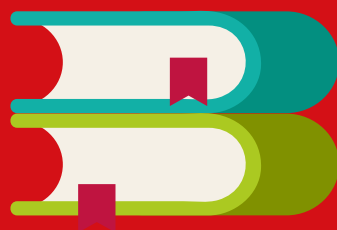


# THE MONTESSORI METHOD: HISTORY, PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATIONS IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND BEYOND

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## Abstract

The present article is carried out with the aim of assessing the relevance of an education that departs from the traditional and provides autonomy to the learner through Montessori pedagogy and to provide hints of change to transform disengaged participation into active or energetic participation since to some extent, the responsibility for providing what is necessary for the seeds of the learner's interest to germinate lies with the educator.

The methodology employed focuses on documentary research, an investigation that centers on texts such as articles, books, theses, and dissertations. This methodology allows for the collection of information about the Montessori method, from its inception to the effects it has had to date, as well as the contributions that arose from direct observation by its creator and the environment for the implementation of the method. It also highlights the importance and the possibility of integrating this method, primarily in primary and high school education, but also some possibilities in the university context. In summary, it confirms the significant implementation of the Montessori method in some levels of education, indicating that full learning can be developed through this new pedagogy.

**Key words:** Montessori Method, education, meaningful learning.

## Resumen

El presente artículo se realiza con la finalidad de dimensionar la relevancia de una educación que diste de lo tradicional y brinde autonomía al educando mediante la pedagogía Montessori y dejar indicios de cambio para transformar la participación desmotivada a una participación activa o enérgica, ya que en cierta medida el responsable de suministrar lo necesario para que germinen las semillas del interés que el educando es el educador.

La metodología empleada se centra en la revisión documental, una investigación que focaliza textos como: artículos, libros, trabajos de grado y tesis. Esta metodología permite la recolección de información sobre el método Montessori, desde su creación hasta los efectos que ha causado en la actualidad, asimismo, los aportes que surgieron de la observación directa por su creadora y el ambiente para la implementación del método. También se visibiliza la importancia, así como la posibilidad de integrar este método, en su mayoría, en la educación primaria y bachiller, sin embargo, también se evidencian algunas posibilidades en el ámbito

universitario. En síntesis, se corrobora la implementación significativa del método Montessori en algunos niveles de educación, es decir, que el aprendizaje pleno se puede desarrollar mediante esta nueva pedagogía.

**Palabras clave:** Método Montessori, educación, aprendizaje significativo.

## Introduction

The human being is found standing on the hands of the clock, times change, however, in the field of education, accepting the passage of time is an arduous process, it is in conflict with the change of the traditional system that is still implemented today, if the metamorphosis is present in daily life, is it not necessary to transform the Prussian methodology?<sup>1</sup> That need for change is the one that awakens the sense of the present documentary research.

The Montessori method, despite its age, is known by few and is not applied with recurrence in the educational world, it represents a real challenge, commitment and love to bring Montessori pedagogy to the classroom. In the present research, we gather conclusive information about the mentioned method, contributing with a grain of sand to the change of perspective that a teacher has about teaching. School as an instruction centre is one point of view, but taking school as an introduction and preparation for social life is another so distinct (Montessori, 1986). This last perspective is substantial because it favours the independence, autonomy and integral development of the learner. There are thousands of methods for building knowledge, however, it is opted for the traditional ones, in that sense for a change we present a methodology that teaches from the respect for the other, applies timely or necessary interventions to guide the learner and more strongly favours the creation of meaningful relationships taking into account the context.

In addition to the above, it should be noted that this review article has a scientific impact by contributing to pedagogical knowledge and providing empirical evidence of its effectiveness. Likewise, it has a social impact by promoting the transformation of education and the inclusion of learner-centred approaches in educational practice.

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<sup>1</sup>This methodology or traditional teaching is based on principles of standardization, doctrinal, focused on the obedience of the students, the teacher is also taken as the only wise person in the classroom. In traditional education, the school is nothing more than a bastion that preserves the surrounding world, in which the teacher, as a monastic abbot, is a model and guide who imposes rewards and punishments (González, et al. 1988, p. 135).

# Methodology

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this text, it tries itself of a review article supported by the Montessori method, its argumentation is consolidated as early as a process of descriptive theoretical research of documentary type that focuses in knowing the history of the creation of the Montessori method, its definition, the analysis of its application in infants, as well as in adolescents or young people of higher education. To guide the present paper, the followings guiding questions were taken into account: What is the history of the Montessori method? What does the Montessori method consist of? Can this method be applied to young people in high school? The methodological route to search for and find relevant information is divided into three significant moments: tracing, selection and analysis of a set of electronic documents. Finally, the databases used were: Dialnet, Scielo, ProQuest and Academic Google.

## Results and Discussion

### A little of history about the creation of the Montessori Method

“Enliven the teaching with the beautiful word, with the timely anecdote, and the relationship of each knowledge with life” (Mistral, 2017, p. 25).

The Montessori method is created by an exceptional woman who decides to perform education from the respect toward children with a foundation built for peace, her name is Maria Tecla Artemisia Montessori. She was born in Chiaravalle de Ancona, Italy, on 31 August 1870 and died on 6 May 1952, among her occupations are found: psychologist, philosopher, doctor, psychiatrist, pedagogue and writer, she has worked in various fields. Her medical career was the one that led Maria Montessori towards the path of perpetuity, leaving her trace in the education, since she began her professional career working with children diagnosed as mentally handicapped and in this trajectory she came across the work carried out by Jean Itard and Édouard Séguin, in which she discovers that sensory education is the perfect tool for the recovery of children with mental retardation, Montessori detects that the pedagogical field is the axis in which the problems of children with mental difficulties circulate and not so much with the medical field, she also points out that these problems are related to the environmental condition in which the child develops (Santerini, 2013).

Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel are thinkers who influenced Education with their innovative ideas and intuitions, as well as Jean Itard and Édouard Séguin already mention before. At the end Maria Montessori managed to synthesize, relate and integrate the

abstractions of the previous thinkers and forge in her mind the Montessori method (Britton, 2001).

In this way the clues for the creation of the pedagogical method were given, after synthesizing all the information that she managed to acquire about the methods applied so far for learning and teaching in education and mixed all this knowledge with medicine. Considering his background, she focused on basic primary education. As an act of solidarity, Montessori got to open her first centre of study called Casa dei bambini, where children of limited means and neglected by their parents attended. In this centre, sensory education was present, this refers to the exploration and exploitation to the maximum of the systems: auditory, gustatory, olfactory and tactile. As the years went by, various personalities visited Casa dei bambini to demonstrate the work that was being successfully and creatively developed with the children. As secondary effect of the visits, Montessori's own teaching method spread to various places such as: North America, Japan, Germany and India, and also to Argentina, as the first Latin American country to include this method in its teaching processes (Britton, 2001). In this way, little by little, in many countries will be known the name of Maria Montessori.

### Universal characteristics of childhood

As central features of teaching the observation is presented to decipher what students need, it must find out what can be offered in order to develop an enjoyable learning experience in the classroom, what methods to implement in order to provide an appropriate teaching and coherent with the context and the socio-cultural environment. In the Montessori method these are factors that form part of its main philosophy. The observations of Maria Montessori carried out in each house of study, where a diversity of ages and cultures were found, turned out to be forceful, as thanks to them she identified principal ideas about the management and education of children (Britton, 2001).

During all the trips made by Montessori to different countries, she managed to identify certain events that are common in all children, no matter of the culture or environment in which they were educated, those are called “universal characteristics of childhood” constituted by six important facts: Firstly, children have an absorbing mind, secondly; children go through sensitive periods, thirdly; children want to learn, fourthly; children learn through the game/work, fifth; children go through stages of development, sixth; children want to be independent (Britton, 2001).

### The absorbing mind

The child is a being capable of analyzing in detail

each of the elements that surround him, this happens because he is discovering the world, he is a being full of curiosity with the desire to decipher what is happening around him, what keeps his brain active because he performs the abstraction of information from their environment, absorbing knowledge, favoring cognitive work and generating learning what can mark positive or negatively in the future (Montessori, 1986).

The absorbing mind is a psychic state which helps the boy and girl to understand one by one the experiences lived in their first three years and later, at four to six years old, analyze and group these experiences, causing the construction of the pillars for their comprehensive development, that is, early childhood is the most important stage of every human being (Albán and Vela, 2021, p. 30).

### **Sensitive periods**

The child is in a stage in which the need to manipulate, observe or taste all kinds of things, arises. It is the opportunity to learn about that striking object, to investigate in depth, for example, it is possible for the child to drop an object repeatedly and the adult picks it up to put it in his hands, this happens because he wants to know how gravity works, he decides to choose what to learn and in the event that the adult gets angry because he drops the object, in the words of Montessori, It will turn into a frustrated learning experience but not a tantrum, which is usually how others and their parents see it. These are special sensitivities that are found in evolving beings, that is, in childhood states, which are temporary and limited to the acquisition of a certain character (Montessori, 1982, p. 39). As they are in an optimal stage of assimilating learning, it is timely and convenient to let the activities of daily life be developed at their own pace without being imposed by an adult (Albán and Vela, 2021).

### **They want to learn**

The kid possesses an innate motivation, it is the instinct that leads them to learn in a natural way about aspects of their preference, therefore, it is of utmost importance to know how to feed this desire correctly, if traumas are generated, his future will be truncated, the acquisition of knowledge will no longer be appealing. So, one way to support to the motivation present in the child is through the creation of materials that respond to his or her interest.

### **They learn through the game/work**

The game in traditional education is not accepted because obedience appears as a fundamental pillar and therefore the silence or stillness of the student in the classroom, something in which the Montessori educational model disagrees. The aspects that accompany the child, in general, are: uncertainty, movement, doubt, curiosity, therefore, taking these

aspects, the game is an ally that condenses the main characteristics of the child to reach knowledge, likewise these aspects contribute to learn "new ideas and to put them into practice, to adapt socially and to overcome emotional problems, especially in imaginative games, such as playing mummy and daddy with the dolls" (Britton, 2001, p. 21).

The psychologist Jean Piaget, who put forward the Theory of Cognitive Development, believed that in order to carry out a meaningful learning experience, active exploration is necessary, which in infancy is at the key point (Piaget, 1980). Montessori, during her observations, managed to relate movement and sensations with cognition, the thought process and the development of knowledge, because of this relationship there is an intense manipulation of objects, therefore, Montessori proposes interactive materials that refine the senses, favour the development of abstract thinking and introduce children to literacy, mathematical concepts, geometry, geography among others (Stol, 2007). In this way, games are included in the learning processes, as well as "work", simple activities (age-dependent) of daily life, e.g., getting dressed, preparing breakfast, washing the dishes used and at school organising toys, which in turn leads the child to be independent.

### **Stages of development**

In order to be a responsible facilitator or teacher who works for the well-being of the student, it is convenient to inquire about the stages of development in which children passes, so it is easier to attend to their needs or to have a guide to contribute to the search for their happiness. According to Britton (2001), Montessori proposes three stages that all child, without exception, go through during his childhood and end of adolescence: firstly, the stage from his or her birth to the age of 6; secondly, from 6 to 12; thirdly, from 12 to 18.

#### **First stage**

Up to the age of three: During this time, children learn by impressions they absorb from the environment, without being conscious of the process. Montessori considered this as the most important part of the three stages (Britton, 2001).

From 3 to 6: although children still absorb information from their environment, they have now developed a memory and a will. They also rapidly acquire language, in which It is supposed a significant difference in the way that they acquire new knowledge (Montessori, 1986).

#### **Second stage**

At this stage of development, Montessori determined that culture is acquired, the child ceases to be a child "like everyone else at birth" and begins to be changed by the environment (Britton, 2001).

#### **Third stage**

It is the period of acquisition of the independence.

Montessori believed that during this time has place many changes, so the child needs as much care and attention as when he or she is less than six years old (Montessori, 1986).

### **Independence**

It is natural to help children in their daily activities, either because there is no time to wait for them or because they are seen as "incapable", however, it must be considered that independence is fundamental, if they learn to carry out their daily activities autonomously, later, they will apply this learning in the academic environment.

The child from birth seeks independence, therefore, the teacher and the parents or tutor must represent a guide that leads them along the path towards strengthening their abilities, that he knows them and develops them to obtain satisfactory results. However, when this goes against the above, that is to say, it is imposed the desire to do everything for the child in the case of parents, but they do not realize about the attitude take in front of these situations, they do it in a natural way and assume that it is OK, the point is that only prevent a natural growth of the child or development of activities that leave him/her a vision about the world, an experience carried out in an autonomous way that later will give him/her self-confidence (Britton, 2001).

### **Characteristics of the environment for the application of the method**

The environment in which the child develops, plays a very important role, this method comes with a transformative idea, the classrooms become a suitable space for the learner. Unlike the traditional Prussian method, this method leaves behind the figure of the teacher as an authority and transmitter of knowledge from a pedestal. The knowledge that the child constructs is internalized through interaction with the environment; therefore, the modification of the architecture and structuring of these spaces responds to the needs that are created during the learning sessions (Jiménez, 2009).

The application of this method requires an environment with defined characteristics, according to Espinoza (2022) the main ones are:

1) The child's decision is important, therefore, spaces that promote the work in group as well as individual excel in this environment.

2) According to Montessori (1986, p. 24) hands are the instrument of human intelligence. In that sense, manual or interactive work is always present in the method, didactic materials and specific spaces are available for the development of the different subjects or activities.

3) The classroom is decorated with the work done by the children.

4) Reflection is of the utmost importance, therefore, the conditions to promote this state are essential, and a

harmonious, orderly and peaceful environment prevails.

### **The Montessori method in primary education.**

Montessori pedagogy focuses on primary education, therefore, at this field is corroborated the effectiveness of its implementation. They are presented several advantages, among them are: the strengthening of cognitive skills, which in turn favours the development of autonomous learning and motivated by the needs that are generated during the child's growth process, in the same way it encourages interaction with others, social relations and the stage of the curriculum becomes flexible due to the freedom that the child has to access knowledge (Espinoza, 2022). According to Trilla, et al. (2001), It is considered that the Montessori method contributes significantly to the comprehensive development of a child, enhancing his cognitive, physical and spiritual capacities. The first stage of the child's development corresponds to an extremely important part, so it permits the formation of "intelligence, the great instrument of man, and not only intelligence, but also the set of the psychic faculties" (Montessori, 1986, p. 21).

Taking into account the above, the conclusions obtained are recovered in the research paper entitled: Influence of the Montessori method in the learning of mathematics in schools, according to Burbano-Pantoja, et al. (2021) the implementation of the Montessori method in a didactic sequence significantly influenced the increase of learning about the operations of addition and multiplication with natural numbers, as well as strengthening the skills to solve certain problem situations, this thanks to the environment, motivation, interaction and the use of teaching materials.

Also, in the graduate work entitled: The Montessori method, as an alternative to achieve a meaningful learning in the schooling stage in children from second to seventh year of Basic Education in the educational Unit "Despertar" of the Parish of Tumbaco, Canton Quito, province of Pichincha, Gerrón (2017) concludes that the relationship between meaningful learning and the Montessori method form a direct link.

The cognitive process that student develops thanks to the Montessori method is significant, a connection is established between previous knowledge and new knowledge, in addition, the intervention of emotions and feelings is encouraged, which allows the inclusion of the management of socio-emotional skills and integral training, situation that encourages reflection and internalization of knowledge to apply in various problems that arise in everyday life (Guerrón, 2017).

Although it is a methodology that contributes significantly to cognitive processes, it is necessary to take into account the scenario or environment in which the Montessori method is implemented, the creativity

of the teacher is of utmost importance in this process if there is a lack of resources or there is an inappropriate structure, however, the practice will be allied of the learner, the deepening of the method will provide new horizons for its application.

### **The Montessori method beyond primary education**

It is clear that this method was initiated with the purpose of strengthening an active school in which the priority is to let people do things and help when it is necessary. Free activity is fundamental in the development of this methodology, in this way the learner leads to spontaneous discoveries that provide meaningful and safe learning. However, the documents signed by Maria Montessori are mostly focused on early childhood and a few talk about adolescence, this stage that is also considered important, as much as the first stage followed from birth to the age of 6. Among the few official documents in circulation is the book entitled: *De l'enfant à l'adolescent*. "In this work, the pedagogue says that adolescence is the psychological stage in which the person lives the transition between the child who lives in a family, and the adult who must integrate into society" (Esteban, 2016, p. 1136). This transition is of utmost importance, a delicate stage that if not is endured of a properly way can cause adverse effects in the child, it is a stage in which the parents, as well as the teacher must be attentive to the changes that are generated. If the infant stage is culminating, the child's environment must change, consequently, his responsibilities also do, for example, the use and importance of money is an aspect that must be handled realistically, to achieve meaningful learning and in accordance with the context, the acquisition of personal experience is encouraged by letting the child make his or her purchases (Montessori, 2004).

Just as attention is paid to the methodology applied in the education of the child, it is relevant to pay attention to the development of learning that takes place during and after the third stage. The pedagogical model and the school's curriculum are documents in which the context and reality must take precedence in order to teach the student, to reach his or her interests and build meaningful knowledge. If the school does not adapt to the new needs of the learner, an insufficient atmosphere is generated, therefore, being a lacking environment, the student will look for ways to satisfy his or her needs and from there the "naughty" or "ill-mannered" is born. In this sense, applying the Montessori method ensures a satisfaction of the student's interests, satisfies his curiosity and encourages comprehensive development. Throughout the history, the effectiveness of the Montessori method in primary schoolers is corroborated, however, this method also appears as an opportunity to transform the traditional education given to adolescents, children from 12 to 18 years old who belong to high school or university students. Esteban (2016) in his

article entitled: *Maria Montessori and her educational method, is it possible to apply it in the secondary and higher education classroom?* He comes to conclude to a satisfactory way the use of activities created from the Montessori methodology in university students, showing an 87% improvement in learning. And in high school students there are no significant changes, however, it is highlighted that this happens because of the large number of students and their little cooperation. Taking into account the above, it can be inferred that the success of the Montessori method can be achieved in small or cooperative communities with maturity.

Alemán (2017) in his degree project entitled: *Application of the Montessori method to the subject: Initiation to Entrepreneurship and Business Activity* proposes a theoretical activity taking into account the Montessori methodology. The activity is called "Treasure Chest" and emphasizes the importance of developing students' skills, especially in the adolescent stage, so that later they can integrate into the world of adults.

The teacher has the duty to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the learner in order to propose activities that contribute to his or her personal and intellectual growth, and also must keep for his or her tastes and interests. Gallardo-Mestanza, et al. (2021), mention that the application of the Montessori method favours and increases the student's academic performance, forging in him or her a positive attitude about their learning process. If the student's potential is discovered, it is necessary "to water that seed" at the right age.

When a child is deprived of any kind of fun, play, interaction with nature or living in constant relationship with others, which forges empathic feelings, he or she will become in a adolescent with weights a bitter, melancholic, pessimistic and will seek satisfaction in banalities, will continue in this way until he or she reaches the door of a university and will possibly end his life in this way (Montessori, 2004). If the total development of the individual is neglected because the transmission of knowledge is prioritized, little can be expected for the person's future. If there is an opportunity to transform a child's life, are you willing to let him pass?

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the Montessori Method is an innovative educational philosophy developed by Maria Montessori, an exceptional person who combined her training in medicine with her observations and studies in psychology and pedagogy. Her approach focused on respect for children and the creation of a learning environment that fosters independence, curiosity and game as motors of child development.

Montessori identified universal characteristics of childhood, including the child's absorbing mind, sensitive periods and innate motivation for learning. These fundamental principles led to the creation of a child-centred educational environment, where learning is promoted through game and work, and the stages of specific development in each child are recognized.

The implementation of the Montessori Method in primary education has demonstrated significant benefits, strengthening cognitive skills and fostering student autonomy. It has been proved this pedagogical approach is effective for mathematics learning and other subjects.

Moreover, the Montessori Method is not limited to primary education; it can also be applied in secondary and higher education. Although adaptation to these levels may require certain creativity and cooperation as part of the students, positive results in terms of improvement of the learning and academic performance have been obtained.

The Montessori approach offers a valuable opportunity to transform children's lives, providing them with an education that is adapted to their individual needs and fostering an integral development that goes beyond the transmission of knowledge. It is an educational philosophy that is based on respect, autonomy and meaningful learning, and its positive impact can last throughout students' lives.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the importance represented for teachers training to learn about the various methodologies focused on a transformation in the educational field, so that there is a participatory and inclusive environment, since the new generations of teachers must be prepared to face the challenges or problems which are present in the classroom. Taking into account the above, there is no better way to start with that transformation than taking the Montessori Method as inspiration and basis, since, as evidence in the present article, the implementation and adaptation of Montessori principles can be carried out with responsibility and commitment at different levels of education.

## Recommendations

For educators interested in adopting the Montessori Method in their classrooms, it is essential to keep in mind certain guidelines and tips that will facilitate a successful and beneficial implementation for students, such as the following:

Before attempting to apply this approach, it is fundamental to obtain adequate training in the Montessori Method. Seek out certified and accredited

training programmes that provide a deep understanding of Montessori practices and philosophy.

Obtain or create the Montessori materials needed in the classroom. These materials are specific to each subject and are designed to encourage independence and active exploration from students.

Practice active observation of your students to understand their individual needs and points of interest. This will allow you to tailor your teaching in a personalized way and provide meaningful learning opportunities.

To foster independence, encourage students to make decisions and take responsibility for their own learning. Allow them to choose the activities they wish to carry out and respect their individual paces.

In case of wishing to build an atmosphere of respect and collaboration, cultivate an environment in which students treat each other with mutual respect and work collaboratively. Encourage the communication and the resolution of conflicts in a constructive way.

Avoid the traditional assessments based in exams and tests. Instead, use authentic assessment methods that reflect students' real progress and its deep understanding of concepts.

Recognize the importance of students' social-emotional development. Help them to develop emotional skills, empathy and emotional intelligence through activities and discussions.

Collaborate closely with other Montessori educators and be part of a supportive community. The exchange of experiences and resources with colleagues can be invaluable.

The Montessori Method follow evolving. Keep updated with research and best practices in Montessori education to continue improving your pedagogical approach.

In summary, the successful implementation of the Montessori Method requires an ongoing commitment with the philosophy and practices behind it. With a proper training, the creation of a favourable environment and adaptation to the needs of students, educators can provide an enriching education, and focused on the child that fosters meaningful learning and comprehensive development.

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