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Box 11, Folder 50 - "The New Children - A Miracle in Education / "The New Children - or - New Method" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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THE NEW CHILDREN - A MIRACLE IN EDUCATION

This is not the place to describe the many , various and astonishing events whihc came tumblin one after the other as out of a conjuror's hat , during that first year , 1907, that Annus Mirabilis 1907. , in the first Casa dei Bambini in Ro,e . If any reader is not acquainted with these happenings it would be a great help towards the better understanding of this essay if he were to pause here and read them .This could be done by reading Montessori's own account of them in her SECRET OF CHILDHOOD , Chapt II , especially that part of it entitle "What They Showed me ".A similar account can be found in the present writers nook MARIA MONTESSORI HER LIFE AND WORK in chapter II under the title Discovery .

From our present point of view what is importance is to lay stress upon the fact that the real cause of the big stir set going by Montessori in the field of education fifty years ago was not the discovery of a "ew Method but - to put it succinctly - the Discovery of the Child . It is o not too much to say that to many of those who witnessed these " revelations ¶ by the children it seemd that anew dimension had been added to human nature in the soul of the child .

For it was not only Montessori but hundreds of others who came from far and near to Rome to see things for themselves who received the same impression .To take ^{an} ~~me~~ example . The London Times (Educational Supplement) sent out its sub-editor , Mrs Sheila Radice , to find out what all the fuss was about . and write up this new educational movement which had taken the world by storm .On her return she published a book , the title of which was THE NEW CHILDREN . Another observer described his impressions under the

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Margherita , was a frequent visitor to Dr Montessori's schools
and became a close friend of Montessori .She remarked "I prophesy
that a new philosophy of life will arise from what we are learning
from these children ". The head of a well-known Religious Order
remarked that "This is a discovery more important than Marconi's"

Even to-day - after fifty years - the impression made on most
discerning people when they visit a good Montessori School for the
first time is not dissimilar . They are apt to make such a comment
as ."These children do not behave like ordinary children , the
children I have known all my life .They are changed in character ,
more concentrated ,better mannered ,more socially developed , and
infinitely more self-disciplined : in a word they are like New
Children "

(on topage 26)

If you were to ask the average educated person to-day (or at least till two or three years ago) who was Montessori the great majority of them would probably reply that she was an Italian lady who invented a new method of education for small children - a sort of modified Kindergarten . And some of the more (mis !) informed might go on to add ; but the method is out of date now having been superceded (or eclipsed) by others more in line with the findings of the most modern psychological research . Almost certainly you would not hear any of them talking about A Miracle in Education , The Discovery of the Human Soul or The New Children . How and why did it come about in the intervening years that Montessori thus came to be associated in the general mind ~~xxx~~ with an educational Method and not with the astonishing revelation of THE New Children ? And which is the more important the more essential thing -- the Montessori Method or the New Children - the discovery of that Deep nature in all normal children of which we have spoken at length above ? Montessori herself constantly in later years spoke of her method "il mio metodo " and actually wrote a book under that title . How can we reconcile these apparently contradictory points of view ?

NO METHOD AT THE BEGINNING

Briefly the answer to this is as follows : When Montessori began her work with the slum children in San Lorenzo she had no method : The Montessori ^{the} method did not as yet exist . She makes it quite clear and beyond any doubt . What came first was the unexpected revelation of the New children - the conversion of those shy , timid , slatternly , ignorant young vandals from the

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the slum tenement building into the orderly , self-disciplined ,
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fact the new children . No one was more surprised at this
unexpected revelation of the deeper nature in the child than she
herself was . And here we might remind ourselves of something
that Montessori herself was never tired of repeating , viz that
one - if not the chief factor in bringing about this revelation
was the almost unique absence of adult interference , a circum-
stance which made it possible for the children to act spontaneously

A NEW METHOD AND A NEW SCIENCE OF EDUCATION COMES

INTO EXISTENCE

In her own brilliant account of this period Montessori
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of the alphabet - the sand paper letters and the card-board cut
out letters for composing words . She had no intention at the
outset of teaching these four and four and a half year olds how
to read and write for " I shared the general prejudice that it
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not before the age of six " . This led to the well -known
"explosion into writing "(I) followed some six months later by
the explosion into reading . Thereupon followed the creation of the
reading Commands , and then more advanced materials for reading
in the form of a little library .

And so once started one thing led to another because
the insatiable appetite of new knowledge shown by the children
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in the sphere of Number . The Number rods -most valuable in
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For it was not only Montessori, but hundreds of others who came from far and near to Rome to see things for themselves, who received the same impression. To take ~~one~~ ^{an} example, The London Times (Educational Supplement) sent out its sub-editor, Mrs Sheila Radice, to find out what all the fuss was about, and write up ~~this new educational movement which had taken the world by storm~~. On her return she published a book, the title of which was THE NEW CHILDREN. Another observer described his impressions under the

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In her own brilliant account of this period Montessori *in the first instance* tells us how she came to provide the children with the letters of the alphabet - the sand-paper letters and the card-board cut out letters for composing words. She had no intention at the outset of teaching ~~these four~~ and four-and-a-half year-olds how to read and write for ["] I shared the general prejudice that it was necessary to begin writing as late as possible - certainly not before the age of six ["]. *But she gave in at the wish of the parents.* This led to the well-known "explosion into writing" (I) followed, some six months later, by the explosion into ["] Reading ["]. *Then came* ~~Thereupon followed~~ the creation of the Reading Commands; and then more advanced materials for reading; *in the form of a little library.*

And so once started, one thing led to another, because the insatiable appetite ^{for} of new knowledge shown by the children increased by what it ^{fed} on. The same sort of thing happened in the sphere of Number. The Number rods - most valuable in themselves at a certain initial stage - soon ~~proved to be~~ *needed* to be supplemented by other and more advanced number materials.

The necessity for new materials

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This spontaneous concentration - this long continued individual work - each child working at its own pace and at its chosen ~~max~~ task - could never have been produced if Montessori had tried to feed these insatiable minds ' "hungry lions ") by means of direct collective teaching with the use of class primers .

It was first of all necessary that the psychological main SPRING which had brought about the revelation of the New children should not be tampered with - that is , that the children who could be liberated from any unnecessary adult influence and be free to choose their own occupations and work with them as long as they liked .

This it became quite clear that this could only be done by providing the children with specially prepared materials for study - or if you prefer for culture - in the various school subjects . in Arithem etc , English , Geometry , History Geography and so forth . In this way , through the collaboration of many helpers , working under the directing genius of Montessori an immense amount of new teaching materials came into existence . And so in this way came into existence what we have elsewhere described as the Prepared Paths to ~~Vulture~~ Culture .

This was not an easy task ; but in the carrying of it out Montessori and her assistants had one sure guide -- the Child . And in this the spontaneous concentration of the children on these new materials was the acid test by which we knew that we were on the right road .

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Handwritten scribble

And thus Montessori and her colleagues found themselves faced with the task of creating new and ever more advanced materials for assisting the mental development of these ~~xxxx~~ " free " children who with their " absorbent minds " - untamed by adult interference fell upon these materials for culture "like hungry lions ".

WHY NEW MATERIALS WERE NECESSARY

The question might be raised :Why was it necessary for Montessori to create new materials for teaching the Three "R"s ,and other subjects ?Were there npt plenty of eaching aids - visual aids and so on already in existence together with a variety of Primers for these subjects ?

The answer to this is very germane to our main theme . For it must be remembered that this was already at that early stage a new kind of schools withdistinguishing characteristics .Amongst these we might mention :

- I) the children worked individually , where as the primers mentioned were designed for ~~xxxxxx~~ collective class teaching or at least for group teaching .
- II)The children chose their occupations and continued at them as long they liked (until "The Cycle of work " was completed)
- III) They were not forced to work - and note it was work they did and not play .
- IV) They showed astonishing spontaneous concentration on their work - at the end of which
- V) They appeared rested rather than fatigued .

acquire new skills + new knowledge

Now in order to make this possible it was (and is) necessary to supply the children withspecial materials for culture so designed that a) they solicit in the children a spontaneous activity combining hand and brain which b) tends to a repetition on the part of the children , and c) through this activity and repetition t they

And to speak more precisely - the concentration of the child.

From the very beginning it was this concentration in the children which impressed her ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ - as in the incident described on page of the small child and the cylinders .

"Many times after wards I observed this phenomenon of concentration ; and always ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ I observed that the child issued from such work more poised , better in his behaviour , full of a moral force - almost as if a new path had been opened up in the depths of his soul. I had now the certainty that the development of character , of the sentiments , and of discipline should proceed from this mysterious and hidden source : and I knew that a law with regard to the soul capable of resolving the problems of education had been revealed to me ."

So now my work was to seek experimentally for objects which were able to stimulate concentration and to make a study of the environment most favorable to it . It was thus that I began to build up my method . All psychologists agree that there is only one perfect method of education - to have a profound interest and an attention lively and sustained . ~~I wished to~~ My wish then was just this to bring about and use these states of concentration - with the mechanical repetition of the exercises which is bound up with them - and ~~thus~~ in this way teach everything which belonged to the acquisition of culture -- writing , reading drawing ; grammar and arithmetic , geometry and foreign languages etc. The attention in order to concentrate needs stimuli with increasing gradations .

strike
First come the objects which appeal to the senses

First it is the objects which appeal to the sense which interest the children : the cylinders , the various dimensions, the grading of colours , the recognition of musical notes , the touching of surfaces . But then it is the things which appeal to the intelligence ; the alphabet , quantities , numbers , words

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, grammar ,arithmetic . the problems of history,nature and so
on upwards until finally we come to things more high and more
abstract - which form as it were a Jacob's Ladder which reaches
right up to heaven "(The Foundations of my method Vita dell
Infanzia March 1963)

Path to Culture

In this way there came into existence
a new form of "Ed" Research + indeed
a new Science of Education.

necessary for bringing them into existence again. That is why we can now say with scientific certainty that the "New Children" \ominus as they were called when they appeared in Montessori's slum schools 50 years ago - are not imaginary beings. Their existence is a sober scientific fact. They can be produced for all and sundry to see, provided that the right conditions are prepared, just as you can produce dahlias or sweet peas if you set about it in the right way, that is if you have the right soil, climate and environmental conditions generally.

It will help to clarify our discussion if, at this point, we make a substantial quotation from an article written in by Dr. Montessori and recently printed in the "Communications", The official bulletin of the Association Montessori Internationale. We shall give these quotations at some length, even though in doing so it may entail a certain amount of repetition here and there.

It might interest us to know the conditions under which these two different natures manifest themselves. Those which produce the tendencies belonging to the superficial nature are those which generally exist. One must realize that to awake the ones, belonging to the deeper nature, one could not have made a pre-established plan, because they were unknown and therefore no one could set out in search of them. It was necessary that for causes not entirely due to chance, these manifestations should get the possibility to appear. To understand what happened one must have a vision of two different processes to arrive at psychological knowledge. One is Research. This involves a psychologist who wants to investigate a certain aspect and sets out to do so. He knows beforehand what he wants and proceeds in his investigation by one method or ~~another~~ another.

I must affirm again not the outcome ... plan of
action .. They were e (p 7) not the outcome of any fixed method .
On the contrary by comparison .

WERE "THE NEW CHILDREN " REALLY NEW ?

Whatever the right conditions are for the manifestation of
the marvellous characteristics of "the New Children " we might
ask --did they ever exist before the advent of Montessori . Was
she the first to see these marvelous traits in action ? Let Mont
herself reply "I am certainly not (page 7 bottom ' ...
See God and the Child

pp 15 - 16 --- belonged to another planet .

back to page 8 small print

As a matter of fact Pest saw these phenomenon only
once - They were a passing phase in his school and he did not see
them again. But they remained impressed on his soul; and he wrote
about them in the endeavour to share the new faith he had gained
but he did not know how to reproduce them , The same experience
came to Tolstoy in his village school in ; but he
too was not able to reproduce it .

"So here we have the case of a discovery but the discoverer
has no power to reproduce the phenomenon because he does not know
the conditions which brought about the discovery . It reminds one
of a story by O Henry of a bartender who - in mixing his drinks -
by accident produced a simply marvellous cocktail . Every one
went mad about this wonderful drink which which produced an almost
beatific state of happiness -- and everyone clamoured for more .
But unfortunately the bartender could not remember what were the
ingredients he had put into it nor their proportions . So the
wonderful cocktail was lost for ever .

What distinguished Montessori from Pestalozzi in this matter
was the fact that she was able to recognise the conditions which

Meanwhile a lady who had come with me had been starting some other children to work with a different piece of the Montessori Arithmetic material -- the short bead stair . The exercise consisted in doing a lot of little sums in addition and subtraction with the units under $10\frac{1}{2}$. Two little girls sat together almost feverishly occupied with this work and one of them - quite off her own bat - volunteered the remark "You know this is the first time that I have really worked at this school (she had been a year in the Kindertarten and half a year in Grade One .)

The same lady had been visiting a Montessori school in Portland , Oregon a week or two before . There she has seen a little girl writing a sentence in French . She asked the Directress Can she read ^{that sentence} those words ? And the Directress replied "No she is only practising writing the words in French . At this the little girl looked up and said "Yes I can " and thereupon began to read the sentences quite accurately . In fact "on ne peut jamais dire "with Montessori children . It is extraordinary how much they pick up from their environment on their own and every Montessori directress will tell you how often she is astonished to find out what the children have learned quite independently of her assistance .