



Maria Montessori
by Anabel Joanne Tocco

Maria Montessori has been described as a feminist, a pioneer, and an icon, even though many don't know her name. However, while at first glance her name may seem unrecognizable, it is easy to recognize the term Montessori School, a school that has transformed education around the globe. There is even a Montessori school right in my hometown. Creating a brand-new system for education is no small feat and Maria Montessori did it in a time of great adversity, hurdling many obstacles in her path.

While in today's world it doesn't seem out of the blue for a woman to pursue higher education, in Italy during the 1800s, it was practically unheard of. Maria Montessori grew up in Rome, having a childhood full of libraries, museums, and schools, being practically immersed in new knowledge. However, this was different from most people, and when she started pursuing her higher education, she had to attend an all-boys technical college. Her perseverance in continuing her education admitted her into the University of Rome's medical program. This made a huge impact on the culture in Italy, opening the door for other women in this field. When she graduated, she was among the first female physicians in Italy. However, her goals quickly shifted from being medical-focused to being more about education.

Montessori began to immerse herself in educational theory, and she began to observe and improve upon the methods used to teach children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Soon after, she was appointed co-director of a new training institute for special education teachers. This time as co-director was very important as Montessori was able to experiment and observe different teaching methods to discover the most successful ones. The children began to make significant gains, and she started to make a name for herself. However, the reason the Montessori method gained so much popularity was due to the phenomenal impact she made on the children of Italy. The childcare center she opened in San Lorenzo, Italy for underserved children became an immediate success. This was the first of



its kind in Italy, and the children within her program were thriving due to her unorthodox methods. The environment in her center fostered the natural desire for learning and gave the children freedom to prepare material and essentially teach themselves. Some of the most important skills that the children learned were concentration, attention, and spontaneous self-discipline.

Montessori's methods attracted the attention of many across her country, leading to Montessori schools being founded across the world, starting in Western Europe. The methods that Montessori created established a brand-new approach to education and changed the systems across the globe. However, due to Montessori's humble beginnings, she also used her platform to fight for women's rights, along with promoting her system for education. She became a leading feminist voice in Italy and beyond due to her fights for more opportunities for women. Rather than be hindered by limits being put on women at that time, Montessori was able to break free and make a name for herself, hoping to encourage that in others.

From the rights women have today, such as getting educated or becoming doctors, to the specialized education system being taught around the globe, Montessori has changed the world for the better. Her Italian heritage and childhood in Rome, along with access to schools and opportunities to help the Italian youth, aided in her accomplishments, along with the importance of Italian culture in her life. The importance of a work-life balance and the value of family impacted how she created her education system because of the way that children learn. Montessori changed the emphasis of one-size-fits-all education to one that is tailored to the needs of each individual child. This is especially important outside of Italy where work or school are hardly separated from daily life. In this way, Montessori's impact on the world is profound.



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