



Maria Montessori
by Jack Gregory Wittmus

Maria Montessori was someone who changed the way we approach the complex area of life we call education. This accomplishment was not something that came easy, in fact, it took many risks and failures to achieve it. When Montessori was young, she had always been thirsty for knowledge and advancement. This gift can be traced back to her parents. Her mother and father were both hardworking individuals in Chiaravalle, Italy. Beyond this, her mother was well-read and educated – something unusual for Italian women at the time. This strong, deviant, Italian heritage is what made Maria Montessori the strong and perseverant woman she was.

As she grew older, she would leave her own mark by breaking gender barriers in education. At 13 she entered an all-boys technical institute to prepare for her prospective career in education. After some time, she decided to pursue a different career, she had her heart set on becoming a doctor. When she applied to the University of Rome's Medical School, she found her first setback – she was rejected. Being the woman she was, she did not take no for an answer. She went on to take additional courses and eventually gained, through rigorous persistence, admission. When she graduated, she continued to succeed in the field of medicine, becoming one of Italy's first female physicians. This “never quit” attitude is what I see as a direct result of her Italian heritage. Her mother was someone who refuted gender expectations and had a constant itch to learn. I see a lot of these beliefs within Montessori. In addition to this, the ideas of perseverance and commitment are present within Italian culture and way of life. In my personal life, my Italian ancestors worked to build the life that I am blessed to live. They did this by being honest, hardworking, and loyal people. All of these “Italian qualities” shine within Maria Montessori.

Montessori's early practice dealt mostly with psychiatry, more specifically, teaching children with intellectual and development disabilities. Throughout her career, she made great advancements, and in doing so, was also able to dissect and analyze the previous methods of teaching. Her opportunity to implement her ideas came when she was appointed co-director of a new training institute for special education teachers. She put a new method to help the children learn, which she believed would boost their progress and understanding, to test right away. This new method was centered around the children's natural desire to learn and allowed them to choose their own materials to work with. Following its initial success, Montessori opened a full-day childcare in San Lorenzo, Italy. This was the risk that made Montessori the woman we remember and celebrate today. Taking a large risk and exposing her methods to large numbers of children allowed Montessori and the world to see how effective her ideas were. As time went on, the “Montessori Method” began to take over the world of education and Montessori schools had opened across Western Europe and eventually the United States.



This growth has truly allowed us to enjoy the benefits of Montessori's system, and these benefits are the very thing helping these young individuals in the education system to this day. Throughout Montessori's life she has always had a tie to Italy, a tie larger than we could ever understand. This tie is the motivation that pushed her to open her first childcare center in San Lorenzo, the tie that motivated her to help the children in a poverty-stricken area, the tie that always put the children as her first priority. But this tie is more than just the country or the city she calls home, it is the tie to culture, the traditions, the heritage. Italy is a country of rich in all three of these aspects and these aspects are what makes the country and the people within it some of the best in the world. With the support of these outstanding people, she was able to achieve greatness. Maria Montessori changed the way that young children learn and progress. This is something that has truly benefited society and will have a lasting impact. This idea stems from the idea that education shapes our future leaders and successors. With a solid educational foundation, such as the "Montessori Method," the future leaders of society are being shaped as you read this. Montessori is truly a hero in all respects, and it is important we recognize and celebrate her Italian heritage who made her the outstanding woman she was.