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**MARIA MONTESSORI:
THE CONCEPT OF THE
DIVINE CHILD**

Jalon Nunes de Farias



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Abstract: In this article we will talk about the Italian educator Maria Montessori (1870-1952). She was an education author; also graduated in medicine, so her pedagogy is methodologically implemented by a scientific matrix, but with a humanist bias and of religious/Catholic origin; Montessori is part of the new education (pedagogy) movement. She was an educator and a physician; she also graduated in anthropology, philosophy and pedagogy (in the theoretical and practical sense). Montessori's conception of the child can be qualified in the field of philosophy, pedagogy and also in the mythical field. Supported by a related bibliographic reading, we seek to present the singular and authentic concept of Maria Montessori, when considering the child as a divine being, therefore, the redoubled care in the act of educating him. The school needs to mold itself to the needs of the student/child, giving them the opportunity to create and recreate their own knowledge.

Keywords: Maria Montessori; Divine Child Concept; New Education; Children's Homes.

INTRODUCTION

There are few names instilled in the history of world education, such as Maria Montessori. This is because her name is commonly associated, and rightly so, with early childhood education, although not many people know her method in depth¹. But, in a few lines, we can say that Maria Montessori was the first woman to graduate in medicine in her country (Italy); she was also a pioneer in the field pedagogical by placing more emphasis on student self-education than

1 It consisted of individualization in preschool education. "In the third edition, corrected and expanded, of the book *El Padrão de la Pedagogia Científica*, Montessori ponders that, despite being a still incomplete experience, limited to the education of young children, the method already constituted an organic whole, which could be adopted with guarantees of success in children's shelters and even in the first grade of primary schools (LANCILLOTTI, 2010, p. 168).

2 We consider as developmental the approach that "seeks in the processes of learning and development a foundation for school education. Much of the model of this approach is related to the concept of motor skill, because it is through it that people adapt to everyday problems. For this approach, we consider that the student has conditions to develop physically and psychically" (RAQUEL, [n.d.], p. 3).

on the teacher's role as a source of knowledge (Ferrari, 2008, p. 1).

As we will see later, Maria Montessori vehemently believed in the capacity for conciliation and in the production of learning on the part of the child, aided by the action of the school. It is as if the child were responsible for teaching adults and not the other way around, but for that, it was necessary – she believed – that adults give such conditions to children, that is, understanding them as a source of purity and truth, love and diverse abilities.

By defending respect for the needs and interests of each student, according to the stages of development corresponding to age groups, Montessori argued that his method did not go against human nature and, therefore, was more efficient than the traditional ones. The little ones would lead their own learning and the teacher would be responsible for monitoring the process and detecting the particular way in which each one manifests their potential (FERRARI, 2008, p. 1).

In this case, from the understanding of the Montessori method, the student is seen as a protagonist, developing an effective and permanent self-education, and the teaching practice help in the balance and in the achievement of peace and internal stabilization, factors that may reflected later on in everyday life.

Thinking in a developmental way², Montessori chose the initial years of a child's life as a priority for attention and studies. For her, the child is not an adult pretender and, as such, an incomplete being, but essentially a human being under construction, endowed

with different abilities and wills, which needs the facilitative accompaniment, developed by the teachers. Since his birth, he is already an integral human being, which reverses the focus of the traditional classroom, centered on the teacher, towards greater flexibility around favoring the child's learning.

Traditional classrooms were viewed with contempt by Maria Montessori. She said they looked like butterfly collections, with each student stuck in place. Anyone who enters a classroom at a Montessori school finds children scattered, alone or in small groups, focused on the exercises. Teachers are mixed in with them, watching or helping. There is no recess time, because there is no difference between leisure and didactic activity. In these schools the classes are not supported by a single textbook. Students learn to search in libraries (and, today, mainly on the internet) to prepare presentations to colleagues (FERRARI, 2008, p. 2).

Therefore, in classes guided by Montessori principles, the student understands that it is necessary to learn to store his study material, the right time to strengthen the bonds of friendship with colleagues, the appropriate time to have his lunch and clean the materials that come to use. All these situations, among others, help in preparing for adult life.

Currently, there are Montessori schools on the five continents of the world, generally grouped in associations that exchange information among themselves. It is estimated that there are around 100 of these institutions in Brazil alone³.

THE LIFE OF MARIA MONTESSORI

Also according to the summary presented by Ferrari (2008, p. 2) Maria Montessori

was born in 1870, in the city of Chiaravalle, northern Italy; she was the only child of a middle-class couple. Since she was a little girl, she had been interested in science, and for that reason she faced resistance from her father and other relatives and friends, in order to study medicine at the important University of Rome.

Inside the University, in contact with professors and students from different regions, Maria Montessori directed her career to the area of psychiatry; as soon as she became interested in children with mental retardation, which would change her life and the direction of the history of education. She noticed that those boys and girls purged from society, as they were considered uneducable, responded quickly and enthusiastically to stimuli to do housework, exercising motor skills and experiencing some autonomy.

Later Maria Montessori graduated in pedagogy, anthropology and psychology and put her ideas into practice at the first Casa dei Bambini (House of Children), in a poor region in central Rome. After that, other houses of the same objectification were founded, in different places in Italy. The success of the houses made Maria Montessori a national celebrity in Italy. In 1922 the government appointed her inspector general of schools in Italy. With the rise of the Fascist regime she decided to leave the country in 1934, but continued to work in Spain, in present-day Sri Lanka, India and the Netherlands, where she died at the age of 81.

The main legacy of Italian Maria Montessori was, without a doubt, to affirm that children carry within themselves the creative potential that allows them to lead learning and find a place in the world. "All knowledge passes through a practice and the

³ The main Montessori schools located in Brazil and affiliated to the Montessori Organization of Brazil – OMB are located in the following Brazilian states: Northern Region: Pará; Northeast Region: Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Pernambuco and Piauí; Midwest Region: Federal District, Goiás, Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul; Southeast Region: Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo and Southern Region: Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. Available at: <<http://omb.org.br/>>. Accessed in Feb. of 2020..

school must facilitate access to it” (BRASIL, 2009, p. 17). It’s what Montessori called ‘help me act for myself’. Another fundamental aspect of Montessori theory is to shift the educational focus from content to the form of thought. The most common criticisms of Montessorianism refer to the individualistic approach and the excess of materials and procedures built within the school, which would make it difficult for students to adapt to other education systems and the ‘real world’.

MONTESSORIAN PEDAGOGY

Reading a little about the life and work of the Italian Maria Montessori, we observe that her ideas were more accepted outside Italy, where she was born and educated, because her theories did not obtain a ‘convincing’ acceptance there, mainly because of the strong presence of traditionally rooted religion and customs.

It is necessary to highlight some concepts found in Montessori’s work: individuality, activity and student freedom are the basis of the theory, with emphasis on the concept of the individual as subject and object of teaching (simultaneous relationship). Montessori defended a conception of education that extends beyond the limits of the accumulation of information.

The objective of the school is the integral formation of the young, an ‘education for life’. The philosophy and methods developed by the Italian doctor seek to develop creative potential from early childhood, associating it with the desire to learn - concept that she considered inherent to all human beings (FERRARI, 2008, p. 2).

Montessori was one of the ‘authentic figures of New Education as an international movement. The reform he recommended was not limited to a simple mechanical replacement of old methods by new, supposedly better ones. No term captures

the process that fundamentally interested her more than reformatio, in the original sense of reorganization and renewal of life’ (RÖHRS, 2010, p. 15).

Its pedagogy is centered on the issue of the child in interactivity with the environment, this environment must be appropriate for children to live and learn. “The fundamental characteristic of its pedagogical program is that it gives equal importance to internal development and external development, organized in a way that complements each other” (RÖHRS, 2010, p. 17). In other words, it is necessary that in the cultural environment, in which they are inserted, the influences of practical life and social life, are in harmony, permeating the simple exercise of transferring knowledge, but paying attention to a collective construction, hence the importance that the child is inserted in a context of normality, from a social, cultural point of view, etc.

Then...

Sensory material can be considered from this point of view as ‘a materialized abstraction’.. It really seems that children are reaching the greatest achievement that their spirits are capable of: the material opens paths to intelligence that, at this age, would be inaccessible without it (MONTESSORI apud RÖHRS, 2010, p. 26).

The aforementioned educational theory also recommends that the educator must cultivate the researcher’s attitude, that is, make constant scientific observations and use intuition in order to discover new needs and possibilities in the development of children’s learning. In his words: “the development of children must be managed responsibly in accordance with the scientific spirit” (MONTESSORI apud RÖHRS, 2010, p. 23).

THE DIVINE CHILD IN MONTESSORIAN PEDAGOGY

We can say that the scientific nature of

Montessori's pedagogy is consolidated in the method⁴, being fed by the psychology and observation of children; Montessori, therefore, found himself in the scientific, psychopedagogical perspective, but infected by a humanist-Christian worldview, in addition to the positivist influence.

On the other hand, there was a mythical-poetic approach in his work method, which conceived the child as a spiritual being (a spiritual embryo), a divine being (with the cult of the boy-god⁵). Therefore, Montessori understood the child as a human being capable of building a new world, in which they will be adult men and women of the future, including being able to prevent a war, if adults listen to them.

Epiphany is the essence of the divine (mythical) child; the myth of the mythical child is updated with the birth of the baby Jesus, renewed at every Christmas party, for example; the boy thought by Montessori is that center of the Holy Family; We must look at the child as if he were the infant cosmos (baby Jesus)! And consider it as a beacon of the future life. We must believe in the child as the Messiah; the future of humanity depends on the child (ARAÚJO, 2013).

Montessori demonstrates absolute confidence in the power and ability of the child (source of love) who supports everything; born in the world, in whatever environment he is born he will be happy (where he is born). It must be looked at to the science of the baby Jesus and educated in a complete way, in all its aspects: physical, moral/ethical and psychic.

The possibility of saving society resides in the child: which is naturally sinful and destructive of its own human and cultural relationships, of the environment, etc.; only inside the child is there the possibility of winning a war; it is,

4 "Thinking about the term 'method', etymologically it means (from the Greek *methodos*, way to reach an end); way in which a goal is achieved. Or the following meaning: program that previously regulates a series of operations that must be carried out, pointing out avoidable errors, in view of a determined result; or still, teaching process or technique; way of proceeding; way of acting; middle" (COSTA, 2001, p 12).

5 In Maria Montessori's work it is common to find biblical quotations and the reference to the Messiah.

it is true, a utopian proposition. The school needs to look at children in a different way, giving them more autonomy and openness to creation and discovery, favoring their natural development.

If the child has a redeeming side, he also has another side in erosion, acquired (by society, by adults): abandonment, loneliness, which cause a stain on the child's personality. The divine capacity comes from the Greco-Roman and Christian sense, but on the other hand, the child bears the mark of helplessness, of the exposed.

The traditional school has a place of displeasure for the child, just like Jesus the Golgotha! The child, like Christ, ends up being an example of hope. Montessori's questions are agonized nowadays, his pessimism about the child is wide open. And the worst thing is that children are abandoned, exposed to loneliness, within their own family (ARAÚJO, 2013).

We need to rethink the way we treat children, at school and in everyday life as well. By defending respect for the needs and interests of each student, according to the stages of development corresponding to age groups, the school will be able to care for the integrity of the child and thus open up a world of discoveries and possibilities. "The little ones must conduct their own learning; it is up to the teacher to follow the action and detect the particular way in which each one manifests their potential" (FERRARI, 2008, p. 3).

Montessori adds:

Our educational object must be to help the development of childhood, not to give them culture. For this reason, after having offered the child the appropriate didactic material to provoke the development of the senses, we must wait for the observation activity

to be developed. (MONTESSORI apud LANCILLOTTI 2010, p. 168).

Therefore, Montessorian pedagogy seeks to help in the normal development of each individual, in their human and social discoveries, as well as in the construction of knowledge, and not only in the transmission of this (which is blind and not reciprocal). Therefore, for this to be achieved, the environment must be as little as possible influenced by the action or teachings pre-established by adults. "The environment must have simple, practical and attractive furniture and objects, which fully lend themselves to children's activity" (LANCILLOTTI, 2010, p. 168).

Finally, with regard to adolescents, Montessori believes that "it is necessary to place a real job in the hands of adolescents, which requires responsibility" (LANCILLOTTI, 2010, p. 171-172). Work is the basis that makes personality development possible and promotes progress in studies. "That's why I proclaim the need for adolescents to move away from their families and undertake real jobs [...] and begin to experience how to earn a living" (MONTESSORI apud LANCILLOTTI, 2010, p. 171-172).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is clear how important Maria Montessori's contribution was and still is to the direction of world education, not only because she respects children's autonomy, creativity and protagonism, but also their freedom, in the construction of a better world, through the choice of what you want to learn, that is, to delve deeper into the classroom.

Respecting the child's interests, without limiting their creativity and freedom, is reflected in the following principles, present in the work of Maria Montessori: when the child respects himself (it implies that he only looks for situations and learning that bring

him beneficial); when the child respects the other (this principle extends to an attitude of non-aggression towards any other living being, regardless of whether it is human, animal or plant); and finally, respect for the environment, understood as the space that promotes the development of life on this planet.

Perceiving the child as a complete human being, however, with many discoveries to be made, is a key factor for us to help - as educators - in their educational and social formation.

"The inspiration of Montessori's early works is anchored in the dogmatic principles of positivist thought. Despite this, contradictorily, Montessori defends the self-education of children" (RÖHRS, 2010, p. 39). The fact that it is based on positivism, we believe, reveals a certain contradiction in relation to some stages of education proposed by it, after all, the positivist, bourgeois, elitist and segregationist model of education never emancipates in a democratic and unconditional way each and every citizen, and in this case, citizens (children) of the whole world.

Therefore,

The educational proposal developed by Montessori for preschoolers was based on the education of the senses.

He considered that the education of the senses had enormous pedagogical importance, and that it would be the necessary basis for the full biological development of the individual, on which his social adaptation would be built (LANCILLOTTI, 2010, p. 168).

Finally, we emphasize that Montessori's emphasis "was more about the biological being than the social, emphasizing that the educational concept is one of growth and development, rather than adjustment or social integration, considering that life is development" (NASCIMENTO; MORAES,

2013). Because it is the biological being (before) that comes together in certain actions; for example: in a school setting; with no desks attached and no rewards and punishments, the child must spontaneously manifest; good could not be conceived as being immobile, nor evil as being active. “Activity and individuality formed, together with freedom, the basic principles of the Montessori system” (NASCIMENTO; MORAES, 2013).

The child’s spirit, therefore, would be free and would be formed through external stimuli. Therefore, for Maria Montessori, the child is free, including in the choice of objects on which he can act and on the actions he must perform, as well as the reflection on such actions.

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