

## Publishers

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## Editorial

Two years on from the centenary celebration of the first Casa dei Bambini, in 2007, we are marking another milestone in the Montessori history. In 1909 Montessori responded to many requests, urging her to record her method. The result was an impressive volume, with a title that wished to stress the science behind the ideas: *Il metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicata all'educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini*. Known by its considerably shorter English title *The Montessori Method*, this book would travel with Montessori a life-time, seeing translations into many languages. In forty years five different editions of the original Italian were published, and Montessori revised, edited, deleted and added with each new edition. The fifth and final edition is better known as *The Discovery of the Child*. Paola Trabalzini, an Italian Montessori scholar, provides many fascinating details to help explain the underlying motives for the editorial choices Montessori made. We expect that both history buffs and “contemporary” minds will be gripped equally by the various historical backdrops outlined.

The theme of this issue is Early Childhood Education, with particular focus on the first three years of life. Maria Montessori was devoted to life, and intensely interested in all of its aspects: whether they were biological, anthropological, medical, cultural, historical or philosophical. And she was an ardent *defender* of life. Perhaps, initially as a medical doctor, but more and more a passionate student of life, the human mind and all its achievements. She grew into a champion of the child, who she saw as the permanent promise. She looked at all of life's manifestations: life's environment and life's

mission, whether mineral or animal. She placed human development within the greater scheme of things, and soon realized that for a human being to develop his full potential all conditions need to be most favourable, from the very start. Beginning at inception, conception, gestation, and pregnancy, a child's start in life perhaps starts with the education of her mother and father.

Most of Maria Montessori's writings that have been published appear to focus on the years three to twelve. And even though she was late in developing a special curriculum for 0-3 training, throughout her life she stressed the importance of the very early years. She knew she shared that feeling with other reformist pedagogues, but she was also very sensitive to all the factors that play a part before birth. She was absolutely convinced that the first three years of life are the truly formative years. Every seed that is planted in that period will grow into a determining factor, pre-signalling development hindrances or successes. In Montessori's words, ‘infancy presents a period of creation, which begins in the tiny body which the mother has given to the world. Such a thought gives us some idea of what is really meant by myths that say man was created from a handful of mud. Like the embryologist dealing with the cell, so it is now with us.’ Montessori observed that we could not yet see in the child the potential of the future adult he is to become, but stressed the importance of the force within the child that must develop. This force ensures that ‘the child becomes the creator who creates himself.’

The first in our theme stories is “Preparation of the Environment for the Young Child

in the Family”, a lecture that Maria Montessori gave on 21 February 1939, Amsterdam. Montessori grabbed the opportunity of addressing a general public, to deliver a “parent education talk” possibly disguised as a talk to explain the design of her child-size furniture, but with a very clear message that the family and school should collaborate, ensuring that both environments are complementary and stimulating growth.

In “The Foundation of the Human Personality: Movement, Language, Independence, Freedom” Judi Orion guides the reader step by step through the stages of early child development. We join the child in his physical and psychical development, and marvel at the speed with which so much progress is made. At each stage Ms Orion stops to emphasize that it is the effort of the child that makes all the difference in the development of independence, and points out its early emergence and necessity. It needs to be supported throughout the remaining stages.

The next article by Susan Mayclin Stephenson shows us what the 0-3 development truly can mean in a very concrete situation. Her report and observations on the development and family situation of a young child in Bhutan reveal the similarities between the philosophy of Montessori’s approach with the natural way a society, still largely unspoiled by modern economic driving forces, receives and nurtures its children. “A Comparison of Montessori Assistant to Infancy Practice and Birth-Three Traditions in Bhutan” will fascinate you.

Cosmic Education has been a recurrent subtheme in *Communications* in the past few years. This issue sees the concluding Cosmic Education lecture that Maria Montessori gave in London in 1936. She continues discussing the earlier aspects of *supra natura* and sweeps her audience along the wonder-

ful achievements of the human mind, while scolding man for his occasional fickleness and lack of humility.

Phyllis Pottish-Lewis makes a strong plea for art—not only as something to give aesthetic pleasure or train us to become astounding artists. As the most important quality of art, she views the creation of awareness, the training of perception, of seeing, and observing. When those skills are trained, they, working together with our verbal skills, can enhance our understanding of the world. This article is based on art workshops, and therefore also offers a number of practical aspects and tips concerning art education.

Nimal Vaz in her lecture Montessori “The Special Needs Child from the Montessori Perspective” explains why we speak of special needs. Special can refer to so many areas in which a child can be challenged, or even under-challenged. Whatever the situation, special children need special understanding and care. Ms Vaz argues passionately that we must never lose sight of the fact that we are working with children whose development we are trying to guide. She adds that the handicapped child needs to be seen as a child foremost, and puts forth that Montessori has much to offer because education is an aid to life.

In our traditional Question and Answer section we reconnect with the 0-3, or Assistants to Infancy theme, and put the use of the pacifier in our “black” books. Dr Silvana Quattrochhi Montanaro expounds on the possible averse effects of giving children pacifiers. She makes a strong plea for withholding them from the child, as they are impediments “in disguise”. The use of pacifiers can thwart language development, and is likely to create problems with the sinking in of the teeth.

Whereas we started with Montessori’s education for the twentieth century, a hun-

dred years on, Dr Steve Hughes in his contribution “Montessori: Education for the 21st Century” postulates that perhaps only now society at large is ready for the Montessori revolution. Only now with the dramatic changes in the constancy of where we live and how we make a living, can we fully appreciate that Montessori offered the perfect tools for human development—for a human being who is creative, collaborative and independent.

Editorial Staff