

Intercultural perspective in Montessori Pedagogy. Peace and inclusive free context

A perspectiva intercultural na Pedagogia Montessori. Contexto de paz e inclusão

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Received: 10/24/2025 | Revised: 11/02/2025 | Accepted: 11/03/2025 | Published: 11/06/2025

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Abstract

The following documentary article describes a pedagogical vision on Maria Montessori (1870-1952), with a focus on intercultural context (Snyder, 2019). Her methodology revolves around the educational context of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Rome, Italy. With her scientific legacy extending as far as the Netherlands, India, France, Mexico and the United States. Montessori addressed the emergencies of her time period, the First and Second World War. Although there was a strong encounter with other cultures, its interculturality was never discussed. However, its cosmic lesson: the biological and cultural development of the subject concerns perpetual spaces of solidarity. The current social condition of the world outlines intercultural conceptual frameworks. This work analyzes this issue from Montessori's pedagogical perspective, the current impact within the guidelines of Italian public education systems and is concluded with Montessori's intercultural vision in relation to the pedagogical issues of the 21st century.

Keywords: Education; Montessori Method; Childhood; Interculturality.

Resumo

O presente artigo documental descreve uma visão pedagógica de Maria Montessori (1870-1952), com foco no contexto intercultural (Snyder, 2019). Sua metodologia gira em torno do contexto educacional de crianças de famílias desfavorecidas em Roma, Itália. Seu legado científico se estende até os Países Baixos, Índia, França, México e Estados Unidos. Montessori abordou as emergências de sua época, a Primeira e a Segunda Guerra Mundial. Embora tenha havido um forte contato com outras culturas, a interculturalidade nunca foi discutida. No entanto, sua lição fundamental – o desenvolvimento biológico e cultural do sujeito – diz respeito a espaços permanentes de solidariedade. A atual conjuntura social mundial delinea estruturas conceituais interculturais. Este trabalho analisa essa questão a partir da perspectiva pedagógica de Montessori, o impacto atual dentro das diretrizes dos sistemas públicos de educação italianos e conclui com a visão intercultural de Montessori em relação às questões pedagógicas do século XXI.

Palavras-chave: Educação; Método Montessori; Crianças; Interculturalidade.

Resumen

Este artículo de tipo investigación documental describe una visión pedagógica de María Montessori (1870-1952), centrada en el contexto intercultural (Snyder, 2019). La metodología de la médica italiana, reflexiona alrededor de la educación infantil en un contexto desfavorecido de Roma, Italia. Parte de su legado científico se logró en Holanda, India, Francia, México y Estados Unidos de Norteamérica. En sí, trató la emergencia de su época, la Primera y Segunda Guerra Mundial, a pesar de su encuentro estrecho con otras culturas, nunca argumentó la interculturalidad, sin embargo, su lección cósmica: desarrollo biológico y cultural del individuo, atañe a espacios perpetuos de solidaridad. La condición social del mundo actual, delinea marcos conceptuales interculturales. Por ende, se analiza la cuestión desde la mirada pedagógica de Montessori, el impacto actual dentro las directrices de los sistemas de educación pública italiana y se concluye con la visión intercultural de Montessori relacionadas con las cuestiones pedagógicas del siglo XXI.

Palabras clave: Educación; Pedagogía Montessori; Niñez; Interculturalidad.

1. Introduction

To engage with the Montessori method is to address the social needs found in the basic formation within the educational context. Needs that require nurturing through good practices starting from elementary school. Upon analyzing the author's reflections, her discourse did not specifically address the concept of interculturality, but it did address human rights. Regarding the culture of peace, she insisted on "organizing peace, preparing scientifically through education" (Montessori, 2007, p. 4); her vision emphasized freedom, ecology, and coexistence, social interaction through speech linked to the construction of a better world. Her method has been implemented in multicultural Italian contexts and tested at the Montessori Foundation by Coluccelli (2020), mainly in primary schools.

Regarding the development of students between the ages of 6 and 12, the author defined this stage as a "cosmic vision." In other words, children acquire knowledge through action and interaction with the world around them. This idea, which she proposes as a driving force for teaching and learning in primary schools, pursues a set of knowledge in relation to the universe: the planet, nature, humanity, society, the body, communication, the mind and history. The educator affirms the correlation between the knowledge shared between children and adults: "every time we want to show children something, they come and crowd around us with boundless interest (...)" (Montessori, 2007, p. 10), outlining the potential for knowledge in children at the age of six.

The scientific pedagogy method (Montessori, 1909) was a phase that emerged during the fascist era, a novel concept at the time. As the title suggests, science was taught at an early age, one of the educational activities consisted of children observing celestial objects through a telescope. In this situation, teachers are called upon to transmit the knowledge and cause an effect on students, so that children can synthesize what they have learned through their ability to relate knowledge between context and the universe. On the other hand, in relation to educational content, he states that subjects should be related as a whole and should be able to help awaken interest and curiosity in students, in order to turn them into explorers of new knowledge.

2. Methodology

This documentary research was carried out from an indirect source, that is, a bibliographic review (Snyder, 2019). This study was qualitative in nature (Pereira et al., 2018) and of the specific type of non-systematic narrative review (Rother, 2007). In the study, the information was collected from the Google Scholar database because it is an open and free access resources for pedagogical study. The search words or descriptors for the research were: Education, Montessori Method, Childhood and Interculturality.

3. Results and Discussion

The Montessori method is an educational tool that has achieved international significance. It is closely related to intercultural epistemology, whose similarities are reflected in Abdallah-Pretceille's Intercultural Pedagogy (1986), a work based on a triad where the following concepts appear: the ontological question, which refers to the cultural identity of human beings that is forged during their relationship with individual and collective culture and as a result, identity is the product of interaction with other cultures (where language and society are intertwined); the epistemological question, which emphasizes the importance of appreciating and recognizing other worldviews, hence, different cultural perspectives influence the understanding of the world and how knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation; and the praxeological question, which focuses on practice and action and explores cultural differences in how they manifest themselves in everyday life,

interpersonal relationships, communication, and social interaction. These questions as a whole appear in Montessori's teaching strategies. The Five Great Lessons will be further discussed.

In Favaro's words, intercultural pedagogy is carried out through two approaches: "identity" and "culture." In contrast, a "relativist model is designed in which the image of many cultures side by side is shown" (Portera, 2013, p. 23), that is, a multicultural model. In contrast, intercultural pedagogy weaves together social encounters, "relationships, coexistence, without ignoring the conflicts that may arise from this, whose sole objective is education for all" (Portera, 2013, p. 48). Consequently, the ideal is to create human harmony. According to Fiorucci, intercultural education makes sense when it moves in the direction of a democratic school, a space for growth, social interaction, and personal emancipation (2019).

Nanni (1992) highlights the importance of the prefix "inter" between the concepts of 'exchange' and "interaction" to avoid a unidirectional process in the transmission of knowledge. He also highlights the empathy of the learner as an emotional factor; this is so that they fall in love with cultural diversity. Landing in intercultural teaching, as Giusti (2017) suggests, requires observation as a tool that is capable of finding connections between cultures. However, to tell the truth, it is essential to know the learners in order to choose the teaching method and the correct content.

3.1 The Cosmic Plan

The cultural aspect of the Cosmic Plan (Montessori, 2007, pp. 9-10) outlines the educational development of children between the ages of 6 and 12: "[...] Psychologically, their personality changes decisively and, as nature has determined, during this period children acquire everything related to culture [...]. In the previous stage, they learn about their environment. "At this stage, the seed of everything is sown, [...] ready to welcome what will later germinate in the form of culture." However, "if the mind is not attended to and its vital needs are not satisfied, [...] it will resist the knowledge that can be imparted to it." In addition, it deals with the curiosity of tender age and "every manifestation of culture is received with enthusiasm," the fruit of which will radiate throughout their world and into the future.

The culture that was broadly designed in the 20th century by the Italian author, in virtue of the need to create a methodology to transmit "the factors of culture" to children, not as a content project "but by sowing as many seeds of interest as possible." Consequently, as children grow up, "when their will begins to give orders, it will germinate and the individual will be able to adapt to these times of expansion" (Montessori, 2007, p.10).

Furthermore, regarding the concept of culture, this time in relation to the context of the 21st century, Dietz (2012) specifies that intercultural education finds its center in the anthropology of migration, which contributes to a good education in the sense that personal character implies a good relationship with one's neighbor. This author analyzes the intergroup and intercultural structures of contemporary society. He also emphasizes educating in and for diversity as part of an intercultural project that aims to redefine and reinvent the nationalist conception, despite being modeled after Western tradition.

This article outlines interculturality in Italy, which has faced challenges as a result of the large number of immigrant children in public schools. Given this situation, there have been direct impacts on school programming, which, prior to the arrival of immigrants, was tailored to a nationalist and standardized society. However, 21st-century schools require intervention in an intercultural context. It is worth noting the bureaucratic issues of public schools: organization and teaching content, that is to say, the teaching-learning activities that take place in the classroom.

The Montessori school provided an incomparable education. Children in the Cosmic Plan (ages 6 to 12) already "know how to read and write, are interested in mathematics, science, geography, and history, [...] and find it easier to learn other subjects." The educator "is faced with an individual who has already acquired the foundations of culture and is eager to

build on this knowledge, to learn about any topic in depth.” Therefore, intercultural teaching can be divided into five topics (Coluccelli, 2020, pp. 90-91), known as The Great Lessons:

1. The Story of the Universe
2. The Coming of Life
3. The Coming of Humans
4. The story of Writing (engaged with the target language)
5. The story of Numbers

Said lessons will be eventually described in detail.

3.2 Peace Pedagogy

The issue of peace has been relentlessly pursued by European education, especially after the effects of the First World War and World War II. This has also been reflected in international projects developed by UNESCO's International Bureau of Education under the guidance of psychologist Piaget, who was head of the Bureau from 1929 to 1968. At that time, cooperation between nations was necessary to create education for peace. To achieve this, Piaget guided the education systems of the UNESCO member countries, whose educational innovation work is based on a method of cognitive development. His theoretical contributions were developed around peace. Today, the same values remain, but this time the primary focus is on pedagogy in intercultural contexts.

The method developed by Maria Montessori (1870-1952) has represented an action mechanism in Italian pedagogy. The work of this physician was influenced by positivism and followed an activist practice, with the establishment of the “Children's House,” a school located on the outskirts of Rome that provided education to children suffering from social deprivation. Up until now, this school model has spread throughout the world and has set an example for its inclusive nature, as is the case with schools in Ghana and Ivory Coast, which are part of the African project carried out by non-governmental organizations: Terre Gemelle, among other projects, financed with European funds as international educational assistance.

About the topic of humanism, according to the author, is an effort to instill in children the skills of self-reflection: who am I? On the other hand, who is the other? The study of various cultures, the functions of society, and the history of humanity. International educational policies in support of children propose a visionary school that strives for a new humanism and allows for a vision that shapes future generations of human beings who are aware of their environment, empathetic and have a lifelong learning outlook (Toledo Sarracino et al. 2024).

As a consequence, the school is committed to helping students identify and solve problems, to understand their human condition and significance, to provide scientific and technological knowledge. As well as offering the appropriate tools to develop the ability to adapt to any context. This is why it can be said that Montessori pedagogy in schools is committed to encouraging the inclusion of immigrant and host children: accepting and welcoming new classmates into the school.

Regarding human condition, the international guidelines set out in the UN (United Nations) 2030 Agenda disseminate directions to raise awareness and promote participation in global education circles to solve the problems of environmental degradation, climate change and energy crises. Similarly, they raise awareness of the equitable distribution of economic resources and even emphasize the importance of intercultural and religious dialogue. To summarize, global policies promote values that favor the common good, the safeguarding of natural, cultural, and linguistic resources and economic issues within the global community.

3.3 Intercultural Approach in Cosmic Vision

Montessori reflected on the intellectual potential of children, which is why she believed that teaching should be able to enrich education with real and universal arguments and that “all things are part of the universe and are connected to each other, as part of the whole” (Montessori, 2007, p. 19). She went on to express her desire to avoid the transmission of fragmented knowledge (she used the word “crumbs”), whereby students store information without reasoning about the causes behind it, limiting their intelligence during their formative years. To achieve meaningful knowledge, the scientific method uses “experimentation, manipulation, play, narrative, and artistic expression” (Coluccelli, 2020, p. 86).

The elements surrounding intercultural didactics can be placed into the previously mentioned five “Great Lessons”;

First: The origin of the Universe and Earth. To address this, a cosmic story is read. This will set the stage for activities involving subjects such as astronomy, meteorology, chemistry, physics, geology, geography, etc. It is worth mentioning that the creator of the method produced useful material for all the subjects mentioned, with a secular perspective.

Second lesson: The origin of life. The timeline is reconstructed using images of the ecosystem, plants, and animals. With this introduction, the narrative deals with those who have inhabited the earth throughout time. The story with the title of the lesson opens up knowledge about biology: cells and microorganisms. It touches topics such as botany and the animal world. Children learn with instruments such as telescopes and photography, which will undoubtedly lead to observation and analysis after reading the story of the Cosmos.

Third lesson: Related to the origin and presence of humans on earth, or if it is preferred, of mankind. Three characteristics emerge from the story—which are known as gifts—that make the presence of the species relevant to safeguarding the earth. By virtue of these gifts, humans can build, have the ability to imagine, carry out their will with their own hands and know how to love because they have a heart. From this derive the responsibilities that will lead children to learn about history, cultures and continents. The activities consist of relating the history of world cultures, art, social sciences, discoveries, scientists and their methods.

Fourth lesson: Contains the history of writing. The cosmic tale narrates the history of communication (in the target language) through signs. It covers the discourse of world writings and their development: pictograms, symbols, ancient alphabets and the invention of printing. Children will discover that languages have affinities. They are classified into groups, derived from the same linguistic root. The subjects and topics in this lesson use reading, poetry, mythology, etc. This allows for analysis and logic of the text. Writing is practiced through composition, such as letter writing. Language is developed through the study of foreign languages, lectures, recitation, among others. Linguistic structures include alphabets, grammar, punctuation rules, simple and complex sentences.

Fifth lesson: This lesson deals with mathematics, the origin of the number system, which was limited over time, and with the encounter of cultures, the decimal system was created. The content in this teaching stage involves mathematics, numbers, scientific concepts and the biographies of prominent mathematicians; geography refers to shapes, theorems and the nomenclature of lines and angles.

3.4 International perspective

It is worth noting that Maria Montessori's method uses scientifically proven material. Taking the result of her work in France where she collaborated with two educators: Jean Itard and Eduard Séguin as an example. She also conducted research in India for seven years. Her career was notably influenced and shaped by her contact with children from different cultures, demonstrating an intercultural character and her view of a context of intercultural humans. Taking Montessori's cosmic vision and her description of human beings is in line with the objectives of the UN's 2030 Agenda. It is closely related to human

beings who respect their social and natural environment in the following ways. In relation to the universe, she sees human beings as part of a cosmic plan, in which each individual has a universal purpose and function. In terms of education, it promotes comprehensive development from a holistic perspective of childhood, going beyond cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual issues. According to Montessori, this set of values enables children to discover and understand their cosmic mission.

Regarding the 2030 Agenda, which sets out seventeen goals, it is important to analyze the topics related to sustainable development: Quality Education and Reduced Inequalities. These are closely linked to Montessori's intercultural cosmic concept pedagogy. It is worth briefly touching on the intercultural scope of some points that Montessori and the 2030 Agenda have in common. With Quality Education (Agenda Goal), Montessori focuses on the individual development and needs of each child, promoting active, meaningful learning adapted to their learning rhythms and styles. This aligns with the goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all, thus ensuring that children have access to quality education that allows them to develop their full potential.

In Reduced Inequalities (Agenda Goal), the Montessori method promotes inclusion, attention to diversity, and individual differences as learning opportunities. This is related to the goal of reducing social inequalities and ensuring equal opportunities for all, regardless of their origin and personality. Montessori education encourages children to respect the environment and connect with nature, designing outdoor activities for children to explore their natural surroundings. This is related to the goal of promoting sustainable production and consumption practices to ensure the protection of the planet. However, there is no explicit relationship between the 2030 Agenda and the Montessori method, although there are pedagogical traces of the author in the values of the afore-mentioned Goals.

In summary, Montessori pedagogy focuses on childhood within the educational process and the comprehensive nature of children's abilities as a tool for achieving peaceful intercultural contexts. The intercultural pedagogical perspective is an educational approach that vitally shapes a set of values and skills to be transmitted to children and turn them into responsible human beings in relation to history and the universe. These values become a constant for teaching in intercultural contexts. Educational systems, in general, and all those involved in education must be committed to facing the new conditions that human beings discover in the universe and invent, to mention a few technologies, such as artificial intelligence.

4. Final Considerations

Finally, in this part of this documentary article, the literature that was reviewed took an important place when conducting this research. As we identify the impact of the Montessori Pedagogical Method in Italian educational system, it helps us to appreciate and promote in our fieldwork with students: Inclusion, Attention to diversity in the childhood, and individual differences as new ways of learning opportunities around the world. It is crucial to have the grounds for future of the tremendous work that Maria Montessori did for the educational system by considering: The Cosmic Plan, Peace Pedagogy, the Intercultural Approach and Cosmic Vision as well as the International Perspective for the teacher training programs around the world in the 21st Century.

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