

MARIA MONTESSORI'S 'THE SECRET OF CHILDHOOD': UNDERSTANDING THE MONTESSORI METHOD - GENESIS, DEVELOPMENT AND CRITIQUE

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The childhood shows the man,
As morning shows the day.
– John Milton, *Paradise Regained*

ABSTRACT

With advocacy for “constructivism” and child-centered education never stronger in curriculum reform and policies (National Curriculum Framework 2005) in the country today, the understanding of Maria Montessori’s philosophy of childhood and education must be studied. This is based on the belief in the child’s creative potential, her drive to learn, and her right to be treated as an individual. With this in mind, I undertook a study of “The Secret of Childhood” by Maria Montessori to understand the genesis and development of the Montessori method, which is the main focus of this paper. A few other questions needed to be answered. Despite being a popular method worldwide, what prevents it from attaining mainstream status? Montessori schools are largely looked upon as alternate schooling in India. What are the resistances to or criticisms of the Montessori Method? For this, a dip into the history and critique of Montessori schools has been also attempted.

1. About Maria Montessori and the Early Influences on Her¹

Maria Montessori (1870-1952), an Italian physician and educator, was a humanitarian best known for her philosophy of education. As a woman in the late 19th and early 20th century, she faced gender discrimination both while pursuing educational studies and later, while spreading her views on education in the USA. Her visits to asylums for children with mental disabilities in Rome were fundamental to her educational work. The 19th century physicians and educators, Jean Marc Gaspard Itardⁱⁱ and Edouard Seguinⁱⁱⁱ greatly influenced her work. They used sensory exploration and

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manipulatives in their work with mentally and physically disabled children in developing self-reliance and independence in them by exposing them to physical and intellectual tasks.

Using these ideas, during her two years as co-director at the Orthophrenic School, for training teachers in educating mentally disabled children, Montessori developed methods and materials which she would later adapt to use with typical children.^{iv} Montessori's work, developing what she would later call "scientific pedagogy", continued over the next few years.^v *The Secret of Childhood* published in 1936, speaks of her conceptualisation of childhood, the rights of the child, education for the child and role of education for a better society.

2. The Secret of Childhood: Nature of the Child and Conflicts in Development

With rapid progress in industrialisation, at the turn of the 19th century there was a rise in consciousness along with better standards of living - both child care and education received an unprecedented attention (Montessori 1936: 3-7). Montessori acknowledges Freud's contribution but finds psychoanalysis not appropriate for child analysis or treatment of psychotic conditions. Montessori suggests that the child must be observed in relation to conflicts within her environment. This she says is of two kinds. The first is superficial and easy to cure, the psychosis as a result of conflict between child and the environment. The second she warns is far deeper - the impact of conflict between child and adult. What is this conflict?

2.1 *Spiritual Embryo*

A child at birth has a spiritual existence intact and delicate – thus the analogy of a spiritual embryo is made. The development of the spiritual embryo depends on its natural growth, with no interference with the psychic instinct. This instinct directs it in its interaction with its environment to "fulfil a cosmic mission for the conservation and harmony of the world" (Montessori 1936: 13-17). Montessori illustrates using vivid examples of many creatures, like the metamorphosing butterfly, where this internal development is evident right from the egg through developmental stages culminating in the adult butterfly. However, in the real world, there is little awareness of this "internalised" development as essential for the health of the child.

She states that we have moved away from natural settings and the artifice imposes on the child many stimuli detrimental to her growth right from

birth - sharp lights, enclosed rooms cut-off from fresh air, heavy clothing, and so on. In the Indian context we may argue that this is less so. However, child-care is hugely deficient and in urban areas, imitating the artificial living imposed by industrialisation, we are slowly moving towards a similar situation. Montessori even states that post-natal care needs greater attention and sensitivity to the birthing trauma that the child faces. Like animals in the wild, a slow adjustment to the world not only serves as a period of the child's awakening but also the awakening of the psychic nature of motherhood and likewise of fatherhood.

2.2 The Adult is Accused

The awakening of the inner design in the child by which she gains control of all faculties and regulates them in her interactions with the environment continually maintains her sovereignty. However, adults repress the natural psychological growth of the child by both conscious and unconscious errors. The adult runs the risk of seeing himself as infallible, one that the child must model herself on and thus any deviance must be corrected. We cancel out the child's personality. This must be averted.

Montessori urges that the adult endeavours to reveal her unconscious mind and its errors to herself for the sake of the child and humanity. This she assures is fascinating and elevates one to a higher understanding. The modification of the adult – a release of the unconscious – a release from psychosis is the first liberating step for the child. Egocentrism, viewing the child in relation to one's own experience and judging every action through the position of being the child's creator is averted. Instead, the discovery of the child's unconscious as the source of the child's potential must be the focus.

2.3 The Natural Child

Montessori uses Hugo de Vries' explanation of '*sensitive periods*' (Montessori 1936: 33-41) as a transitory animating impulse of 'readiness' in the child. Each psychic passion places him in greater relationship with the world, each conquest intense and bestowing power. For all this to happen, a varied and favourable environment for growth is required. The child will interact, grow and direct her interest. From confusion arises a distinction, which will result in activity. For example, developing speech readiness takes place in stages not as a continuum. The child first emits sounds, moves to blabbering, then to syllables, and soon to words, phrases and sentences, finally resulting in speech. This clearly shows a pre-determined and internalised directive quality of learning and acquisition.

If ignored, controlled or stopped in its natural conquest, the child loses the chance forever and this brings about boredom and inaptitude in the child. Case studies of children kept in denial of human company have shown limited ability in developing full speech capacities in later childhood. We see these deprivations also manifest as violent reactions, opposite to a response to stimuli which results in doing and entering a state of calm. The unknown psychic health can grow and blossom or be deformed, stunted or impaired if the background is one of functional disharmony and despair.

2.4 Essential Features of the Environment

Montessori lays stress on the concept that the environment must provide adequate multi-sensory stimuli to the child for her natural psychic development. She identifies care as one of these factors. She defines it as being vigilant for indications of need. No grandiose preparation is required; the child must be assisted through her development, and at her pace. She will indicate the what, when and how of her need. *Orientation through order* in the environment is essential. Children up to two to three years seek order and tend to restore it if upset. In the next stage beyond two years they look toward an inward orientation, for example, the relation of different parts of her body, their position and movements, what gives her comfort of body is good, and what does not make her agitated. This phase is marked with an attention to detailing.

2.5 Constructing Knowledge

The child is not a blank slate or empty vessel waiting to be filled but is in possession of inner sensibilities, making mental images based on her own interest. Thus reasoning develops as a result of self-directed interaction with the environment. Adults must be aware and not quick to judge every aberrance, puzzling manifestation as a whim of the child but as a psychical inner process of making meaning, in today's parlance of 'constructing knowledge' for herself. Ever so often the child might be in conflict with the adult's interpretation and inaccuracy with respect to the way she differently perceives events. This, says Montessori, is the reason the child and the adult do not understand each other.

2.6 Adult-Child Conflicts

As children become more self-reliant they begin to interfere in the order of the adult's world, like invaders. Adults revert to the defence of their territory and space and take on the 'socialisation of the young'. This is the first source

of conflict that takes place between a child's innocence and her parent's love. Children are 'kept away from sight', 'put to bed', 'seen and not heard'. Parents or teachers, says Montessori, must not use the dominating position they are in but curb it and take cues from the child, in guiding it towards a healthy development. *Sleep* must be self-directed and not enforced. Children must be allowed to *explore and walk* at their own pace and come into their own physical being. The two milestones of physiological development – *walking and speech* have got to do with movement. It is important to remember that these are *self-determined and self-attained* too.

Likewise the hand and brain are linked. The hand is the executive organ of the mind and documents thoughts. The child through grasping and feeling tries to integrate the outer with inner and must not be hindered. Both speech and activity result from imitation, different from mindless copying. This acquired knowledge comes out of the relation of adult and child. *Purposeful activity* is what every child seeks to undertake and is essential for her formation of ego and confidence. These tasks are the beginnings of understanding of work-life, for example opening and closing doors, drawers, jars, etc. *Rhythm* too is innate. The clumsy, stilted attempts cause adults discomfort and they seek to 'help' the child, thus interfering with her development of work and rhythm. Such useless assistance is the first roots of '*repressions*' and can do immense harm to the child.

2.7 Adult Substitution

According to Montessori, adult substitution is the final blow to a child's autonomy. Substitution is the imposition of the adult's personality and mannerisms on the child, so that the child no longer acts of her own will but the adult acts through her. A child who is integrated will spend time deliberating and mastering one task before moving to another. A child who is not integrated will move randomly from one task to another without thought or deliberation – demonstrating no inner discipline or coherence.

2.8 The Importance of Movement

The denial of activity clearly indicates the blindness to the '*unconscious*', and the moral and intellectual development remains stunted. The sense organs are the mechanisms for the enjoyment and appreciation of stimuli by the ego. If there was no ego, the sense organs would be rendered useless. Similarly, if the ego is unable to translate its desires into actions through the mastery of movement, its unity will be disconnected. We can accuse many schools today of this crime!

2.9 Intelligence of Love

The child develops through an intelligence that interacts to perceive and understand, and develop oneself with love. A love that determines intensity, that sees the unseen, which perceives differently, is the spiritual beauty and morality behind the “intelligence of love”.

3. The Secret of Childhood: Role of the Educator and Education

Montessori speaks of a radical revision in child psychology which has till now looked at the outward aspects of the child. It must now direct its gaze at the environment within which she grows. The adult environment is not a life-giving one with obstacles and defences and deforming efforts making the child a victim of suggestion. A cry of joy is growth and realisation; a tantrum is an utterance of disharmony or non-realisation. Montessori looks at the role of the educator and of education in the positive development of the child – one that frees the child of this conflict (Montessori 1936: 103- 114).

3.1 Liberation or Discovery

When the child's potential is unravelled without hindrances, it leads to discovery, liberation, and an unravelling of the inner psyche. Thus, the role of an educator (adult) is to provide an unhindered environment and she must adjust herself to the need of the child.

3.2 Spiritual Preparation

The educator must cultivate a moral order by preparing oneself to discover in the self defects that may prove obstacles in relation with the child, instead of seeking defects and tendencies to change in the child. Do not aim for perfection but train, seek guidance, and learn. ‘Seven Deadly Sins’ that must be avoided are anger, pride, avarice, sloth, lust, greed, and envy. However, Montessori speaks of the first two being the most necessary to purge.

Anger is authoritative and tyrannical and on young, defenceless children can be accusatory resulting in the child feeling deformed and oppressed. Educator must strip himself of tyranny and pride.

Thus was defined a multi-sensory environment of opportunities for the child, a “lesser” role and authority for the educator, and the recognition of the child with rights and having potential.

4. The Secret of Childhood: Genesis and Discovery of the Montessori Method

Montessori education is characterised by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child's natural psychic development. One may describe it as a method for human development through learning and teaching (Montessori 1936: 115-143).

4.1 How it originated

In 1907, when called upon to supervise the development of poor, illiterate workers' children in a tenement in order to prevent them from causing harm, Montessori began classes with a feeling of doing something momentous and says it soon showed that she like Aladdin "had a key in her hand that opened treasures!" The first Casa Dei Bambini was launched.

4.2 The Environment

Everything fitted within the easy reach of every child and was made to child-like proportions. Pleasing, clean and clinical (at first) with the age-related sensorial equipment that had been previously developed in a cupboard. There was order and function for free movement and independent work.

4.3 Lesser Educator

The teacher recruited was the porter's daughter and was briefly trained in the use of equipment and was asked to have the highest respect for the child's personality.

4.4 The First Children

The children of the first batch of this make-shift 'asylum' were between 3 and 6 and were tearful and fearful during their first day at school. They were shown the equipment and explained how to use them. Each was assigned a task and given equipment accordingly.

4.5 Lessons Learnt

Repetition of exercise, engagement and self-construction: Anything taught with careful detail was an exercise that was repeated many times over, till own satisfaction was attained - appearing rested and satisfied as if some inner voice was assuaged.

Order: Children preferred to restore things to their place themselves. The younger children were more exacting in their orderliness.

No to toys: Children preferred to use equipment that was involving and that they were able to construct meaning out of. Play is inferior to more urgent tasks that they do in developing themselves.

Free choice, independence and autonomy: In the absence of the teacher, each chose their activity and sat down to work. They preferred to choose than be allotted work. There was no indiscipline but work executed in an organised, disciplined manner.

Rewards and Punishments: The system of rewards and punishments had to be shelved as the children had no need for them. They were intrinsically motivated to work and needed no external prodding. On the other hand, any indiscipline had its cause in an inner conflict which had to be resolved accordingly. An opportunity to gain expertise and practise mastery over their faculties needs no reward or punishment.

Silent exercise: The children preferred to work in silence with complete focused attention; work was worshipful activity and conducted in a similar manner.

Refusal of sweets: Children avoided irregular food at odd hours if they were involved with the labour of self-development. The involvement of labour in learning was what gave them satisfaction.

Sense of dignity: The children had their own sense of dignity and will try and portray their best. Every visitor was greeted carefully with manners, each worked in their silent deliberate manner, and acted on requests with quiet confidence.

Spontaneous discipline: Despite ease and freedom of manner, children displayed an extreme sense of discipline and spontaneity. Surprise visits were received with equanimity, and on one occasion the children opened the school and sat down to work on a non-working day with no teacher or adult supervision.

Writing as communication: The alphabet symbol and sound connections were made when the alphabets were taught using cut-outs of sensory material. Children soon discovered they could make words and then sentences. The progression was self-directed. They made meaning of the symbols by connecting with them according to their own needs. They began communicating in writing on their own. This was almost cataclysmic. After the first child began, the rest followed suit.

Reading came later: Discovery that reading communicates ideas and stories followed next, and this developed interest in reading and in books. Until then

students showed no interest in books.

Healthy minds: The once sickly children were restored in health and vitality. What the mentally malnourished environment had done to them was quickly reversed with an exposure to an enriched environment.

5. The Secret of Childhood: Implications for Curriculum

Based on this first concrete experience of ‘educating’ normal children, Montessori established the basic principles of her methodology – to educate, cultivate and assist. She focused on ‘seeing the child, not the method’ and ensured that the child developed naturally, without hindrances. A suitable environment, a ‘lessened’ negative role and spiritual humility of the teacher, along with the supply of alluring sensorial scientific equipment, would ensure the right stimuli for the child’s natural integration and development (Montessori 1936: 144-158).

The various lessons learnt made her incorporate the following features – space and plan for individual work, time for repetition of exercise, free choice, analysis of movements, silence exercises, good manners in social contacts, order in the environment, meticulous personal cleanliness, sense education, writing isolated from reading and prior to reading, reading without books, and the discipline of free activity.

Further, this led to the abolition of rewards and punishments - the A-B-C method of alphabets, collective lessons as a rule, programmes and examinations, toys and greediness, special high desk for teacher, and the control of error within adult educator. This helped in ensuring the essentials for maintaining the vital eagerness of students.

Using the above methods and working with orphans of the Messina earthquake who were severely traumatised, she soon found they gained normalcy and happiness and vigour. Similar was the case with well-to-do children who were highly distracted and disinterested in the beginning till they found involvement in something challenging. This was the defining moment of a new attitude to work – single-minded focus that allows one to integrate the inner psyche with the outer environment. This she termed as “*True Normality or Normalisation*” – a “*Conversion*” from continuous repression to normalcy after involvement in work and discipline, with sympathy for others.

6. The Secret of Childhood: Psychosis and Malaise in Society

Montessori attributed psychosis in man and malaise in the society to a single cause. These deviations are born out of *man’s egotism* in the disguise of love,

which manifests as obstacles in the path of natural growth of the spiritual embryo. Beginning with an intense engagement with outer manifestations, in a serene and content manner, internalisation and growth of the spiritual embryo resumes. These psychological barriers manifest externally in society in many ways - barriers of clothing for the skin from air; barriers of walls between families and community; barriers of language, gender, and nations (Montessori 1936: 159-189). Some signs of psychosis are mentioned below.

6.1 The Dependent Child

A child that is denied her own inner harmony seeks approval and happiness from other sources and depends on others for her sense of fulfilment. *Possessiveness* – borne of a hunger to feed the spirit; the child looks towards the environment for this fulfilment. If impeded in her activity to develop the self, she seeks and possesses material things in her hunger to feel spiritual attainment. Thus attaching and detaching the self to possessions in rapid succession. Thus emerges *competition and division* within man and possessions – the root of all destruction. The *power of craving* is a conquest of snatching at things.

6.2 Inferiority Complex

An inferiority complex emerges as ‘things’ are shown more importance than the child. The child itself is diminished, and not shown the same consideration as an adult is shown, by being expected to follow every adult whim or fancy. The child feels the discontinuity and inferiority of her own decisions and actions and no longer has the dignity to be responsible - her actions previously ridiculed leave her with a sense of impotence.

6.3 Fear

Fear is less seen in normalised children. Children are more tuned to dangerous situations and apt at dealing with them. Normalisation prevents them from running into danger by recognising the signs and dealing with it.

6.4 Adaptation (or Camouflage)

In society, adaptation (or camouflage) to convention is often used and clothes sincerity – a normalised child is integrated and does not use deceit or adaptation to conventions. This involves clarity of ideas, union with reality, freedom of spirit, active interest in meaningful pursuits and instils ‘reconstruction’ of the sincere soul.

Repercussions on a physical healthy living are many. Gluttony, disease and inflictions due to repressions afflict the society, and have become a major social concern. A freer and normalising environment produces a healthier child and hence a healthier 'normalised' society.

7. The Secret of Childhood: The Natural Instinct of Man to Work

7.1 The Instinct to Work

The Montessori method identifies independent, free work at the centre of its curriculum design. Gandhi, Dewey and Tagore all recognised that the development of the child and oneness with her environment was through productive work – Dewey speaks of “learning by doing”, though he had reservations on Montessori's method (Dewey 1902). They all believed that work as a result of inner instinctive impulses becomes fascinating, irresistible, raises man above deviations and inner conflicts. The urges that are liberating and unifying burst forth and humanity progresses in a positive manner. This can be seen in the work of discoverers, great artists, scientists and craftsmen (Montessori 1936: 193-219).

7.2 The Conflict of Work

The environment of the child has moved from a natural to a restricted, artificial one. The work of the parent and the work of the child both are essential but unmatched.

7.3 The Adult's Task

This refers to the social, collective and organised adult work. Natural laws of division of labour, and production of more with least effort expended, are normal. These laws are replaced by laws that are self-serving and stratifying. Division of labour becomes seizing work; least resistance turns to making others work while one rests, and so on. The child is considered an extra-social being and thus relegated to different areas for socialisation, away from the adult world. Yet the child is dependent on the adult for everything.

7.4 The Child's Task

The child's task is even greater, says Montessori. It is the task of producing the adult. As she integrates and develops, the child grows into an adult of her 'own' making. The adult is more excluded from this world than the child from the adult's. The adult might perfect the environment but the child perfects

being 'her own'. Each the master in her own, yet dependent on the other.

7.5 Tasks Compared

Both adult and child need work and for each, work has its ends. The man works towards a definite goal while the child works for work itself – a factor of an inner need, a psychic maturation - following the hidden law in the spiritual embryo. Contrasting with adult work, the child does not follow the law of least effort but expends great effort in achieving her inner spiritual growth (through repeated action until the integration is achieved). In contrast, in the adult world, the attachment to outer manifestations leads the adult to lose herself and her health to it. The child's work is not exploitative. It is to be carried out on its own, for its own development.

Sensitive periods are likened to examinations through the different stages progressed. The *guiding instincts* hold the key to life, while adult life explains the hazards of survival (adaptation, struggle, competition, self-preservation). Guiding instincts seen in nature are the inner sensibilities involved in the preservation of life and intrinsic to it. Montessori questions how the human adult, who dominates its environment has become so disconnected with the very rhythm of nature that it lays obstacles in the natural integrated growth of its own offspring?

8. The Secret of Childhood: A Case for Peace and Education for Peace

We have understood how an adult disconnected from nature and the self, hungers for power and acquisition. On the other hand, a *normalised* child emerges from an environment that allows her natural explorations to persist and is directed inwardly towards an attainment that was meant to be. For a better society, we have to *normalise* people as the world today is made of people whose childhood has impeded their growth in a normalised manner. Montessori seeks for this improvement in education that assures the normalisation of the child. Or every development or tangible means of progress has the potential to be used as a means of war and destruction, as we see today (Montessori 1936: 220-232).

The parents' mission must be to protect the child from obstacles in development, accusations, insults and punishments during her development into a normalised adult. The rights of the child to grow and develop unhindered, to be protected from insult, injury and punishment must be protected both for the welfare of children and society. The salvation of man lies in the salvation of childhood.

Maria Montessori finally appeals for a preservation of the innocence and protection of the child's unhindered development.

9. Growth of Montessori Method around the World and In India

With the success of Casa Dei Bambini, Montessori's work began to attract the attention of the international world. Montessori education was adopted in public schools in Italy and Switzerland. Montessori schools opened across other European countries and were planned for countries in Asia, the United States, and New Zealand. In 1913, the first International Training Course was held in Rome and a second in 1914. Montessori conducted a number of training courses and established centres across the world in subsequent years.

After attending her training in Rome, students across India had started schools and promoted Montessori education since 1913. The Montessori Society of India was formed in 1926, and *Il Metodo* was translated into Gujarati and Hindi in 1927. By 1929, Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore had founded many "Tagore-Montessori" schools in India. In the year 1939, the Theosophical Society of India extended an invitation to the 69-year-old Maria Montessori. During her years in India, Montessori continued to develop her educational method of "cosmic education" for children aged six to twelve years, which emphasised the interdependence of all the elements of the natural world. This work led to two books: *Education for a New World* (1946) and *To Educate the Human Potential* (1948).

Between 1939 and 1949, Maria Montessori conducted sixteen Indian Montessori Training Courses, thus laying a very sound foundation for the Montessori movement in India. These courses led to the book *The Absorbent Mind* (1949), in which Montessori described the development of the child from birth onwards and presented the concept of the "Four Planes of Development". She travelled to Pakistan in 1949. She was nominated six times for the Nobel Peace Prize. Montessori died of a cerebral hemorrhage in the Netherlands in 1952, at the age of 81.

10. Other Philosophies of Education and Criticisms of the Montessori Method

Montessori's pedagogic thought finds resonance with other thinkers, philosophers and psychologists of education, like Rousseau, Dewey, Gandhi, Tagore, and Piaget (Ginsburg 1988, 256-258). All speak of the right of the child; the intrinsic value of work in the integration of the child and the

universe, which brings about the harmony in both individual and society; and the role of the teacher in guiding the child. Rousseau's views on education had greatly influenced the works of both Seguin and Itard, whose works in turn, as stated earlier, had greatly influenced Montessori. She was most convinced of Seguin's argument that if working with challenged children could produce positive results then an education system that was radically different "held the potential for human regeneration" (Zell 1997:7). And just as Montessori expected the 'educator' to purge herself of the evils, so did Dewey and Gandhi expect in the teacher the highest form of ideals in manner, thought and practice (Kumar 1993).

John Dewey also makes a strong case for the autonomy of the child just as does Montessori. "Let the child's nature fulfill its own destiny.... The case is of Child. It is his present powers which are to assert themselves; his present capacities which are to be exercised; his present attitudes which are to be realised" (Dewey 1902: 31). Dewey held admiration for her practice and expressed his solidarity with her concept of liberty of the child. However, Dewey had reservations about the Montessori method. More balanced than any American educator of the time on the Montessori method, Dewey wrote a critique in his essay "Freedom and Individuality" in 1915 (Zell 1997: 44-46). The areas where he strongly raised reservations were on the greater reliance on materials for sense training and the "contrived" activities that resulted. This greatly differed from Dewey's view of "real world" learning. Secondly, in Dewey's vision the teacher held a greater directional role than the "lesser" teacher in Montessori's classroom. Thirdly, he differed with the extent of the "natural unfolding and innateness" in the learning process. While Dewey raises these objections, one clearly sees a match in each of these conceptualisations. What differs is the praxis of the concepts between Dewey and the Montessori methods.

Montessori was met with both interest and criticism from very strong quarters in the United States where she was unable to sustain a strong presence. William Heard Kilpatrick, an influential progressive educator, was dismissive and critical of her work in his book titled *The Montessori Method Examined* (1914), which had a broad impact. Critics spoke of her 'feminist' approach as being 'sentimental', the method as being too reliant on sense-training, outdated and rigid with little social interaction. "Being female, foreign, working class, non-Protestant was enough to pose serious problems Montessori was all of these things" (Zell 1997: 28). She was unable to establish a strong leader to take her ideas forward in United States and moved her attention to other parts of the world, including India.

11. The Resistance to Becoming Mainstream Schooling

Montessori schools carry the tag of being elitist even though the pedagogy promotes the notion of social equalisation. Clearly, the costs of equipment and the setting up of the environment as envisaged by Montessori require larger pockets. That coupled with the cost of trained teachers makes the schools beyond the reach of the poorer majority. Further, though the method is well researched and established, most Montessori schools cater to children below the secondary school stage. The Montessori method clashes with methods of standardised tests and examinations followed in the current school system. These have been practical obstacles in the spread of Montessori schools in different parts of the world.

12. Conclusion

As a pedagogy, the Montessori method restores the child to the forefront of the education system, allowing the learner to “construct” her learning – internalise her inner psyche with the outer environment, to make meaning of the world around her, and develop into a person more attuned to the world around her. Putting our faith and confidence in the centrality of the child’s innate aptitude to learn requires a leap of faith.

Further, the expense of setting up a Montessori school provides a point of resistance. The equipment, development of adult attitudes, and change in definition of learning - all require substantial intention, effort, and time. While the integration of the Montessori method bodes well with the spirit of the NCF 2005, the current system will have to be turned over on its head to accommodate it. Completely alien to tests and certifications, how can such a system fit into the bureaucratic world of today?

Notes

- ⁱ Indian Montessori Centre (2011): *Maria Montessori - A Biography*, The Official Website of the Indian Montessori Centre, Viewed on April 2012, from : <http://indianmontessoricentre.org>.
- ⁱⁱ “Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2012, Viewed on 4 April 2012 (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/297902/Jean-Marc-Gaspard-Itard>).
- ⁱⁱⁱ “Edouard Séguin.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Viewed on 4 April 2012 (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/532753/Edouard-Seguina>).
- ^{iv} “Maria Montessori.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Viewed on 4 April 2012, (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/390804/Maria-Montessori>)
- ^v **Written Works:** Montessori wrote extensively on pedagogy and conducted anthropological research and was qualified as a free lecturer in anthropology for the University of Rome to lecture in the Pedagogic School at the University. Her lectures were printed as a book titled *Pedagogical Anthropology* in 1910. Some of the other works written by her are Montessori’s Methods in *Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica* (1909); *The Montessori Method* (1912), *The Advanced Montessori Method* (1917–18), *The Secret of Childhood* (1936), *Education for a New World* (1946), *To Educate the Human Potential* (1948), and *The Absorbent Mind* (1949).

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