organizes Montessori Pedagogy Masters and has set up a Montessori digital library.

Conferences and Seminars
Many conferences and seminars are held in many Italian cities. A list of the initiatives is available on ONM website www.montessori.it.

From 25th to 27th September 2014 a Montessori International Congress took place in Rome on the following issue "The origin of things. Montessori in today's school". In the first day the issue analysed, concerned the proposals of the Montessori Method compared with those of the traditional school as to the recent neuro-scientific theories. In the second day the Congress works were hosted by the University of Tor Vergata in Rome. The issue dealt with was about "The learning of scientific subjects". Presentations were done by mathematicians, scholars of neurosciences as well as by Montessori teachers. The last day the Congress was held at LUMSA University in Rome and here a Round Table took place. The issue considered and deepened was "Montessori training of trainers" with the participation of associations carrying out Montessori training.

Ongoing research projects
The current research activity regarding the cultural heritage of Maria Montessori focuses on the following subjects:

Montessori for the adolescents: ONM is studying the original Montessori's work on this subject, and is designing a training project for Italian teachers.

Montessori and mathematics: ONM is performing an extensive study about Montessori mathematics. This is particularly interesting due to the fact that many Montessori proposals had recently had a striking confirmation by the neuro-scientific analysis, most of all regarding the maths teaching.

Editorial activity ONM: the editing of *Psychogeometry* has been recently completed. Another current editorial research concerns the original text of *Psychoarithmetic*. ONM is also planning to ask to Montessori Pierson the authorization to publish the texts of several courses held by Maria Montessori. The papers of these courses are available in some Montessori libraries.

Grazia Honegger Fresco and Clara Tornar are working at the critical edition of *Psychogrammar*.

Montessori's books and books about Montessori education published in the last years
M. Montessori, *In viaggio verso l'America. 1913, diario privato a bordo del Cincinnati* (Maria Montessori Sails to America - Private Diary, 1913), preface and notes by Carolina Montessori, Roma, Fefè Editore, 2014.
M. Montessori, *Montessori, Dio e il bambino e altri scritti inediti* (Montessori, God and the child and other unpublished writings), Brescia, Editrice La Scuola, 2013.
M. Montessori, *Psicogeometria. Dattiloscritto inedito*, a cura di Benedetto Scoppola (Psychogeometry. Unpublished typed document), Roma, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, 2012.
M. Montessori, *Dall'infanzia all'adolescenza* (From childhood to adolescence), introduzione, revisione e note di Clara Tornar, traduzione di Monica Salassa, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2009.
"Vita dell'infanzia" magazine, published by the Opera Nazionale Montessori. The September/October 2014 issue is available.
Cives G., *L'"educazione dilatatrice" di Maria Montessori* (The "widening education" of M. Montessori), Roma, Anicia, 2008.
Cives G., M. A. D'Arcangeli, Pesci F., Trabalzini P., *Montessoriana. Incontri italiani* (Montessoriana. Italian Meetings), Pescara, Libreria dell'Università Editrice, 2010.
De Napoli I., *Dal silenzio alla musica col metodo Montessori* (From silence to music with the Montessori method), Roma, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, 2014.
De Sanctis L. (a cura di), *Le ricette di Maria Montessori cent'anni dopo. Alimentazione infantile a casa e a scuola* (Maria Montessori's recipes one hundred years later. Child nutrition at home and at school), Roma, Fefè Editore, 2008, II edizione ampliata 2012.
De Sanctis L. (a cura di), *In giardino e nell'orto con Maria Montessori. La natura nell'educazione dell'infanzia* (In the garden and in the kitchen garden with Maria Montessori. Nature in children's education), Roma, Fefè Editore, 2008.
De Sanctis L. (a cura di), *La cura dell'anima. L'educazione morale, spirituale e religiosa dell'infanzia* (The care of soul. Religious, spiritual and moral child education) Roma, Fefè Editore, 2011.
De Sanctis L. (a cura di), *L'infanzia svantaggiata e Maria Montessori. Esperienze psicopedagogiche, educative e sociali dal '900 ad oggi* (Disadvantaged children and Maria Montessori. Social, educational and psycho-pedagogical experiences from '900 to the present day), Roma, Fefè Editore, 2013.
Foschi R., *Maria Montessori*, Roma, Ediesse, 2012.
Giovetti P., *Maria Montessori. Una biografia* (Maria Montessori. A biography), Roma, Edizioni Mediterranee, 2009.
Honegger Fresco G., *Maria Montessori. Una storia attuale*

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(Maria Montessori. A topical story), Napoli-Roma, L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2008.
Venturo Mariafrancesca, *Ho fame: il cibo cosmico di Maria Montessori* (I am hungry: the cosmic food of Maria Montessori), Fidenza (Parma), Mattioli, 2014.

Articles

Practical Life at San Lorenzo: Implications for Erdkinder

Paola Trabalzini, Department of Human Studies, Lumsa University

This article was published in The Namta Journal vol.36, n.3, Summer 2011. It is the text of lecture at the conference held during the celebrations of Bergamo's fiftieth year of advanced Montessori courses. I thank David Kahn, editor of The Namta Journal, for having authorized the publication of the article in the MoRE Newsletter .

In this presentation I will be examining the theme "Practical life at San Lorenzo: Implications for Erdkinder" and I shall alternate references to texts and images regarding the Children's houses of San Lorenzo with texts and images concerning the adolescent school.

In the restructured buildings of the San Lorenzo district of Rome, considerable attention was dedicated to environmental care, as the educational notices put up in the courtyards of the buildings show: "The care of the plants is entrusted to the good manners of the tenants" or "Hygiene in the home is your children's health"[i].

Environmental care characterised and marked community life of San Lorenzo, and we also find it in the Children's Houses. In organising the educational day, Montessori initially put forward a schedule for the series of activities as she herself wrote in 1909 in *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all'Educazione Infantile nelle Case dei Bambini*, published in English in the 1912 under the title *The Montessori Method. The Method of Scientific Pedagogy as applied to Child Education in the Children's Houses.*

A schedule for the series of activities, Montessori specifies: "was practically never followed as a whole (demonstrating that a schedule for the various subjects was unsuitable for the atmosphere of freedom!). I started off the day with a series of practical life activities; and I must say that this was the only part of the schedule to be followed excellently – so much so that this activity still normally starts the day in the "Children's Houses"[ii].

In actual fact, before doing these "practical life exercises", in the Children's House there was first a personal "*cleanliness* check": the children's hair, hands, fingernails, neck, ears and teeth were examined. Then the children's clothes, to see whether any buttons or stitches were missing. The children were helped to look at themselves and to see whether their conditions were adequate.

The teacher taught them how to use a basin, how to wash parts of their body: fingers, nails, face and eyes, "focusing their attention on the shape of the parts the child was washing, and on the different ways of getting clean" – brushes or just soap and water. The teacher "taught the older children to help the younger ones to wash themselves well, but making sure the younger children would make an effort to do things for themselves"[iii]. A complete bath was not a daily routine, however, but children took it in turns to have a full bath during the week.

Once the personal cleanliness activity was over, the "practical life activities" would begin. The children undressed and donned their overalls by themselves or helped one another to do so. Then, the work room inspection began in order to check tidiness and cleanliness of the objects. The teacher taught the children to find the places where dust would gather and to use the right cleaning tools: swabs for the tables, brooms for the floor.

As Montessori wrote in 1909: "All this, when the children had trained to do things *for themselves*, is done quickly. Then the children go to their places" and the teacher teaches them how to sit properly, how to get up and sit down without making a noise. Montessori continued: "The teacher would then get the children to perform exercises of grace; how to come and go, greet people, give objects gracefully, and to receive them with thanks. […] From this starting point, the teacher then proceeds to *free* teaching, that is, she will not make comments to the children, who are free to move around, and she will only reprimand them if they perform any disordered movements"[iv]. They will choose activities like the naming or sensorial exercises.

From this description we can see that initially in San Lorenzo the personal and environmental care activities were envisaged in connection with concerns of a hygiene-sanitary nature, as prevention against the spreading of diseases and as a way to acquire behaviours of civil cohabitation. I must recall here that, in the early 20th century, San Lorenzo was a peripheral working class area of Rome inhabited by people with little or no education.

The "cleanliness check" would appear to have been a collective exercise: it is the teacher who set the pace, even if she focused mainly on the fact that children did as much as possible *by themselves*, even by helping each other out.

The teacher also pays attention to details – "to the shape of the parts of the body the child washes", "teaches them to find the places where dust gathers" and shows that every activity calls for specific acts and specific tools in order to be performed, thereby helping the child to discover the environment, the objects in it, the way of using them, their purpose: that is, she proceeds in a clear, orderly, precise and, we can say, scientific manner. The work

demanded by "practical life" activities is all the more educational the more it is performed with that correctness and accuracy that the children seek.

In San Lorenzo the young children had lunch at home while in the "Children's Houses" they had some crockery at their disposal in order to learn how to lay the table and how to behave at table as well as the names of the various objects. As regards the use of cutlery, in 1909 Montessori recommended a spoon for the younger children and also a fork for the older ones, "but never a knife".

A child is sorting forks and spoons: 1910-1911 in the Children's House in the premises of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary of Via Giusti. I thank Dr Giovanna Alatri, collaborator of the Mauro Laeng Historical Museum of Didactis at University Roma Tre and promoter of educational and documentary exhibitions on the history of the primary school in Italy.

Knives were evidently considered to be dangerous in the hands of children, who were considered incapable of handling them properly. Montessori was of a different opinion in 1913, in the second Italian edition of *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica*, where she wrote that the cutlery for the older children "will be extended to a fork, and also a knife". And then in 1914, in *Dr. Montessori's own handbook*, she reaffirmed that "knives are still part of the tableware". Using a knife was thus no longer forbidden[v].

It may be that this happened both because, through the analysis and coordination of movements and repetition of the exercise in a prepared environment, children gradually gain a greater mastery over themselves and over the "House" environment, thereby becoming more self-confident and gaining greater spaces of autonomy and responsability. The practical life slowly takes on, at a proper educational level, that is, individuals capable of thinking, wanting and choosing – compared to the initial hygiene-sanitary level.

As Grazzini wrote, from three to six years of age "what the child wants to do is to master his environment […] his hands, guided by intelligence, begin to do jobs of a definitely human type". Through "work for his own development", the child "becomes adapted to his immediate surroundings (a visible and tangible reality)".

The child therefore performs a work of creation of self "as a complete and distinctly human being". With the plane of adolescence, "we come to another plane of creation […] in which the individual becomes a member of society in his or her own right. Phyicaly speaking, the transition from the juvenile to adult state is given by puberty; psychologically speaking, there is a transition from the child who has to live in a family to adult who has to live in society"[vi]. He has need to make experience of social life, according Montessori, through various experiences of productive work.

If 3-6 year old child can keep his "House" clean and tidy, serve at table and wash the dishes, then why an adolescent shouldn't be capable of running a "House-school" in the country where he lives, which, as Montessori states in 1939, can have the structure of a private hotel as far as the management is concerned. It is a place that, as Montessori stressed during a public lecture given at London in May 1939: "has something friendly and religious about it because it is something that offers hospitality in which all the most generous sentiments of the soul can find expression. At the same time, there are very precise roles to adopt – roles that constitute the instruments through which to develop"; roles that are in relation to the maintenance of the building, to the management of the spaces and social moments that takes into consideration the schedules and respects the life of others such as the organization of the kitchen and of the lunch.

In this case, for instance, with regard to the purchase of the food which is not produced in the farm, it is a matter of finding the suppliers, paying attention to the value for money – it is therefore necessary to keep accounts – giving preference to the products that are linked to the tradition of the place, to the seasons, less expensive and above all fresh, without applying too much to preserved products.

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It's a question of taking care of the food, of getting acquainted with its nourishing value, also considering the possibility of different menus with a view to obtain a good quality of meals. Lunch is also an opportunity where personal tastes, cultural differences, various personal experiences and interests can emerge but also a possibility to learn knowing one another.

The running of the house-school in country (country home) needs organizing services such as laundry, managing water and electricity in order to limit waste, collecting and disposing of waste paying particular attention to the environmental impact that one own behaviour may cause.

Thus one acquires relational, managing and economic competences connected with the fulfilment of needs in a socially organized life system in which values, life styles and ways of being are also brought in. For the adolescent, practical life activities are a "concrete space-time" and time delimitated by the reciprocity of roles and functions, in which he has the possibility to build a positive representation of himself, of his relationship with others and of the world[vii].

In the first Children's House in San Lorenzo there was also a caring for the outside environment. There was, in fact, a courtyard with a garden where the children could run in the open air, and also a piece of land with some trees, a path and clods of earth divided into as many portions as there were children

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The garden of one of the first Children's Houses (photo from Il Quaderno Montessori, 2007).

"*Possessors of the earth*": this is what in the 1909 Montessori called the children aged four and over, who worked in the garden. They "sow or dig or water or contemplate the surface of the soil, observing the germination of the plants". She also suggests that the "possessors of the earth" could grow plants and harvest their fruits to be used for food, and also raise animals – in this case also obtaining resources for food; for example, "the older children could directly milk the goats, after scrupulously washing their hands"[viii].

Montessori thus suggests a complete cycle of activities from cultivation to nutrition, from the soil to the table, through which the children explore the environment, exercise the senses, coordinate movements and organize the mind, involved in processes of observation, comparison, reasoning, knowledge and socialization, without overlooking emotional development.

In San Lorenzo there were no animals to take care of, but they would be seen for the first time in Milan in 1908, in the Children's House opened by the Società Umanitaria, where the children looked after hens and pigeons, which were also the object of their observations.

The definition "*Possessors of the earth*" cannot but recall the definition of "*land's children*" that Montessori used for adolescents. Montessori did not want to turn adolescents into farmers, but rather to prepare them for the study of civilization starting from its origins. Likewise, the young "possessors of the earth" in the Children's House of San Lorenzo were not farmers but explorers of the

surrounding "visible and tangible" environment. Both the "land's children" and "possessors of the earth" were involved in activities envisaging a combination of mind and muscles, intellect and the hands; activities enabling the individual to connect to his environment and to concretely experience the interdependence of current life.

For the adolescents the cultivation of the earth, together with the management of the activities connected to the farm life, opens the field to scientific and historical studies; harvesting and selling activities then lead to understanding the fundamental social mechanism of production and trade underlying the economic basis of society.

Farm work enables children to follow the entire production cycle, to have a sense of responsibility in organizing a biological garden, in running a bed and breakfast structure and in raising animals. The farm with its activities becomes the prepared environment for the adolescent.

Through the productive work in contexts that have a social organization such as house-school, farm, "hotels" (today bed and breakfast) where to give hospitality to visiting relatives, the adolescents – who are born to a social life in which they are not prepared to take part, carry out – as Montessori observes – an apprenticeship/training of adult life and independence. The productive, social, collective and organized work offers them the chance to experience and understand the economic, commercial, social, cultural and ethical dynamics of community life of our times. Productive work is real work with a purpose: it has its own degree of commitment, planning, responsibility, worry, dedication, expectations, seriousness, collaboration and effort.

In San Lorenzo, besides manual conservation tasks linked to caring for oneself and for the environment inside and outside the Children's House, Montessori introduced productive manual work as an activity for the education of movements, such as by producing objects in order to decorate and enrich the environment: in other words, a specific work having a socially useful purpose.

In Children's houses, children would make simple red clay vases filled with white clay eggs, and then gradually make vases of more complex shapes, such as amphorae and tripods, the production of which trained to the sense of beauty, to art and to the care of objects[ix].

In the adolescent's productive work we can find an echo of the artistic productive work carried out in the "Children's house" in 1909. In 1939 Montessori writes about the "artistic simplicity" according to which the "hotels" are furnished by the adolescents offering them "an opportunity for developing good taste and efficiency in domestic matters"[x] and the respect for goods of common use.

The 5-6 year-olds also used a potter's wheel to make bricks in order to build little houses with their own hands, using lime and a trowel: these would become shelters for animals. The production of artistic and everyday life objects put children in contact with the history and needs of humanity: the house as shelter, the vases to contain the food, the decorative objects to make the environment agreeable.

Artistic objects such as vases and pottery articles can be created by adolescents and sold together with the produce of land in the shop, another context of social productive work proposed, as we know, by Montessori in 1939 in *The Erdkinder*. The shop as well is run by the

adolescents who operationally learn economic concepts; the shop is also a meeting place for exchanging opinions and experiences, and is a center of sociality.

As Montessori stressed, it is not a matter of creating commercial institutions, but educational paths to help children build their cognitive, social and emotional instruments to then become their own guides in the contemporary society adepting themselves to the new situations. The adult is responsible for the development processes of the adolescent and is asked to prepare the learning contexts that favor and support social experiences in which adolescents can check the capacity of analyzing the situations as well as their planning, organizational, forecasting, re-organizational and management skills. All this by understanding other people's needs alongside their own, and thus acquiring mediation skills as independent individuals who are members of a community that lives through the contribution of everyone concerned.

In 1909 in *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica* the topic of "practical life" is fragmented in several chapters and the space devoted to it is certainly more limited; the subject is less structured compared to the space devoted to sensorial education and to the cultural sphere. Suffice to say that, of the 22 photographs included in the first edition of *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica*, not one of them concerns "practical life", which only begins to be documented with photographs taken in the Children's House of Via Giusti – the place where the internships of Montessori courses were conducted in 1910 and 1911

I thank Dr Giovanna Alatri, collaborator of the Mauro Laeng Historical Museum of Didactis at University Roma Tre and promoter of educational anddocumentary exhibitions on the history of the primary school in Italy.

We have to wait until the 1926 edition of *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica*, the third Italian edition, to have a more structured and accurate treatment of the topic, which is dealt with in the chapter entitled *Nature in Education*, concerning the sensitive periods, the analysis, economy and precision of movements, the "voice of things", the sentiment of nature and social sentiment. At this point, 14 out of the 62 photographs of this edition are dedicated to "practical life"

Happy kinship with nature (a rural Montessori school in England)

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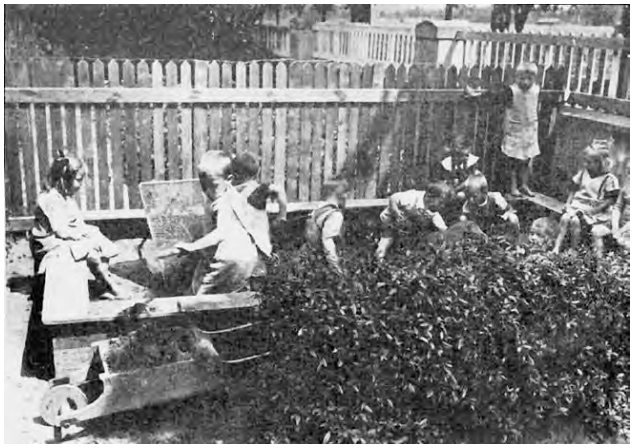
Agricultural works: preparation of land without stones and transport of earth with wheelbarrows (Berlin)

In 1926 Montessori clearly saw the importance of "practical life": as experienced life, it is the answer to the children's instinct to actively adapt to their surroundings. The use of tailored everyday life tools enables children to "absorb the environment" and to reprocess it according to their own level of experience; enabling them to 'measure' their own ability, to take possession of themselves and to correct themselves.

Practical life, like real life, meets the children's vital drive towards independence, towards doing everything they are able to do by themselves, according to the ability of their age and this experience of doing things for oneself leads to self-esteem, to an awareness of being able to act in situations in different ways according to the context.

Hence, through "everyday life activities", children do not just adapt to the environment, but also to themselves: they learn to know themselves. And they also learn to know others – the way to interact with others. Practical life is also the building of social relations with respect to the common good, in that doing also means doing with others, for the others, and is thus the communication and sharing of the ends and means.

In 1939 Montessori observed that productive work, as a social education experience for adolescents, can be considered "as a development of that principle [Help me to do things for myself] that has already had such great success in our schools for smaller children right down to the 'nursery class' and known as the 'Exercises in Practical Life"[xi].

Montessori stressed the educational value of manual work linked to "practical life activities" also for adolescents: adaptability to the environment intended as the ability to orient oneself in it as well as independence, self-knowledge, self-discipline, self-esteem, respect for things in common, the sharing of rules, the building of social relations, the understanding the contemporary time. All aspects that are experienced at the level of self-construction as a social individual.

The independence that the adolescent progressively masters from the adult is now of an economic nature and it has an educational and psychological valence rather than a utilitarian one: it gives the adolescent a sense of his own worth as well as that of others and of things in general; it gives him a sense of being able to succeed in life and makes him an active participant of current life. The adolescent's productive work creates experience, culture, independence and sociality[xii].

In all the facets examined here, in the adolescent (as in the child) practical activities facilitate the sense of belonging to a community, the sense of usefulness, the adoption of roles to identify with and be identified with, the resulting responsibilities, the ability to take decisions, to steer one's own actions, in the specificity of the different planes of development.

"Practical life" in fact allows very different activities; it is a "place" for making projects and cooperation. Moreover, practical life activities enable the learning of school subjects to be active because they are linked to real life situations connected to needs and problems arising from everyday life: knowledge becomes operational and concrete, and work becomes the essential and deep expression of the human being in his or her entirety.

Practical life activities, therefore, are not only an educational continuum with the Children's house but rather a physical and psychical space in which the process of valorization of the adolescent's personality takes place, this is intended as discovery of talents and aspirations, insecurities and frailties, personal and social dynamics. All this in a prepared environment such as the one of the farm, that enables the adolescent, through various experiences of productive work, to conquer progressively awareness of himself, independence and responsability.

Translation by F. Amodeo and M. B. Fusè

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[i] E. Talamo, *La Casa Moderna nell'Opera dell'Istituto*

[ii] Montessori M., *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all'Educazione Infantile nelle Case dei Bambini. Critical Edition,* edited by P. Trabalzini, with the coordination and advice of Giacomo Cives, the cooperation of Carlotta Padroni and Vittoria Scanavino, preface by Mauro Laeng, and essays by G. Cives, A. Scocchera and P. Trabalzini, Rome, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, 2000, p.241.

[iii] *Ibidem*, p.243.

[iv] *Ibidem*, p.263.

[v] See also Prisca Melucco in www.montessoriinpratica.it.

[vi] C. Grazzini, "The Four Planes of Develepment", in *Namta Journal*, Vol.29, No.1. Winter 2004, pp.33-34 and 36.

[vii] See S. Vitale, "A Proposito della Vita Quotidiana" [Concerning Everyday Life], in *Vita dell'infanzia*, Year LV, n.11/12, November/December 2007, p.71.

[viii] Montessori M., *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all'Educazione Infantile nelle Case dei Bambini. Critical Edition*, cit., pp.263 and 315.

[ix] The activities were the ones proposed by painter and ceramist Francesco Randone, recalled in the first (1909) and second (1913) italian edition of *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica*, in his "School of Educating Art" (*Scuola di Arte Educatrice*), founded in Rome in 1890 with the aim of educating working class youth to have respect for objects, buildings and monuments through art education. The definition of "productive work" for these activities appears in the *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook* (1914).

[x] M. Montessori, "The Erdkinder. A Scheme for a Reform of Secondary Education", in M. Montessori, "The reform of education during and after adolescence" introduction by M. M. Montessori, *Bullettin of the AMI*, Year 2, No.1, 1939, p.14.

[xi] *Ibidem,* p.11.

[xii] See A. Scocchera, "Il Programma di Laren" [The Program of Laren], in *Vita dell'Infanzia*, Year LVI, No.1/2, January/February 2007, pp.44-47.

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How to help children think? Stimulating the formation of strategic cognitive processes according to the Montessori method

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"Supposing I said there was a planet without schools or teachers, study was unknown, and yet the inhabitants—doing nothing but living and walking about—came to know all things, to carry in their minds the whole of learning: would you not think I was romancing? Well, just this, which seems so fanciful as to be nothing but the invention of a fertile imagination, is a reality. It is the child's way of learning. This is the path he follows. He learns everything without knowing he is learning it, and in doing so passes little from the unconscious to the conscious, trading always in the paths of love" (Montessori, 1988, The Absorbent Mind, p.24).

The external environment and the formation of cognitive processes

The formation of a human being in its each and every aspect always takes place among other people. A child's mind and its achievements are indisputably dependent on the transmission of cultural and civilizational legacy, which is passed on either through hexemplary action or by means of oral transmission. For a child's cognitive development to take place, it is necessary that a child interacts with others. According to Jean Piaget, the formative role of social contacts in a child's cognitive development consists in the fact that they bring about conflict, which in turn disturbs the cognitive homeostasis in a child's mind (Piaget 1966). The

resulting creative anxiety stimulates a child to seek answers and solve a problem, which has just occurred. Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist representing the cognitive-cultural approach to human development, argues that higher mental faculties, such as speech or thinking, may develop only in the social context, and evolve as interpersonal phenomena to become intrapersonal ones (Vygotsky 1971). Thus, the process of internalisation is possible only due to experiences gathered among and thanks to other people. Yet another researcher of human development, Anne Perret-Clermont, suggests that it is only through cooperation and interaction with others that one can acquire new methods of coordinating and managing one's cognitive activity (Perret-Clermont 1979). It goes without saying that children's closest environment, namely their parents and teachers, is the most important factor in children's development. The role of the adults in stimulating children's cognitive development has been given due credit in the concept of scaffolding, whose author,Jerome Bruner, emphasises the importance of the guidelines and support which serve as a ladder held by an experienced adult, and help children achieve higher levels of a given competence (Bruner 1978).

The formation of strategic competences: attention and memory

The concept of cognitive development includes both improving on and diversifying forms of thinking, and the formation of functions that are necessary for the process of thinking to take place. Attention and memory are strategic competences whose levels are conditioning factors for the pace, fluency and effectiveness of other cognitive faculties.

Attention

Attention is characterised by voluntary development, and only to a little extent is conditioned by the external environment. The process of development is thus described from the temperamental perspective or the one related to puberty (Dobrołowicz 1985, Ruff, Rothbart 1996, quoted after Jagodzińska 2003). However, a detailed examination of the influence that the social environment exerts in this respect allows for several interesting comments to be made. The processes of focussing children's attention, paying attention, and joining attention may be stimulated and exercised by parents playing with children (Bornstein, Tamis-LaMonda 1989). The positive impact on attention development may also be achieved through bedtime reading, explaining experiences that children have, encouraging children to speak, and purposeful enriching children's experiences by their relatives or teachers (Bornstein, Tamis-LaMonda 1989; Bradley, Caldwell 1984; quoted after: Damon 1998). Vygotsky (1971) mentions two auxiliary ways to stimulate attention development, namely pointing gestures and speech. These two forms of communication occur spontaneously and repeatedly when children and adults spend time together. Parents' and teachers' behaviour, such as scaffolding or purposeful teaching activities, may thus facilitate the formation of the ability to maintain attention.

One branch of the research on attention seeks to find factors conducive to its development. The other branch of it aims to examine the predictive value of attention among children of nursery school age, measured in laboratory conditions and with regard to their performance and achievements at school (NICHED 2003). The research on working memory also belongs to the field of clinical research since working memory constitutes one of the components of an integrated executive function which plays a primary role in the planning and performing of purposeful activities (Hughes 1998, Białecka-Pikul, Kantaruk 2004).

The essential precondition for the appropriate functioning of attention is the individual's intentional control of selection processes and his or her ability to actively ignore excessive stimuli. Children acquire these abilities as they grow due to the progressive development of emotional-volitional processes as well as favourable external conditions.

Short-term memory

Short-term memory develops in the following manner: children first memorise motor and manipulative activities, then pictorial materials, and finally develop verbal and logical memory. Memory-based learning methods include imprinting, latent learning and learning from observation (Vetulani 1998). At the beginning of human life, memorising is involuntary in nature, and as such free from any intent, purpose, or plan. Until early school age the results achieved by stimulating children's implicit memory prove to be better than those related to explicit instruction (Jagodzińska 1993).

The hypothesis of ten strategic deficiencies (Flavell 1970) suggests that the low scores obtained by children in memory tests are brought about by their inability to intentionally remember the assigned material. Initially, the research on memory in middle childhood led to the conclusion that children have no conscious control of their own memory functioning, and that they memorise only through acoustic encoding. However, more recent reports have pointed out that two-year-old children employ common conceptual categories when memorising things. Very early on they also prove capable of semantic encoding of the provided stimuli (Jagodzinska 1993).

The characteristic form of memory that develops at preschool age is pre-strategic memory. Observable, too, are children's activities that fulfil mnemonic functions, such as repetition, naming, grouping, and categorising. The forms that stimulate memory at a pre-strategic stage of its development are repeated monologues and dialogues as well as all sorts of games and rituals connected with the rhythm of the day. According to the above assumptions, the achievements of small children should be interpreted as a result of processing information through extrapolating, playful and social behaviours.

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Montessori nursery school and its specificity

Montessori nursery school employs a number of ideas and guidelines, which purposefully emphasise the importance of stimulating children's cognitive areas. A significant number of exercises and methods that use developmental materials enhance the development of the strategic abilities mentioned above. Below are presented the most frequent rules, which have positive impact on the development of attention and memory.

1. The intentional introduction of games and exercises, which require that children deliberately focus their attention. The availability and attractiveness of the materials encourage to take part in the exercise.

2. Numerous individual activities:
Seeking the way to obtain optimum concentration.
The possibility to work in one's own rhythm and pace enhances motivation and learning results.

3. Purposeful selection of multisensory (simultaneous influx of various types of information suitable for various sensory modalities), intersensory (various types of information) and intrasensory stimuli (e.g. the instructions from the teacher and the whispers of the classmates are heard simultaneously) allows children to regulate their attention processes on their own.

4. Self-regulation of actions and activities: focussing attention on entire series, strings, or sequences. The often observed polarisation of attention allows for long-term and successful memorising of the sequence in which a given activity should be performed.

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5. The presentation given by a teacher or a classmate, stimulates the purposeful targeting and maintaining of attention on the performed activity.

Own study

Hypothesis

The author decided to examine an increase in concentration and memory among preschool children. The research was based on the observations of the activities among children aged between 3 and 6 years in three nursery schools; and on the analysis of the educational purposes of these institutions.

The study hypothesis was as follows:

- An increase in strategic cognitive competence is the highest in children from Montessori nursery school

Subjects were three groups of preschool children (N = 45). The research was conducted in three nursery schools in Krakow: Private Integrated Montessori Nursery School, Private Waldorf Nursery School, and Municipal Nursery School No. 38. The share of subjects was as follows:
Montessori Group
N = 15, mean age 3.80
Waldorf Group
N = 15, mean age 3.64
Standard Group
N = 15, mean age 3.60

Variables and research tools
The study employed the following variables:

Independent variable: the two-year educational impact of the nursery school on the children who, as the study began, also began their education. The institutions involved employed Montessori pedagogic system, Waldorf (Steiner) pedagogy, and standard approach to pedagogy.

Dependent variable: an increase in children's developmental competences, such as concentration or short-term memory.

Intermediate controlled variable: children's age, their health and family situation, their previous experiences and activities.

The following tools have been used in the study:

Concentration: the odd-one-out test, also known as the asterisk test. The indicator is the sum of points obtained by children,who are looking for a specific character in a set of other characters. Each recognized and selected "star" is one point. The test takes 3 minutes, and is held in three stages. At the end of each minute, children change the colour of a coloured pencil and continue to work for another minute.

Short-Term Memory: test assessing the ability to memorise vocabulary. The indicator is the total number of points scored according to the number of memorized words, whichare either one-, two-, three-syllabled, or mixed. The words were presented in groups of 4 by the author of the study, and then repeated by children.

Study procedure

The measurement of children's competence was conducted three times and included:

- the constative stage (beginning of pre-school education, autumn)
- the first control stage (after the first year, spring)
- the second control stage(after two years, spring).

Study results

The comparative study, which has been performed according to children's age, their health and family situation and past experiences and activities, does not reveal the existence of significant differences between children from the groups schooled in three different pedagogical systems.

The obtained quantitative results have been arranged using the statistical package STATISTICA 6.0 and presented as charts.

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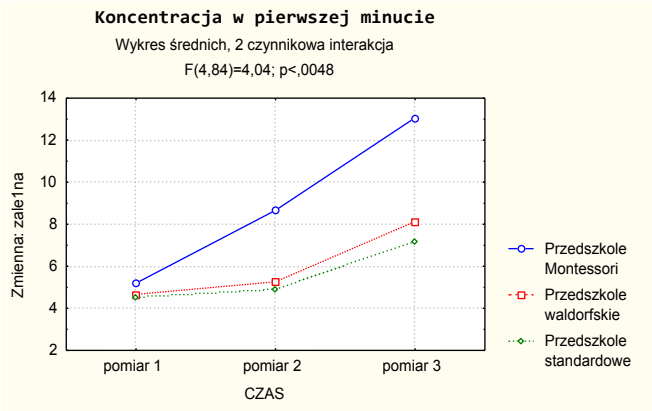


Figure 1. Concentration growth in the w 1st minute of the study

The analysis of variance has revealed a statistically significant difference in concentration growth in the first minute of the test between thecompared nursery schools. The highest level of concentration has been observed in the Montessori nursery school.
(F (4.84) = 4.04, p <0.0048)

Figure 2. Concentration growth in the 2nd minute of the study

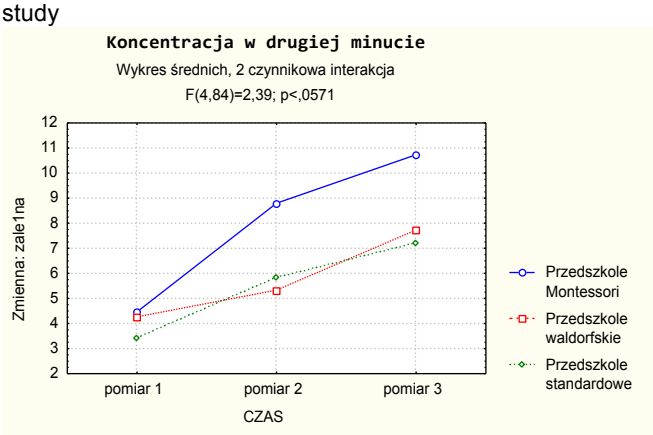
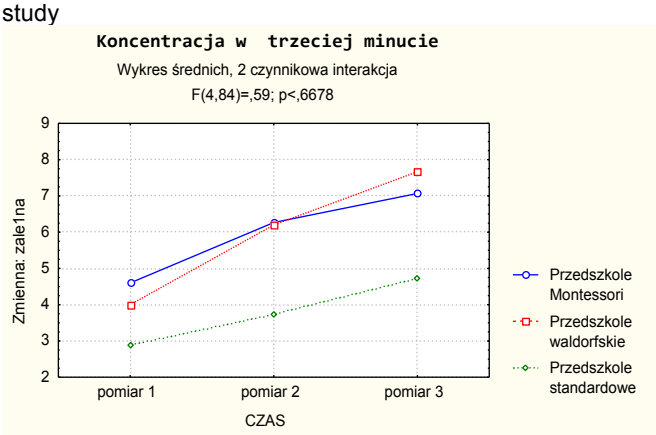
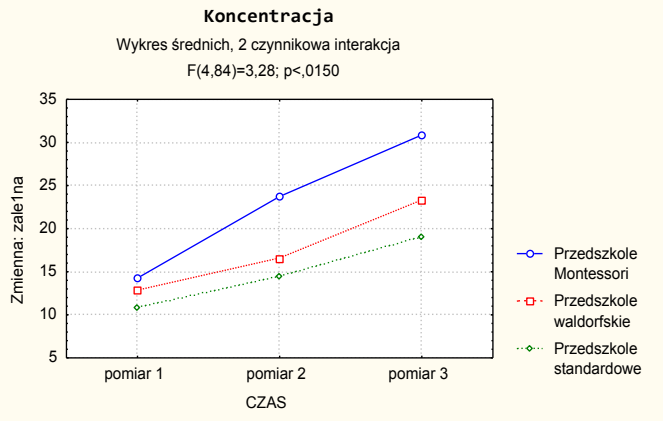


Figure 3. Concentration growth in the 3rd minute of the study



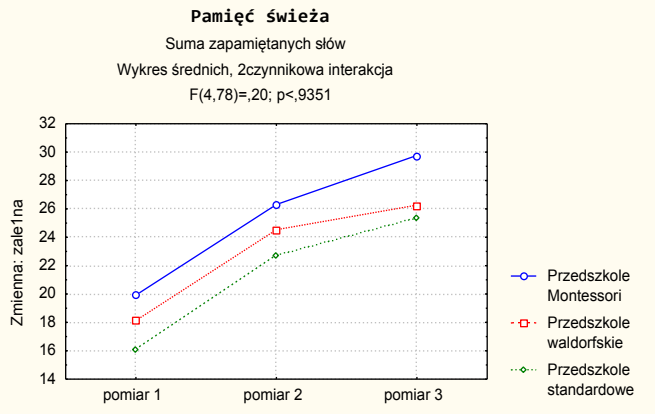
The test examining the difference between the concentration growth
in the second and third minutes of the study **has shown little statistical significance**.

Figure 4. Concentration growth in the entire study



(F (4.84) = 3.28,p< 0.0150).

Figure 5. Short-term memory growth in the entire study



The analysis of variance (ANOVA) has shown no statistically significant difference in short-term memory growth between the three nursery schools involved in the study
F (4.78) = 0.20, p<0,.9351, either in the entire study or with regard to individual word sets. An increase in the competence has been observed between the second and third measurement in all the nursery schools, and the dynamics of this increase proves similar in each and every group.

To summarise the above results, it may be pointed out that they have **partially confirmed** the study hypothesis. As regards the higher growth in one of the strategic variables, concentration, in the group of children

from the Monstessori nursery school F (4.84) = 4.04,p< 0.0048, this hypothesis has been confirmed. However, a similar hypothesis concerning a higher increase in short-term memory in the group of children from the Montessori nursery school F (4.78) = 0.20, p<0.9351**)** has not been confirmed.

Discussion and conclusions

The relevant literature on the subject offers numerous recommendations on how to influence individual developmental areas in the process of schooling and education.Children's attention and memory may be significantly improved provided that children are placed in the attractive social and material environment. Children are more likely to undertake all sorts of activities if they are surrounded by friendly atmosphere and a cheerful, colourful and stimulating environment. The importance of these guidelines are confirmed in the concept of the prepared environment expounded by the Montessori pedagogy: *It is necessary for a child to be provided with both the natural and prepared environment, both at school and in nursery. It is in such environment that children can learn through playful and purposeful activities*(Helming 1994, p.33, translated by the author).

Strategic cognitive abilities may be exercised and improved by memorising necessary sequences of actions performed during the play, and also by the place where educational materials are always put. This requires that children focus their attention and retain the acquired information as it may come in useful in other plays (Kirk 1984). This rule is regularly employed in Montessori nursery schools, whose ordered external environment reflects children's need for orientation, order and precision. "Children need an ordered environment, as it is through the elements of this environment that they develop. This internal sense of order requires support from the stable order of the external objects" (Standing 1995, p. 84, translated by the author).

The ability to intentionally ignore excessive stimuli and choose only those that are essential to individual action is yet another competence that proves vital for appropriate levels of concentration (Hughes 1998). This ability may be exercised spontaneously as the child works individually, focussed on his or her action and surrounded by talking and playing classmates or peers. The ability to focus attention on a selected object or problem and the ability to maintain it despite external disturbances is an extremely important competence in the educational development of each and every child. The polarisation of attention proves necessary for effective learning, and its levels depend on children's individual abilities and varying stages of sensitivity. "Wherever possible and year after year, we should allow a child's nature to develop his individual learning plan. (…) yet another desired solution is to organise learning materials according to a child's current stage of sensitivity. This solution will not reduce the effectiveness of learning, and will certainly improve its intensity(Standing 1995, p. 92, translated by the author).

Children's ability to maintain appropriate levels of attention is acquired as children are given more tasks in a rising order of difficulty. This rule allows for maintaining appropriate levels of motivation in children, whose curiosity is constantly stimulated and who thus remain willing to act and play, and are interested in the tasks provided by their teachers. With their rising levels of difficulty and complexity, such tasks not only pose a challenge to teachers and parents alike, but also provides them with the opportunity to influence children's closest developmental areas (Vygotski 1971). The Montessori approach duly recognises this opportunity: *A child is passing through a period of self-realisation, and it is enough simply to open a door for him. A being that is creating itself, that is passing from non-being to being, form impotency to act, cannot at this stage of its existence be complicated…* (Montessori, 1966, The Discovery of the Child, p. 110)

To summarise the methods important in stimulating strategic cognitive competences, it may be observed that all such methods have been duly employed by Montessori nursery schools. These methods include:

- Using only relevant messages and instructions
- Reducing the number of simultaneous stimuli
- Increasing the intensity of relevant stimuli
- Taking advantage of the novelty effect and original solutions
- Using motor and tactile activities
- Presenting the material through demonstrations and games
- Drawing on children's previous experiences
- Training children's ability to switch attention by means of separate signals to start and finish individual and group activities (Kirk 1984, Jagodzińska 1996,Białecka-Pikul, Kantaruk 2004).

As regards the lack of significant difference in short-memory growth in children from the three studied nursery schools, it should be said that the two remaining nursery schools also employ numerous techniques that stimulate this competence. Preschool pedagogy is an area that has been rapidly developing since the 1990s. The exchange of information between various countries and academic centres and the opportunity to exchange experiences allows for a number of borrowings. As a result, a significant number of alternative systems of pedagogy and original programmes has been widely used in Polish nursery schools, which certainly contributes in the process of stimulating children's development.

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New publications

Book review

Learning to learn, International perspectives from theory and practice.
Edit by Ruth Deakin Crick, Christina Stringer and Kai Ren. Routledge 2014.

In times when the results of Pisa and TIMS are discussed almost everyday, this book is of great importance. In Sweden the political rhetoric, no matter if it is from the left or the right wing, is about the results falling across all three measures of math, reading and science. The discussion about how to reverse the decline is mostly not grounded in educational science. The suggested solutions are; raising the teacher's salary, reducing the number of pupils in each class, reintroducing marks in early school years and to bring into effect credentials in order and behaviour. But does ranking by Pisa and TIMS tell us the whole truth? What about democratic values, gender-equality, critical thinking, the ability to speak foreign languages and the essential competence "learning to learn"?

Christina Stinger is the author of two chapters in the book Learning to learn, International perspectives from theory and practice. In the first chapter she clarifies the issue "learning to learn" and in the latter she is discussing principles for a theoretically oriented practice, refereeing to an evaluation in southern Italian middle schools. I will, for the reader with interest in Montessori education, concentrate on the first chapter, titled What is learning to learn? A learning to learn process and output model.

There is, according to Christina Stinger, a difficulty in defining the concept of learning and furthermore the concept of learning to learn, which is clearly apparent in the plurality of scientific literature discussing the definition. She starts with a quote from OECD (2010:3), noting that our society requires students that can deal with a world, which undergoes rapid changes. Those individuals who are able to follow the changes will become successful and one of the competences needed is the capability to learn to learn. What is interesting is Stinger's ability to refer to the work of Maria Montessori, something that is rather uncommon in scientific literature. Highlighting this essential concept from the Montessori theory through a comparison to the theory of learning to learn is a valuable contribution to the academic world.

Learning to learn is one of the key competences formulated by the European Parliament (2006). Researchers confirm this skill as "an "essential evolutionary task" and that "knowledge of one's knowledge is a prerequisite for clarity of mind". To begin the student has to know how to learn which will be a necessary skill throughout life. However, we have to make sure that "learning to learn" does not become a slogan or empty words, states Christina Stringer

Stringer gives two paradigmatic definitions of "learning to learn" one cognitive and one socio-cultural-historic

approach. The first definition is about the elements needed to become an efficient learner; Motivation, organized base of knowledge, learning skills together with strategies for using them and meta-cognitive skills. The latter is about the developmental process regarding how people's conceptions of learning evolve and become aware.

The concept learning to learn is nothing new. Christina Stinger refers to Smith (1990) who states that the concept appeared after the First World War. The radical changes in society after the Second World War gave emphasis to the need of life long learning but with focus on adult learning. Stinger thus emphasizes, referring to Knowles (1990), that "learning to learn" is an indispensable tool for survival. Based on their models and Stingers own literature search, she distinguishes two main areas of how "learning to learn" functions; learner self-improvement and social functioning. Self-improvement is in brief about how to develop self-confidence, skills for problem solving, collaborative learning, self-reflection, being able to use knowledge from one context to another and to allowing freedom to think. In other words, the focus is on the individual's ability. Social functioning regards the individual in a social context and focuses on the capacity to update knowledge, enhance productivity, enable people to refer to others, being able to cope with uncertainty and changes, being able to take responsibility, foster personal development; to mention some of them. A summary indicates that the "learning to learn" includes both developmental, operable and empowering roles and that the guidance of learning to learn is a challenge and an important concern for teachers regarding children's development.

Stinger's analysis from the literature were extracted from more than 500 components into less than 50 macro-components and systemized according to Maria Montessori's work. The reason why Stinger chooses Montessori as a base was that she finds Montessori's work "unique compared to other educational thinkers" as Montessori's research does not derive from a theory. Montessori was instead presenting the results of her observations from children in activity; it is as Stringer writes, a result from teaching experience.

Stringer states, that according to Montessori, every individual is motivated to learn, driven by a congenital curiosity. With focus on Montessori's educational principles a foundation for "learning to learn" appears into the scene. Stringer finds a large consensus between the Montessori principles and science of today. Among Stringer's gathering from Montessori's writings, she mentions the individual innate desire to learn which triggers the intrinsic learning motivation, and the endeavours to learn. She points at the learning experience with practical material together with the control of error, and the expanded learning environment where the child develops the capacity to perceive differences and learns to reason and develops critical thinking. Other Montessori principles that support "learning to learn" which are of great importance is an education based on meaning-making, self-discovery and self-reflection through self-directed learning. Additionally Stinger stresses Montessori's developmental stages, and the work in the classroom, an important observation. The way these two aspects are intertwined in Montessori education is unique and one of the prerequisites for learning how to learn.

Stinger concludes by emphasizing that learning to learn is not only about learning; it is something more, higher and more dignified. It includes affective, biological, social aspects and the ability to reflect and evaluate decisions as we learn for life.

While reading Stingers article I came to think about a quote from Montessori's book From childhood to Adolescence, which will become an excellent summary.

> It is necessary that the human personality should be prepared for the unforeseen, not only for the conditions that can be anticipated by prudence and foresight. Nor should it be strictly conditioned by one rigid specialization, but should develop at the same time the power of adapting itself quickly and easily (1973:99).

The intention of Christina Stingers article is to bring this subject into focus by conceptualizing the learning to learn for further research. Beyond this aim the article gives us a picture of what is already required by the citizens of our community, which in short implicates flexibility, a capacity to learn to learn and life long learning. Christina Stinger shows that this was something that Montessori was aware of a century ago. It is important and upon time that Montessori's work gets recognized in a broader circle, outside the Montessori community, and therefore this article of great importance.

Eva-Maria Ahlquist

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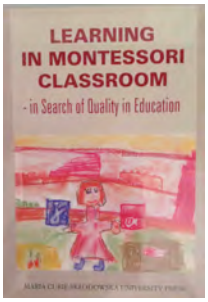
Book presentation

Learning in Montessori Classroom



In August 2014 Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press published the monograph: Learning in Montessori classroom. In search of quality in education, by B. Bednarczuk, D. Zdybel (ed.), which presents 15

theoretical and empirical studies, devoted to core principles of Montessori pedagogy in the light of contemporary educational sciences (part 1) and focused on learning in Montessori classroom as the process of building oneself (part 2). Authors from Europe and the United States decided to share their professional reflection on Montessori education, which facilitate the critical explanations of Maria Montessori pedagogy as well as the *interpretation* of *quality in education.*

"Contemporary school seems to be in urgent need of coming back to origins, to a wellspring of Maria Montessori thoughts and ideas. Such mental journey is necessary not only to prove the universal value of Montessori visions, but also to refresh our own knowledge, to clear it out from folk myths and inconsistencies, to reveal possible misunderstandings and lay concepts. Teachers, school administrators and policy makers need to be constantly reminded that every child is born as a spiritual embryo, the cell which contains a predetermined plan for its development. The only task of a true educator is to assist the child in fulfilling this plan, by creating a proper learning environment which would respond to a child's needs, direct his attention and offer the order for his mental and physical activity. Such well organized environment should serve as developmental scaffolding, enabling the child to construct his own knowledge and achieve the next level in life competencies. To quote Dr Montessori: "As were the vestals to whom it had been given to keep pure and clean from ashes the sacred fire that others had lit, so must be the teacher to whose care has been consigned the flame of [child's] inner life in all its purity. If this flame is neglected it will be extinguished, and no one will be able to light it again" (1971, p. 24).

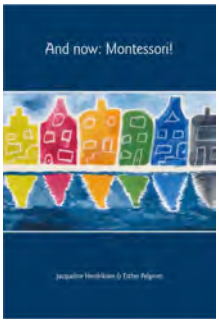
Learning in Montessori Classroom is unique collection of conceptual analyses and empirical reports written by leading specialists in Montessori pedagogy from different countries (…)It was the volume editors` deliberate decision to keep a variety of texts in terms of style, structure and way of dealing with citations. This diversity is a source of richness and inspiration, and also as a reflection of culturally diverse ways of reading Montessori in the world" (*from the prefece).*

Beata Bednarczuk, Maria Curie Sklodowska University in Lublin Dorota Zdybel, Social Academy of Sciences in Łódź
Introduction:

http://www.wydawnictwo.umcs.lublin.pl/index2.php?id=450

Book presentation

And now: Montessori!



And now: Montessori! By Jacqueline Hendriksen and Esther Pelgrom is written for all parents, teachers and students who want to learn about Montessori, who want to understand the vision and who has the greatest respect for the power of development of the child. The book is divided in three parts and covers 180 pages.

The first part contains the theory of Maria Montessori in combination with the most up-to-date scientific insights. It is larded with true classrooms and home situations story's. What is the montessori style? Can I learn this, does it suit me? To find the answer you need to have a firm theoretical background. The first part is divided in 3 chapters: the child, the space and the educator.

In the second part you as a teacher, parent, or educator are in the centre. Adults are necessarry in the life of a child, he needs to have role models. We connect your acting to the phases of development. Every child in every phase asks something different from you. You can see this part as a bonding to the first part. When you know the theory you now will learn how to act in your own group, in your own situation. In this part we connect theory with practice. You observe the child and you learn how to react on what you see. This part is also divided in 3 chapters: the child from 0-6, 6-12 and 12-18 years. Each chapter is larded with observations from the reality.

In the last part specic montessori terms are described and defined. All those words and terms that you hear during your study or your work. Besides the words from Montessori you also find new concepts, those who are recent, actual and belonging to education in the 21th century. You can see this part as a small reference design.

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News

U Nordic and Nesna University College: Montessori Education

During the autumn of 2014 a Master course in Montessori Education started. The program is coordinated by the U Nordic and organized by Nesna University college. U Nordic's aim is to link colleges and universities in the Nordic countries together to enable higher education through collaboration and interaction. The course is accessible to students throughout the Nordic region, regardless of physical location. Course coordinator is Eva-Maria Ahlquist, PhD, at Stockholm University, Department of Education.

The organization of the course gives opportunities to share resources and use each other's skills and knowledge by working together. The presentation of U Nordic gives a pictures of the possibilities: "U Nordic is a Nordic response to global opportunities - where we bring out the best in Nordic education system and allows us to be inspired by new solutions through a global development [...] LIVE seminars held in virtual meeting rooms - using" state of the art "high definition video conferencing. It's like being in the same room!. "(http://www.unordic.com/)

The Montessori course is divided into two modules where the first level enables students to earn a Bachelor's degree the second level enables student to acquire a Master's degree. The course lasts for two years and admits 30 students.

In short, this course will aim for the student to assimilate:

• The ability to critically reflect on Montessori theory, didactic principles and its application.
• The ability to consider the philosophical and didactic Montessori principles in the light of social and educational perspective.
• Understanding child development in the context of Maria Montessori's philosophy, her theory and developmental psychology.

www.unordic.com

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Ongoing research in Sweden

For the last 25 years I have been interested in Montessori pedagogy from different perspectives; as a teacher, principal, educator and now as a researcher. As a teacher I looked upon the pedagogy as something to relate to in my profession rather than a complete method for how teaching should be implemented. Regardless the accuracy in this it´s, however, as I see it more common to describe the pedagogy according to the latter when it´s noticed (see e.g. Lillard, 2005). As I see it, it´s reasonable to assume that such descriptions contribute to the practical application of the pedagogy is seen as almost uniform by people outside the Montessori-community, despite the fact that we know little about how the pedagogy is practiced in different cultural contexts in Sweden since studies on Montessori pedagogy has been neglected. One example of a circumstance that may contribute to such a view is the large amount of attention that has been given to the material which has been described as been surrounded by instructions (see e.g. Cossentino, 2005) which thus give the impression that Montessori teachers discretion is narrow and that the teachers are handling the materiel habitually.

My ambition when I three years ago started to work on my thesis was, according to what has been said above, to take part of how the "method" was practiced in a variation of Montessori environments in Sweden, at the same time as I explored my interest in aspects of importance for teachers opportunities for what can be seen as workplace learning in such contexts. In the ongoing exploratory study I therefore took part of nine Montessori teachers daily work in three different elementary schools with the aim to explore aspects with importance for Montessori teachers possibilities to expand their discretion when teaching, since research in this area emphasize that individuals' competence in a workplace does not develop if they are only requested to perform tasks which lack room for interpretation as well as action (see e.g. Håkansson, 2004; Illeris, 2011; Molander, 1993; Senge, 1993). According to this research, development of competence depends on the possibilities for the individuals to make use of, and if possible, expand this "action space".

The empirical material in the study, which is based on action theoretical starting points and related to theories about experiential learning, is collected with an ethnographic approach through participant observation, "natural" conversations (during breaks etc.) and interviews. I therefor not only fix my eyes upon what teachers do, but also upon how they talk with me and each other about the same. In the analysis of the empirical materiel patterns or themes are identified and interpreted in relation to various aspects of the research topic. It is currently too early to report on any of the results in the study since I still find myself in an analytical stage of the process. Dissertation is planned to autumn 2016.

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Books, new releases in Germany
Report from PhD. Michael Klein-Landeck

Horst Schaub: Kosmische Erziehung in der Montessori-Pädagogik, Band I, Freiburg: Herder-Verlag

Silke Allmann: Beobachtung in der Montessori-Pädagogik. Einführung in Theorie und Praxis, Freiburg: Herder-Verlag

Silvana Montanaro: Das Kind verstehen. Entwicklung und Erziehung von 0-3 Jahre nach Maria Montessori, Freiburg: Herder-Verlag

Monika Klotz: Kinder erleben Musik. Musikerziehung nach Maria Montessori, Freiburg: Herde-Verlag

Maria Montessori: Kalifornische Vorträge, Freiburg: Herder-Verlag

Anja Maderebener: Legasthenietraining nach Montessori, Books on demand

Horst-Klaus Berg: Kinder verändern die Welt - Montessori und Korczak, Münster: LIT-Verlag