

1. Maria Montessori was a generation older than Piaget and Vygotsky: she was born in 1870, and they were born in 1896. Both men knew her work and commented on it. Piaget was the President of the Swiss Montessori Association for several years. Vygotsky mentioned Montessori in an interesting paper on early literacy written in 1930. It can be accessed at:

www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/words/chapter6.pdf

In it, he commends Montessori for having children learn letters phonetically, and having them write before reading, but he criticizes the content of their messages. He felt the Montessori-schooled children were sending formal declarations of congratulations instead of the more personal messages that he felt were more vital. It is not clear from the article how much he actually observed of Montessori education, but there were schools in Russia during his lifetime. Montessori's role as a constructivist is just now being recognized.

Erik Erikson had Montessori training, and taught in a small private school in Vienna with Peter Blos in the late 1920s. It was organized for the education of the children of Dorothy Tiffany Burlingham, who was in analysis with Sigmund Freud. A student of that school describes his happy memories of it in our *Erik Erikson: a Life's Work* film.

2. Dr. Montessori had a dramatic life. A somewhat critical biography of it was written by Rita Kramer with a foreword by Anna Freud, entitled *Maria Montessori: A Biography*. Montessorians say that the book contains factual errors. A loving portrait of Dr. Montessori and her theories was done by E.M. Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*. In February 2005, Oxford University Press published University of Virginia Professor Angelina Lillard's new book entitled *Montessori: the Science behind the Genius*. The book discusses how modern social science research supports Montessori's ideas.
3. "Montessori" was labeled a generic term by the US Patent Office in 1967. The organization she founded with her son, to continue their work is called the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI). Its headquarters are in Amsterdam, with a US branch office. There are also several other Montessori organizations, such as the American Montessori Society (AMS), the International Montessori Society (IMS), and St. Nicholas Montessori. Each certifies the training of their own teachers, and there are at least two accreditation organizations besides them. However, anyone can open a school and include "Montessori" in the name, so there is great variation in the tone and quality of schools that bear the label.
4. The work of Jean Itard and his student Edouard Seguin inspired Montessori's work with the mentally retarded. Itard is best known for his reports on the feral child "The Wild Boy of Aveyron". (Truffaut's 1970 film on this encounter, *L'enfant Sauvage* has become a classic.) Seguin, was also French, but ended his career in the United States. He was a pioneer in the humane treatment of the mentally retarded. Seguin first developed much of the sensorial equipment that Montessori refined.
5. In the course of making this film, I, the producer, spent days in four Montessori schools. Three were AMI schools, but the fourth was not. I was impressed with how engaged the children were and how they really did seem involved in the activities. The film captures the beauty of the classrooms. Each

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class had children who were not yet “normalized”—who needed more teacher intervention—but the majority of the children were working independently. Seeing very small children in one school’s toddler room competently washing glass objects, and a four year old in a primary room ironing with a real iron impressed me. Outside at lunchtime, the children frolicked naturally and raced around with the vigor one expects from young children.

6. Dramatic play is something that is not fostered in Montessori classrooms. Having produced a film about the value of this, I did miss it in the classes I visited. Montessori felt that children needed real work; she asked why pretend to cook or wash when you could really do it? In response to questioning, Dr. Angelina Lillard, in a phone conversation, supposed that Montessori’s objection to toys and pretend play, in part, came about as a reaction to the Victorian era obsession with fantasies like fairies (such as Tinkerbell in *Peter Pan*) and tall tales. With her feelings about the importance of the years before six, Montessori thought that mental energy should not be squandered on learning about untrue things when the real world was so interesting and knowable. Seeing as how my young grandson knows the names and characteristics of hundreds of Japanese anime characters, but not about the local birds, I’ll grant her this point. But I did miss the wonderful library of story-books that good traditional early education rooms have. In the primary (Montessorian for early education) classes I visited, the books were all non-fiction. In elementary Montessori school classes, fantasy stories are allowed. Older children there are encouraged to do creative writing and participate in dramas.
7. Most Montessori classes in the USA are for children younger than six years, but to fully appreciate the Montessori educational scheme, one needs to observe the classes for older children. In the schools I visited, these were tremendously impressive with children working at interesting tasks in small groups with the teachers serving as resource specialists. In the elementary years, there is a science-based curriculum (Cosmic Curriculum) in which students study the solar system, the biology and geology of the Earth, and their interrelationships. As at all levels of Montessori education, children are taught the scientific nomenclatures. However, the most impressive to me are the math activities with their appealing manipulatives.
8. Montessori was an acute observer of children. For Instance, her chart of language development included in her book, *Absorbent Mind*, very much parallels the growth described in textbooks today. Her descriptions of “sensitive periods” for certain kinds of intellectual growth are being confirmed by brain tomography, which shows tremendous growth in the frontal lobes during the first years of life, and in the language areas in later childhood.
9. The brain image visuals we used in this film are from UCLA’s Laboratory of Neuro-Imaging at www.loni.ucla.edu
10. Dr. Haines is the head trainer at the Montessori Training Center of St. Louis: www.ami.edu/mtcstl

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