

To cite this article: Lorena Rodríguez González, Juan Núñez Valdés and Belén Carrasco Moya (2026). MARÍA MONTESSORI, AN INNOVATIVE WOMAN OF TEACHING IN HER TIME, International Journal of Education and Social Science Research (IJESSR) 9 (3): 12-27 Article No. 1228, Sub Id 1894

MARÍA MONTESSORI, AN INNOVATIVE WOMAN OF TEACHING IN HER TIME

Lorena Rodríguez González, Juan Núñez Valdés and Belén Carrasco Moya

Dpt. Geometry and Topology. University of Seville
C/ Tarfia s/n. 41012-Sevilla (Spain)

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2026.9302>

ABSTRACT

The educational method of María Montessori, known to everyone as “la dottoressa”, represented a true revolution in pedagogy in schools, first in her country and later in practically the entire world. Although today the ideas she proposed may be considered obvious and simple, her proposal represented a revolutionary change in her time, which generated strong rejection among the most conservative educational environments. Her legacy, which endures over time, continues to inspire educators around the world who continue to pursue inclusive education focused on integral development. Graduated in Medicine in 1896, but a lover of all sciences and, above all, of pedagogy, this woman soon dedicated herself to spreading her ideas about how the education and training of three-year-old children should be carried out, later moving on to throughout her life to those intended for any age in general. The main objective of this article is to highlight her life and work, which has given rise to an immense number of educational centers that bear her name in all countries. A brief description of the main characteristics of her teaching method is also shown.

KEYWORDS: Gender Difficulties; María Montessori; Pedagogy; Pioneering Women; Teaching Methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Maria Montessori, a prominent educator and pedagogue woman, challenged the educational norms established in Italy in the 20th century, by placing the child as the central protagonist of the learning process. Her revolutionary approach completely transformed early childhood education, creating new materials that promote self-learning and adapting the school to the child himself instead of imposing an already established model on him. The main objective that María Montessori pursued was to be able to educate children so that they were autonomous and independent.

In Italian society at the time, new pedagogical approaches were sought due to the high rate of child delinquency. There, María Montessori found a favorable terrain to develop her new educational techniques. Subsequently, her methods expanded rapidly due to her training and her contacts with various ideological circles, from socialists to liberals, Catholics, modernists and theosophists.

Her ideas constituted a revolutionary change at the time that generated great controversy, especially among conservatives. Her legacy endures over time as she continues to inspire educators who continue to pursue inclusive education focused on comprehensive development (Castellarnau and Castro 2019). The main objective of this article is to make her figure known and show her as a reference to society. It is also intended to show the foundations and main characteristics of her educational method.

The article is structured as follows: this introduction is followed by three sections. The first shows the biography of María Montessori which details both her personal life and the difficulties she had to overcome to make her method known and get it finally accepted. The second describes the essential ideas and main characteristics of her educational method. A brief final section of conclusions closes this contribution.

2. MARÍA MONTESSORI

María Tecla Artemisia Montessori, better known as María Montessori, was born on August 31, 1870, into a bourgeois Catholic family in Chiaravalle, a province in the Italian region of Ancona. She was daughter of Renilde Stoppani and Alessandro Montessori.

Her father, a military man by profession and an official in the Ministry of Economy, had a very strict character and thought that the most that a woman could aspire to at that time was to become a teacher, since the role that was reserved for women by society was only to take care of their families and their homes. Her mother, coming from a family of small landowners, followed the role assigned to women, although she had a good education and was very fond of reading. However, and despite this conditioning on women, both he and his wife believed that their children should receive a quality education [1].

With that conviction, when María Montessori was 12 years old, her family decided to move to Rome with the goal that she could have an exceptional education. At first, her parents had thought that she would study teaching, the only professional option for women at the time, but she considered other options.

Between the ages of 12 and 13, a great interest in engineering aroused in her. In 1883, the year in which women's access to secondary education was regulated and allowed in Italy, Maria Montessori enrolled in the Regia Scuola Técnica Michelangelo. However, those studies must not have satisfied her much, because years later she abandoned them and decided to study medicine, despite the refusal of her father, who did not see favourably that this career was suitable for a woman. However, the academic authorities denied her access to these studies alleging that the reason was not because she was a woman, but rather because she did not have knowledge of Latin and Greek, unavoidable requirements to be able to enter that faculty. Determined to study Medicine, María Montessori enrolled in the Faculty of Natural Sciences as an alternative, since she knew that graduates in that career were eligible to enrol in the third year of medicine. This is how in 1892, she finally managed to be admitted to the Faculty of Medicine of the “La Sapienza” University of Rome, where a great interest in the

specialty of psychiatry was born. However, very strict rules were imposed on her: always go to school accompanied by an adult (normally it was her father or mother who accompanied her), not hang around the hallways under any circumstances and, above all, do anatomy practices alone, at night, in order not to scandalize anyone (Castellarnau and Castro 2019).

In 1896, at the age of 26, María Montessori graduated in medicine, with honor (Angulo 2000), thus becoming one of the first women to obtain a degree in Medicine in Italy, although not the first, as she herself affirmed (Asins 2020).

Prior to this degree, in 1894, María Montessori had carried out work on general pathology that allowed her to win the prestigious prize awarded by the Fondazione Ettore Rolli, which each year collected the merits of a medical student. That prize was worth 1,000 lire, a very considerable amount for the time, equivalent to the annual salary of a teacher, which gave her, apart from great academic prestige, a strong financial boost that allowed her not to depend on from her father's money to finance her studies (Castellarnau and Castro 2019).

In 1895, she worked two jobs: one as a medical assistant at the women's hospital of San Salvatore and another at the Santo Spirito men's hospital in Sassia, the oldest in the world (founded in the 8th century). That same year, she entered the psychiatric clinic of the University of Rome with the idea of completing her Ph.D. thesis (Guzmán 2020).

She defended that thesis on July 10, 1896, before a tribunal made up of eleven professors. As this was a public event, the room was completely full of students, onlookers and even journalists. Her parents also accompanied her. The thesis, titled “A clinical contribution to the study of antagonistic hallucinations” received a score of 105 out of 110 points. That day, María Montessori wrote to a friend (Castellarnau and Castro 2019)

So here I am. I am famous (...) But not because of my abilities or my intelligence, but because of my courage and my indifference towards everything. This is something that, if desired, can always be achieved, but great efforts are required.

After graduating in medicine, María Montessori (Figure 1) also began to feel attracted to the human sciences, specifically teaching, although she did not abandon medicine and for a period of time continued to practice it and dedicate herself to research in that field.



Figure 1. María Montessori.
Source: (Castellarnau and Castro 2019)

As a result of these concerns for the human sciences, she began studying anthropology and finished her academic training by obtaining a doctorate in philosophy. Her thesis was intended to shed some light on mental illnesses, relegated and considered marginal at that time. Precisely, during that period, she had the opportunity to attend one of the first courses taught in her country on experimental psychology, which allowed her to carry out her own classification of mental illnesses (Castellarnau and Castro 2019).

The next steps in her life were marked by a very personal circumstance. During her stay at the university, she had met Giuseppe Montesano, a psychiatrist by profession, who was one of her professors and with whom she had an affair, as a result of which her son Mario Montessori was born, on March 31, 1898, six months before she carried out her first pedagogical activity.

Due to this situation, both Dr. Montesano's mother, Isabella Schiavone, and her own mother, Renilde Stoppani, took the reins regarding the fate of the new born son. Although María Montessori was quite autonomous and rebellious, she was submissive and did not dare to oppose the decision of her mother and mother-in-law, because according to herself, her professional career would be ruined if it became public that she had had a child abroad of marriage. The mothers of both opted for the son to be raised in the countryside, on the outskirts of Rome, by a wet nurse. Maria Montessori visited him quite frequently and sometimes introduced him as her nephew or even as her adopted son. Mario did not know until he was 15 that María Montessori was his mother. Furthermore, Isabelle opposed Giuseppe Montesano and Maria Montessori marrying, so Dr. Montesano made an agreement to give his son the legal surname on the condition that his birth be kept secret. Later, after the death of Montesano's mother, the reasons to keep this situation a secret disappeared and when Mario was 15 years old, María

Montessori recognized him as her son and began to live with him, also ensuring that he did not bear Montesano's last name. Maria Montessori (Fig. 1) felt very disappointed with the behaviour that Giuseppe Montesano had had in this whole matter and ended up leaving her job and joining the feminist movement of which she was a representative at a national and international level.

Maria Montessori represented Italy at the congresses held in Berlin, in 1896, and in Turin, in 1898, where she explained the need for a good education for intellectually disabled children and the relationship between school dropouts and delinquency. and finally, at the International Pedagogical Congress in London, 1899. There, she explained her ideas in the field of education, interacted with other prominent educators and compared perspectives. All of this would give rise to what was later called the Montessori method.

Montessori's ideas and theories on education aroused the curiosity of Guido Baccelli, Minister of Public Instruction of Italy, who proposed that she gave a series of lectures in Rome to present her ideas on the education of these children and teach courses at the Orthophrenics Master School on the education of children with intellectual disabilities.

Maria Montessori accepted this proposal and between 1898 and 1900, she dedicated herself to working at that state school, of which she became director, with disabled children. During that period, she was able to discover that those children had latent abilities that needed to be developed to have a better and fuller life. A key moment was when she witnessed how those children played with food crumbs during lunches with great interest. It was then that she understood that what those children really needed were objects that they could touch, explore and manipulate. For this reason, Maria Montessori formed a group of teachers specialized in the observation and education of minors with disabilities, who collaborated with her to provide assistance and support. It was at this moment in her life that she decided to dedicate herself definitively to education (Saettler 2004).

A year later, in 1901, Maria Montessori was appointed director of a psychiatric clinic associated with the University of Rome. There, she implemented an education based on observation and experimentation, achieving in a period of two years that eight children with intellectual disabilities passed the reading and writing exam intended for children of the same age without disabilities.

She then moved to London and Paris to find new educational methodologies. Upon returning to Rome, she continued her observations and carried out a method based on principles of Jean Marc Gaspard Itard and Édouard Séguin (Ruiz et al. 2010).

From these bases, she carried out experiments in the field of literacy and achieved very positive results with disabled children. Her research helped her obtain the chair of Pedagogical Anthropology at the University of Rome, where she taught for several years, which she also combined with classes at the Women's Institute of Higher Teaching, where she was in charge of training future teachers in Italy.

Her classes were so popular that students from other faculties came to hear them. One of these students was Anna Maria Maccheroni, who would later become one of her best friends and closest collaborator. Maria Maccheroni would remember the first day she had witnessed one of Maria Montessori's lessons with the following words (Castellarnau and Castro 2019)

After sitting down, I could see that the room was packed with young people of both sexes. The teacher stood up, looking at them all with sympathy and as if she wanted to register all their faces one by one. I realized immediately that she was a very attractive woman, but what impressed me most was that she did not follow the general customs of literate women of her time, who were few and preferred to dress in masculine styles. She, on the other hand, does not. Her outfit, no matter how simple it was, maintained an elegant and feminine touch, and her face never stopped smiling. She spoke not only about Anthropology, but also about schools. She told us what a school should be like. Her language was simple, clear, and she spoke so animatedly that we could all understand her. Everything she said had the warmth of life: I remember one of her students saying: “her classes make us want to be good.”.

Over time, Maria Montessori would begin to expand her focus to school-aged children in general, thus expanding the applications of the Montessori method to children of other ages and conditions.

In 1908, the Roman neighbourhood of San Lorenzo, near the communal cemetery, was called “the shame of Italy” because criminals, prostitutes and all types of marginalized and destitute people resided there. That year, Maria Montessori's career was positively affected when Eduardo Talamo, engineer and general director of the Roman Institute of Real Estate, a social entity dependent on the Bank of Italy, asked her for collaboration to improve the living conditions of the neighbourhood through construction of modern buildings, since their inhabitants lived in precarious hygienic conditions. The main objective was to dignify the quality of life of the working class. In this situation, Eduardo Talamo had reserved a safe space so that the families who lived in these homes could leave their children during work hours. The director of this organization knew of Maria Montessori's experiences as a doctor and educator, and considered it appropriate to ask her to manage this space, which would later be known as the “Casa dei Bambini” (Children's House).

This centre was a pedagogical institution for children between 3 and 6 years old. Maria Montessori accepted Eduardo Talamo's proposal to direct that center and set two priority objectives: focus on the well-being of the resident children, especially at a hygienic level, and achieve pedagogical goals. Thus, the Casa dei Bambini (Figure 2) was an innovation, as it offered children an adapted space where they could spend the entire day under the care of a governess. This governess had the obligation to live in the building to ensure that the parents collaborated in the education of their children. In addition, parents were invited to enter the centre and see the progress of their children, with the only condition of respecting the established rules. It was in that first centre, established on Marsi Street in Rome, that Maria Montessori began to apply the results of her studies, creating what is currently known as the Montessori Method (Isaacs 2010).

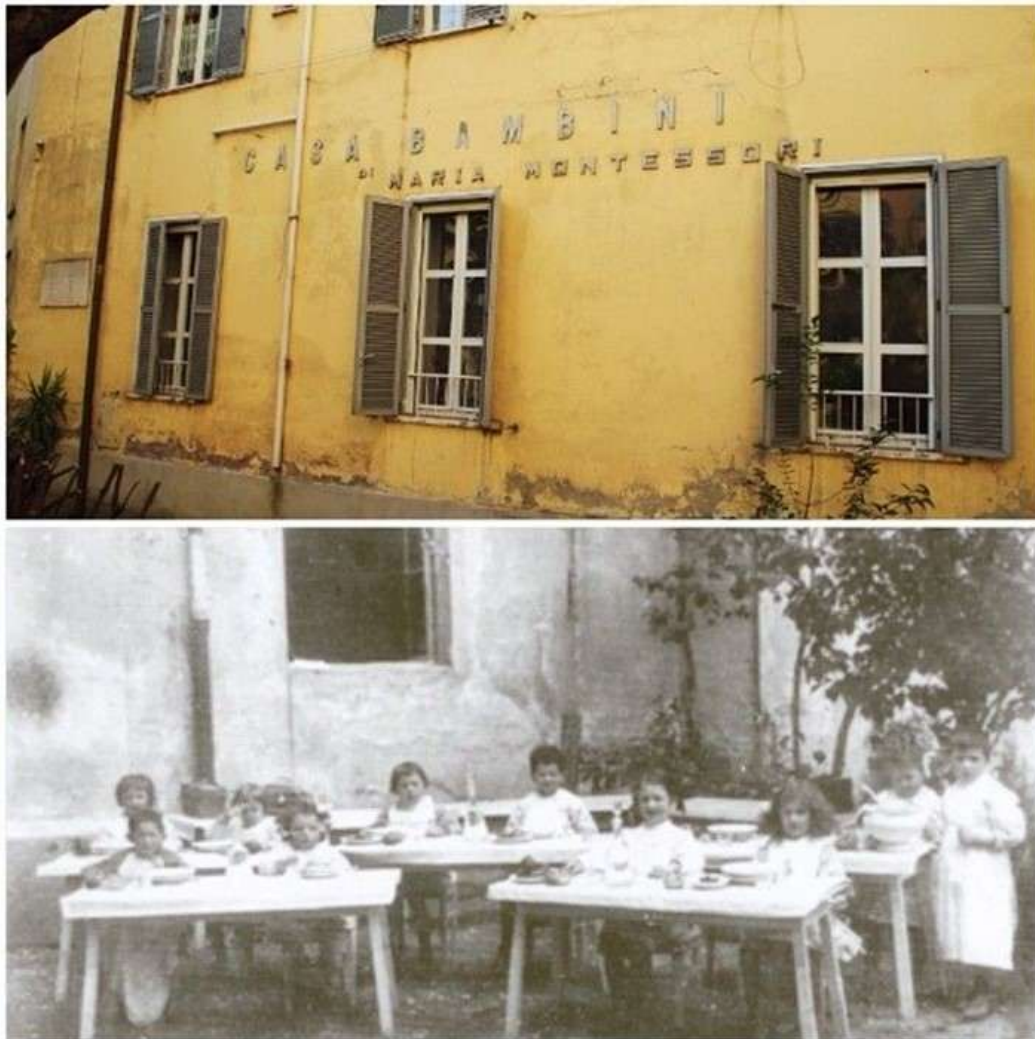


Figure 2. The Casa dei Bambini in Rome in its beginnings.

Source: (Mc Leod and Guy-Evans 2024)

In that project, María Montessori began by creating an area of practical life (hygiene and manners) that would restore dignity to the child. The children concentrated and repeated the exercise, the toys did not attract them, they were for leisure time. They rejected rewards and punishments and gained the satisfaction of doing their work alone. Little by little the rebellious children became normal, they became kind, respectful, and they learned with interest and enthusiasm. There were 60 children. Instead of imposing arbitrary rules on them and filling their heads with data, their spirit was left free. When at four and five years old they learned to read and write as a natural process, the world was shocked. In this way, the San Lorenzo neighbourhood stopped being a child control centre and became a research centre where children were developed with dignity, freedom and independence. They had the freedom to be active and the responsibility to know how to use this freedom (Castellarnau and Castro 2019).

To achieve the objectives that she had set, María Montessori prepared a clean, spacious and well-lit environment and was in charge of bringing materials that had been used in her research to observe the children's reaction (Figure 3). Based on their actions, María Montessori made new learning materials and thanks to them, she was able to see a very positive change. The children began to read and write without help from adults, they worked without interruptions and demonstrated that they did not need a person to guide and correct them. This change also extended to the children's homes, as the parents strove to have in their homes the same cleanliness and order that they had found in the Casa dei Bambini.



Figure 3. María Montessori prepared the environment of the class for her students. Source: (IMI undated)

Although the collaboration with Eduardo Talamo was brief, it was so revolutionary that it became known worldwide in educational circles. At that time, it was extraordinary to be able to link the social aspect with the pedagogical aspect in early childhood education and defend the rights of children against adults. In 1909, the first Montessori guide course took place, attended by people from all professions. At the end of the course, at the request of the Barons Franchetti, Lepoldo and Alice, with whom María Montessori had made friends, since Alice was an American pedagogue and philanthropist who had opened a rural school in the region of Umbria, María Montessori published her fundamental work on the method of scientific pedagogy applied to the education of children in enabled spaces: “The method of scientific pedagogy applied to children's education in children's cases”, in which she established the development of the materials and the foundation of her method. This publication had such an impact that it was quickly translated into different languages (Gutek 2004).

Unfortunately for her, María Montessori suffered at the end of 1912 the loss of her mother Renilde, to whom she was very close. This was a hard blow for her and caused her intense sadness for some time. On the day of the funeral she dressed in black and did not stop wearing that color until many years later. Ana María Maccheroni, her friend and collaborator, described years later how María Montessori experienced that sad event (Castellarnau and Castro 2019)

For three days after her mother's death, María was unable to eat. She didn't cry, she didn't seem depressed, we insisted: "eat just a little." "I can't," she simply responded (...). When they placed the coffin inside the vault of the pantheon in the cemetery, María simply stuck her head into the hole and remained like that for a minute or two without tears, without showing emotion (...). Then she took us with her father and her to a place by the sea for a few days.

After the success of the Casa dei Bambini, Maria Montessori founded four other schools in Rome and decided to abandon the original school in order to expand her methods. In 1913, she organized a series of international courses in Rome attended by numerous educators from various countries. These professionals, once they internalized the method, reproduced it in their respective places of origin, favoring an environment conducive to the learning of their students. Due to this diffusion, the first Casa dei Bambini was established in Milan, based on Montessori principles.

Both before and during the First World War, Montessori's ideas continued to spread, so many children had access to an education based on her method. She herself carried out numerous activities, in the form of conferences and courses, to publicize the foundations of her method in different places in Europe, America and Asia (London, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, Barcelona, San Francisco, Madras or Karachi, among others). María Montessori personally trained more than five thousand students from all over the world.

The spread of the Casa dei Bambini also reached the United States. She herself moved shortly before and during the First World War several times to that country where she founded a college for teachers. Together with who is considered the inventor of the telephone, Alexander Graham Bell and his wife Mabel opened the first Casa dei Bambini in the United States, specifically in 1913: Scarborough School in Maine, which was followed that same year by more of 100 similar schools in the country.

That profusion of Montessori schools in the country led to the formation of the American Montessori Association, led by Alexander G. Bell himself and Margaret Wilson, the daughter of President Woodrow Wilson (Povell 2009). However, it should be noted that the Montessori method also had its detractors. The renowned Columbia University professor William Kilpatrick wrote his book "The Montessori System examined" in 1914 in which he stated that Montessori theory had become obsolete and harshly criticized it.

In 1915, María Montessori traveled to the United States again and took the opportunity to take her son Mario Montessori with her, who at that time was already 17 years old. That was the beginning of a period where mother and son were closely linked in both their professional and personal lives. Two

years later, in 1917, they returned to Spain, concretely to Barcelona, to continue expanding the Montessori method and Mario Montessori married Helen Christie there. Unfortunately for him, that marriage did not go well and in 1936 the couple divorced. Helen returned to the United States, leaving her four children in the care of her husband. In Barcelona, María Montessori also founded a “Church of the Little Ones”, where the principles of “Casa dei Bambini” were applied to the religious education of the little ones, a topic to which she later dedicated some essays: “I bambini vivirti nella Chiesa, 1924” and “La Santa Messa spiegata ai bambini”, 1949.

From the beginning of the 1920s, Mario Montessori began to occupy an increasingly important place in Maria Montessori's life. In fact, at the end of that decade, in 1929, mother and son founded the International Montessori Association, an organization that aimed to unify and promote the Montessori method globally. Previously, in 1926, the Royal School of the Montessori method had been founded in Italy, with the support of Benito Mussolini.

As a result of all these actions, schools and teacher training centers expanded considerably throughout Italy and spread to various countries, including Germany. However, Maria Montessori later renounced Mussolini's help because he was using schools to instill war indoctrination in children, which was contrary to the central idea of the Montessori method: freedom. As a consequence of that decision, Mussolini ordered the closure of all her schools in Italy and Adolf Hitler did the same in Germany. That forced her to leave Italy and go back to Barcelona at the age of 64, where in 1934 she had to start from the beginning (Lillard and Lillard 2008). There she also developed pedagogical methods to teach religious catechesis.

In 1936, with fascism in full swing, the Montessori family was forced to go into exile, so they left Barcelona, and not being able to return to Italy and after a brief period of stay in England, she left with her son and her four grandchildren to the Netherlands, to Amsterdam, where the headquarters of the International Montessori Association was established, which she and her son had founded in 1929 to supervise the activities of schools around the world (her son Mario directed that association until his death in 1982). In Amsterdam, Maria Montessori met the banker Pierson and his daughter Ada, with whom she and her son partnered to open a school. Ada Pierson, over time, would become at first almost like a daughter to Maria Montessori and would later become her daughter-in-law (Castellarnau and Castro 2019).

That departure from Italy was due to the fact that María Montessori had numerous problems with the fascist government. Fascism in Italy used school to train young people to obey orders instead of free thought. However, María Montessori tried to ensure that students had a comprehensive development and promoted peace over war. Therefore, her educational approach was perceived as a threat to the totalitarian system and she was forced to leave Italy.

During the Second World War, Maria Montessori and her son Mario traveled to India thanks to an invitation from the Theosophical Society based in Madras. Her four grandchildren had stayed in Amsterdam in the city of Ada Pierson and María Montessori and her son Mario arrived in 1939 in the

Indian city of Adyar. There they carried out important work with children over 6 years old, beginning to apply their method to primary education. Initially, María Montessori had planned to organize a three-month course in that country and then return to Europe, but due to the Second World War they could not return to Amsterdam and were forced to extend their stay in India. However, they also had quite a few problems because as Mario had Italian nationality, he was forced by the British government (which then exercised power in India) to be interned in a concentration camp in Ahmendnagar and also placed restrictions on the activities of María Montessori. However, on August 31, 1940 (curiously, Maria Montessori's birthday) Mario was released (Castellarnau and Castro 2019).

María Montessori was in India from 1939 to 1946 and there she organized a hundred courses and prepared a thousand teachers. These courses were explained in Italian, but Mario translated them into English so that everyone could understand them. The experience in times of war led Maria Montessori to delve into the educational aspects related to peace and she came to the conclusion that the only way to build a peaceful society was through education. Due to her outstanding work in this area, she was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize (1949, 1950 and 1951), although it was not awarded in any of them. Figure 4 shows Maria Montessori and her son Mario in India.



Figure 4. María Montessori with her son Mario in the photograph on the left.

On the right, both with theosophist George Arundale and his wife

Rukmini Devi in Adyar (India). Source: (Castellarnau and Castro 2019)

In 1946, after the war calmed down somewhat, María Montessori returned to Europe and settled in Amsterdam. For his part, her son Mario married, for the second time, Ada Pierson, who had taken care of her family while he had been in India.

With the help of her son, Maria Montessori continued to hold courses and conferences in different cities and countries, including London, Scotland, Rome, Berlin, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), India, Pakistan, the Netherlands and France. Her presence in those places contributed to establishing her as a great prominent figure in the field of education. In her final years, in 1952, she was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Amsterdam. Previously, in 1939, she had received the French Legion of Honor for her outstanding work in the field of education.

Finally, María Montessori established her residence in Holland until her death in Noordwijk Aan Zee, at the age of 82, on May 6, 1952 (Patron et al. 2008), shortly before making a visit to Africa, invited by the president of Ghana. She is buried in the Catholic cemetery of such a city.

With reference to her publications, María Montessori was the author of more than 70 books, in which she presented her pedagogical ideas and the theoretical foundations of her educational method. Those publications can be checked in (Website 1 undated).

It is also important to note that María Montessori, in addition to being well known in the field of education, is also a very prominent figure in gender issues. It is considered a symbol of female empowerment and a reference in the fight for gender equality in society. Her work managed to meet the traditional expectations of her time and stood out in a field dominated by men at the time, demonstrating that women can have a significant impact on society and education. Through her dedication, she got other women involved in the field of education and other professional fields.

At the age of 20, María Montessori had already established a relationship with feminist groups fighting for the political and civil rights of women. At an International Women's Congress in London in 1890, María Montessori denounced the difficulties experienced by rural teachers in Italy and the labor exploitation of children in the mines of Sicily. In her speech, she linked feminism with the fight for social equality, as she stated that women should have the same opportunities as men in society. She emphasized women's right to vote, to education, to choose equal work opportunities, to improve maternity conditions, and to make decisions in marriage. Finally, she managed to lay the foundations for the advancement of women's rights in society.

As already indicated, in the fall of 1896, having recently graduated in Medicine, María Montessori was invited to be part of the Italian delegation that would attend the Congress on Women's Rights in Berlin. In that congress, her participation greatly reflected her commitment to the cause of gender equality.

In 1908, Maria Montessori participated in the first Congress of Italian Women in Rome, where she presented a paper entitled "Sexual morality in education" in which she defended the importance of sexual education as a means to free women from puritanism and the morality that confined them in

roles designed to care and be mothers. María Montessori defended an education where women could be owners of their thoughts and were given greater autonomy.

In her book “For the Cause of Women” we can find ideas that promote a model of the “new woman”, a leading woman aware of her potential. Her texts reflect the first steps of female emancipation in Europe and present a progressive vision of the role of women in society: the right to vote and education, and equal treatment at work and in marriage. Therefore, Maria Montessori fought for the education of women, promoted their independence, defended their political rights and rejected the limitations imposed on women by society.

III. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD

With the aim of promoting a greater contextualization of María Montessori's life, this section gives a very brief description of her pedagogical Montessori method.

While developing her pedagogical work, Montessori discovered the works of the two aforementioned French doctors, Jean Itard and Eduardo Séguin. The first of them is considered the “father” of the new pedagogy, which establishes the importance of observation in children and understands that nothing can be imposed on children. The second devised exercises and materials to help the child develop his faculties, in addition to studying the case of the so-called “wild child of Aveyron” (a wild preadolescent child found in the forests of Caune, in the French Languedoc, at the end of September 1799, who was treated, educated and reintegrated into society by Itard).

Later, María Montessori learned about the works of the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, who placed special emphasis on the preparation of the teacher, who must first achieve a change in his person and must have love for his work. There must also be love between the child and the teacher.

In accordance with these precedents, María Montessori believed that education should be based on a triangle, that is, there should be a continuous interaction between three fundamental elements in the educational process: the child, the prepared environment and the guide or educator.

The main vertex of this triangle is the child, since his mind has the ability to easily acquire knowledge through interaction with the environment.

First, children begin to learn unconsciously, but gradually they do so consciously. In fact, there is a comparison of children with sponges due to their ease of absorbing knowledge, although there is a big difference between them: the sponge has a limited capacity and that of children is infinite. Furthermore, children experience sensitive periods in which they learn a new skill with great ease. These moments are temporary and are limited to the acquisition of certain knowledge. Likewise, each child sets their own learning pace and those times must be respected.

The second vertex refers to the environment, referred to a space organized for the child to foster their autonomy, to the people with whom the child interacts and to the activities and guidelines that are proposed. In this environment we can find a series of teaching materials that are within the reach of

children and that play a very important role in their learning process. These materials have been designed in order to stimulate the child's curiosity and guide their learning. An important characteristic of these materials is that some are self-correcting. In this way, self-education is encouraged. Figure 5 shows María Montessori using her mobile alphabet, a simple game made of cardboard, with which she got her students to learn to read and write naturally much sooner than with the traditional teaching system, based on simple repetition.



Figure 5. María Montessori using her mobile alphabet to teach to a child to read. Source: (Castellarnau and Castro 2019)

The third vertex is the educator. In Montessori philosophy, the role of the adult is to be a guide for the child. This is a caring educator who is at the service of the child, giving him the freedom to explore and discover the world at his own space. He must be a responsible figure since he is a role model for the child and must have love, since it is what sustains the relationship between the two. The counselor's action must be minimal and in no case may rewards or punishments be granted, since the objective is to achieve the intrinsic motivation of the children. Therefore, the guide should not exercise authority but rather be a mere observer of each child's behavior. Ultimately, the teacher acts as a mediator between the child and the environment, creating an enriching and stimulating environment for the child's exploration.

In summary, the most important thing about the Montessori method is to motivate children to learn and satisfy their curiosity, discovering their own ideas and without the need for an external agent to provide them with new knowledge. To achieve this, it is essential to maintain order, hygiene and discipline.

Maria Montessori herself implicitly alluded to these aspects in the following phrase of hers, which has passed down to posterity (Castellarnau and Castro 2019)

If there exists for humanity a hope of salvation and help, it can only come from the Child, because in him is built the Man.

4. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that from the study carried out it can be concluded that María Montessori was a true innovator woman of the teaching that was carried out in her time, based solely on the performance of the teacher and in which the students were not taken into account at all. She changed this model, starting with children and then continuing with people of all ages.

REFERENCES

- Angulo, F. (2000). *Pedagogías del siglo XX*. Valencia: Editorial Cisspraxis.
- Asins, E. (2020). *Por la causa de las mujeres*. Madrid: Editorial Altamarea.
- Castellarnau, A, and Castro, M. (2019). *María Montessori. La mujer que revolucionó para siempre la educación*. RBA Editores.
- Gutek, G.L. (2004). *The Montessori Method: The Origins of an Educational Innovation*. U.S. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Guzmán, M.R. (11 septiembre 2020). María Montessori, ¿feminista? *Diario La Razón*.
- IMI: International Montessori Institute (undated). Available in website <https://montessorispace.com/maria-montessori/>.
- Isaacs, B. (2010). *Bringing the Montessori Approach to your Early Years Practice*. Taylor & Francis.
- Mc Leod, S. and Guy-Evans, O. (2024). *Montessori Theory of Education*. University of Manchester.
- Patron, I., Dorance, S. and Toinet, V. (2019). *Vida práctica – Vida sensorial. Montessori paso a paso*. Available in: <https://www.casadellibro.com/ebook-vida-practica---vida-sensorial-montessori-paso-a-paso-ebook/9782366380781/9643400>
- Lillard, P.P. and Lillard, J.L. (2008). *Montessori from the Start: The Child at Home, from Birth to Age Three*. U.S: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Povell, P. (2009). *Montessori Comes to America*. U.S: University Press of America.
- Ruiz Berrio, J., Sanchidrián Blanco, C., Colmenar Orzaes, M.C., Diego Pérez, M.C., Egido Gálvez, I., García Crespo, C., González Fernández, M. and Grana Gil, L. (2010). *Historia y perspectiva actual de la educación infantil*. Valencia: Grao.
- Saettler, L.P. (2004). *The Evolution of American Educational Technology*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.



Website 1 (undated). *Libros de María Montessori*. Available in:
<https://www.todostuslibros.com/autor/montessori-maria>