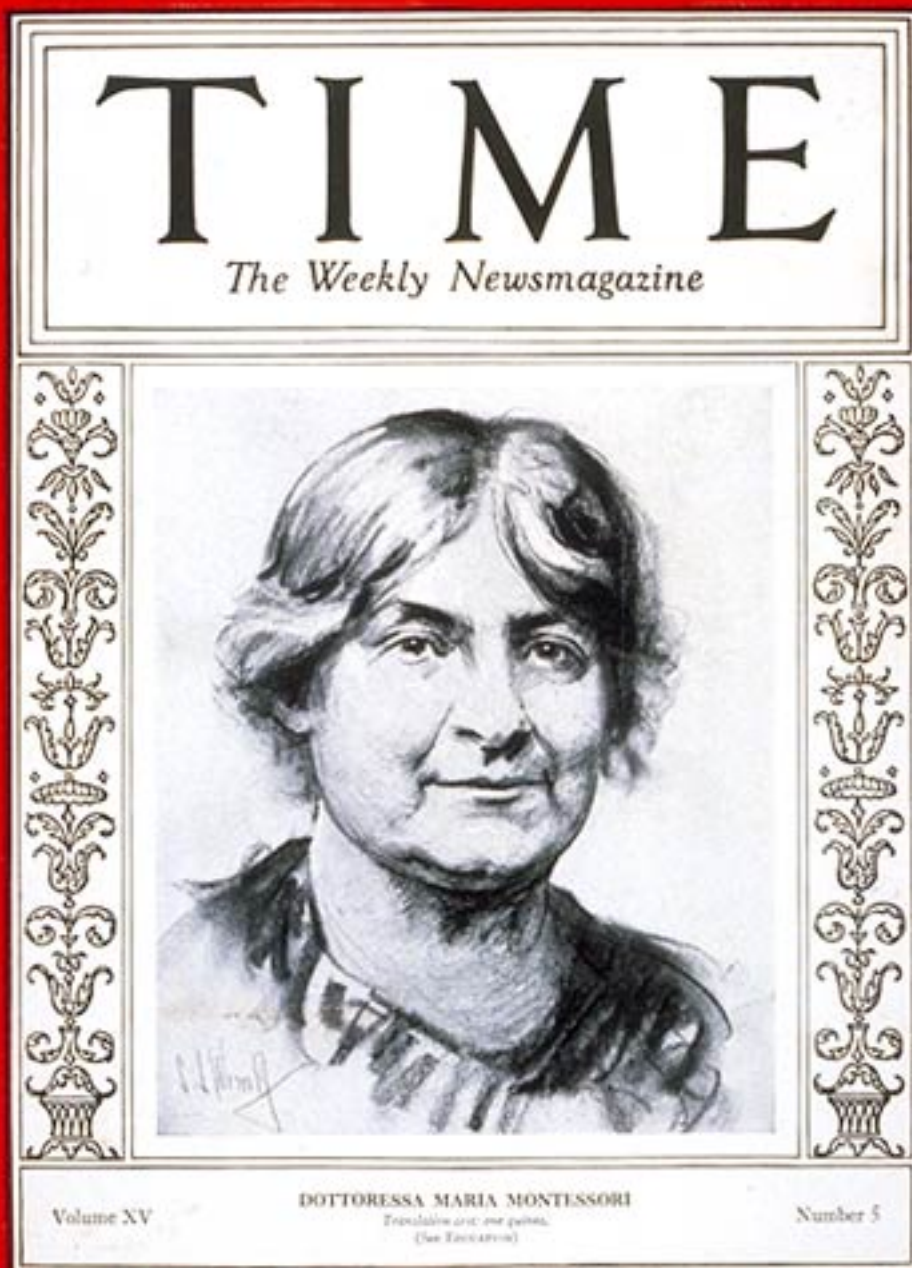


Monday, February 3, 1930 article on Dr. Montessori by Time magazine.



Last week at Rome, in the Via Monte Zebio, a plump little woman in rusty black clothes stood up to receive the approval of Fascist officialdom, the applause of learned contemporaries, the acclaim of 100 disciples from 21 nations. Dottoressa Maria Montessori had come home, after 16 years, to reinaugurate her Theoretical & Practical Training Course on Child Education, under the auspices of the Italian Government. An honorary member of the Fascist party since 1926, she had been recalled by Il Duce himself, elected by the Ministry of Education to conduct her own new experimental school -the Opera Montessori-after 16 years of lecturing abroad.

Some distance from the Opera Montessori is a place, where, in the last decade of the last Century, a young woman medical student was jeered and hooted by male classmates. Women were

not then supposed to have technical careers, or minds of their own, or the liberty of going about the city unchaperoned. Fellow students enjoyed blocking the young woman's path to classrooms and simpering sarcasms in her presence. "A woman of genius might reasonably consider a profession, but surely an ordinary woman shouldn't." "Fool men go in for medicine, why not a fool woman?" But Maria Montessori had the satisfaction of being the first woman to get an M.D. from the University of Rome.

Her degree got her a position on the staff of the city's Psychiatric Clinic, first as an interne, later as assistant physician. Working among cretins and morons, she undertook to sift out and salvage feeble-minded and backward children. Through patient experimentation she discovered that if the child were given something to twist and touch with its hands, its brain might learn to function responsively. At least it was less restive. Four years later (1898), she made known her preliminary findings to colleagues at the Pedagogical Congress in Turin. Her psychiatric studies and feminist activities brought her national recognition. The same year aged 28, she was sent to Germany, as Italy's representative at the International Woman's Congress where she was barred because she professed Socialism. Returning to Rome, she became directrix of the new Scuola Magistrate Ortofrenica (state institution for feeble-minded). Here was formulated the nucleus of what most pedagogs now know as the Montessori Plan. So adept did her backward children become that they outstripped conventionally trained, normal children in public school examinations.

In 1900 she left the State school and set about thoroughly preparing herself for a life of scientific pedagogy. She enrolled at the University of Rome as a student of philosophy and experimental psychology. She read, talked to educational theoreticians, and visited schools where "immobile children were nailed to their seats." From Friedrich Froebel she learned that education should come to the young as a result of self-activity. She found that Johann Pestalozzi held sense perception to be the source of knowledge. In 1907 she was given the opportunity of putting her theoretical research to practical use.

Edoardo Talamo, Roman engineer, had gotten some model tenements built. Families living in them were better housed than most of the city's poor families, but during the day, while the adults were at work, urchins reveled in the courtyards, ran riot in the long halls. Signor Talamo set aside playrooms for the children, urged Dottorressa Montessori to take them in hand. Thus was founded the first Casa del Bambini. Such establishments, subsequently organized in the U. S. and England, came to be known as "Children's Houses."

When the Queen Mother Margherita saw fit to favor the enterprise, influential Italians poured gold and good advice upon the Casa del Bambini. It was here, after 13 years of germination that the Montessori Plan first came to full fruition. The results of Dottorressa's clinical experience with dull children were to be objectively applied to normal ones.

Upon three tenets Dottorressa Montessori rests her scheme of education: 1) "The Doctrine of Freedom," 2) Auto-education, 3) Sense-training.

"The Doctrine of Freedom" is calculated to encourage spontaneity of development in the child. Given the proper environment, the happy child can do no wrong. In no way must the individuality of a Montessori-trained youngster be arrested, nor is the pupil stimulated to any unnatural effort. The system of "rewards & punishment" is un-Montessorian because it encourages the child to do something it would not want to do otherwise. A child who is not mentally or physically sick must become "master of himself" when at liberty. Platonically, he has then become disciplined. Parents are assured that Montessori-trained children are not told, ballad-wise: "If you feel like yelling, yell

like hell!" Anti-social behavior is anticipated by the second precept, an appeal to the individual "mysterious life-force," curiosity.

Auto-Education is the name of the method by which the pupil's attention is awakened. The child is given access to a room full of "didactic material"—scores of ingenious, practical devices which he handles and learns to use. There are pieces of cloth on racks for three-year-olds to button and unbutton, bowknots to be tied and untied, shoe-buttoners to be handled. Infants, when let alone, learn to identify similar buttons and knot on their own clothing, are thus taught to dress themselves.

Older children handle blocks, beads, rods, rope. A sense of factual values begins to dawn. They have grasped some of the significance of length, breadth, and thickness. Color and texture of objects is next identified through running fingertips over sandpaper and velvet, by sorting colored tablets of enameled wood.

Sense training is gained through auto-education. Similar methods are applied to the development of the more delicate senses. A child is given two crude, one-string fiddles, one with frets, one without. By comparing noises made on both, he can soon fit in the missing frets, play the second fiddle. Children who can read are encouraged to act each sentence out in dumb show. The system tries to make a pupil's entire acts coordinate with all his senses. Through ideological gymnastics, an intellect is developed by the exercise of attention, comparison, and judgment.

Scope. To expound her system, Dottoressa Montessori has held 14 international training courses. The fifteenth, which begins this week in Rome, will last until the end of June. Thrice a week she will lecture to elementary teachers, students of pedagogy, parents who have "problem children." Under her direction there will be held some 70 practical demonstrations of her "didactic" contraptions.

Italian disciples "and members of religious orders" will pay 1,000 lira (\$52) for the five-month course; foreigners will be charged £30 (\$146). Although the Dottoressa has understood English since 1917, she speaks it seldom and circumspectly. The lectures will be delivered in Italian. For those who will not be able to understand her, translation will cost one guinea (\$5.11) per month.

History. Three principal Roman schools where the Montessori plan is in effect are the Via Trionfale school, the Via Fuà Fusinata school Casa del Bambini, the convent school in the Via Giusti. In none of these institutions has Dottoressa Montessori actively participated since 1914 because of bureaucratic opposition to her method. Although she dislikes travel save by automobile or airplane, she went abroad the previous year. In England she fared well, establishing institutions, receiving an honorary D.Litt. from Durham University. In the state of Victoria, Australia, mental defectives are corrected by her system. South Australia subsidizes Montessori kindergartens.

The Montessori Plan early took root in the U. S. The debut was handled by Anne E. George, onetime teacher in the Chicago Latin School, a graduate of the 1910-11 training course. Through her efforts, Frank Arthur Vanderlip started a Montessori school for his own and neighbors' children in his Scarborough, N. Y., home. Miss George went to Washington to further the Montessori cause. There

she met Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell with whom she founded the Montessori Educational Association. Mrs. Bell was the Association's President. A school was begun on Kalorama Road, near the present home of Attorney General Mitchell.

Triumphantly the Dottoressa entered the U. S. in 1913. She was the guest of the Bells, met President Wilson's daughter Margaret, made her way as far West as Chicago.

In 1915 she returned to inspect the application of her methods to New York tenement children in the John Jay Dwelling. This time she crossed the continent, gave two International training courses at the Panama-Pacific exposition in San Francisco. Once more, in 1916, she crossed the Atlantic. Her lecture course that year was sponsored by the Child Education Foundation of New York.

After her mother's death (1912), she foreswore her youthful agnosticism, returned to the Catholic fold. The course this year has been expanded to include "The Principles of Religious Education."

Products. Among famed U. S. children who have been educated under the Montessori methods are the grandchildren of Alexander Graham Bell: Lilian Waters, Alexander Graham Bell, and Elsie Alexandra Carolyn, children of Editor Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor; Alexander Graham Bell, Barbara, and Nancy Bell, children of Botanist David Grandison Fairchild. In the Hollywood school, chubby Douglas Fairbanks Jr. learned to button shoes, fit blocks, scrape the second fiddle. The Dottoressa never married but her adopted son Mario is a finished product of the system. He is now 31 years old, married to Helen Christie of Cleveland, who teaches at the Opera Montessori.

Criticism. Most U. S. educators, jealous of the fame of John Dewey, are quick to point out that Dewey, in 1902, was working with auto-education in his University of Chicago-school. The interpretation of his philosophy in the education of young children also emphasized the importance of correlating the infant's use of its hands to its brain.

The system, derived from Dewey philosophy, now used at Columbia University Teachers College, differs from the Montessori plan in that it stresses the child's supervised intellectual growth rather than its undirected development. At Columbia the pupil is taken to see a hangar full of airplanes, which he is encouraged to copy in clay, wax or crayon in the classroom. Under the Dewey method, the child has opportunity for creative expression which the less plastic Montessori equipment does not allow.