

Montessori Principles for Adult Education and Training: Is the Montessori Methodology Suitable for Adults? The Italian Experience at Lingua Più Città di Castello

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Abstract

Lingua Più is an official Training Center for Foreign Languages and ICT in Italy, Città di Castello.

Our expertise is based on the application of Montessori method for adults' training.

With our speech we will show the audience how a small training centre in a small Italian town has been able to elaborate a new approach for training adults, based on the Montessori Method, and present our methodology.

Maria Montessori gave children the freedom to learn following their own pace, ability, and attitude.

Everyone involved in the educational system, is globally facing the need of quick qualifications and/or specialised qualifications, this usually involves adults.

Also, now people on 2nd and 3rd age ask for further education and training, both for personal interest and professional purposes.

This means that stakeholders in the educational field for adults must offer a different approach for a faster and more effective education, something that follows students' pace and reduces the stress caused by a limited amount of time available.

Lingua Più has successfully started an application of the Montessori method applied to adults with its students.

⇒ *Why the Montessori Method for adults?*

- ❖ *The name "Montessori" is now synonymous of a high quality and effective education system. The Montessori Method is a pedagogical approach structured to teach children. At the beginning it was applied to children with learning difficulties and poor background: it had such good results that it became a curricular approach, worldwide.*

It was applied, and it is still applied, with children up to the age of 11, and is sometimes applied to teenagers.

⇒ *Why Lingua Più is involved in Montessori Method?*

- ❖ *Lingua Più is from Città di Castello, the place where Maria Montessori, together with our local Baroness Alice Franchetti, a good friend of hers, elaborated and refined the methodology and set up the first primary schools. Also, the first training course for Montessori teachers was held in 1909 in Città di Castello. Again in Città di Castello she printed her book "Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica"*

Following 2 researches carried on in 9 European countries, it seems that only Lingua Più is using this method applied to adults learners.

This expertise, particular of Lingua Più, acquired in many years of teachers' training and improvements, resulted in two EU projects:

"Frojol – Free Style Montessori on the Job Learning" designed for:

- ✓ *Teachers/ trainers - professionals from schools or training centres*
- ✓ *Tutors - professionals at work places, who tutor trainees*

"MMLT – Montessori Methodology in Language Training" addressed to:

- ✓ *Language teachers/ trainers to adults 20+*
- ✓ *Language trainers of trainers*
- ✓ *Students of language teaching*
- ✓ *Language students*

Both projects have a Guide for Teachers and Trainers written by Lingua Più.



Introduction

“This book of methods compiled by one person alone, must be followed by many others.

It is my hope that, starting from the individual study of the child educated with our method, other educators will set forth the results of their experiments. These are the pedagogical books which await us in the future” (Conclusion (Chapter XXII) to first Montessori’s publication in English, *The Montessori Method*, Montessori, 1912, p. 374).

Maria Montessori (August 31, 1870 – May 6, 1952) was an Italian physician and educator best known for the philosophy of education that bears her name, and her writing on scientific pedagogy. Her educational method is in use today in public and private schools throughout the world.

She printed her first book on her method, “Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica” in Città di Castello, in 1909. Still in Città di Castello, in the same year, Maria Montessori held the first training course for teachers.

Later, Maria Montessori started some primary schools in Città di Castello where she applied her methodology, together with her friend, the local Baroness Alice Franchetti.

100 years after the opening of the first Montessori school (“La Casa dei Bambini” Rome, 1907) – Laura Gastaldi and Roberta Marsili at Lingua Più, a Language Center in Citta di Castello, started testing the basic Montessori principles in adult training. They approached Montessori Method, because of the connection of their town with Maria Montessori, the respect and consideration they have for this woman, the study of her work, and also for the necessity for new effective approaches for teaching adults.

The results they reached strengthened their opinion, that even in the 21st century the Montessori Method is still an effective approach, and even applicable to a different target group: adults.

Researches carried on in 9 European countries, proved that only Lingua Più is adapting this method to adults learners.

This distinctive expertise of Lingua Più, acquired also in many years of teachers’ training and improvements, resulted in two EU projects:

“**Frojol – Free Style Montessori on the Job Learning**” designed for:

- ✓ Teachers/ trainers - professionals from schools or training centres
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How Lingua Più adapted Montessori Method to Adults’ training

The 12 Montessori principles

Listed below are the *12 Montessorian Learning Principles* deriving from the revolutionary studies of the Maria Montessori which Lingua Più considered suitable to be adapted to adults’ training

- ❖ Self-directed learning.
- ❖ The teacher is an "observer" not a lecturer.
- ❖ Sensitive learning periods
- ❖ Better learning through repetition
- ❖ Suitable environment
- ❖ Self control of mistake in didactical material
- ❖ Choose own learning time
- ❖ Learning by doing
- ❖ Movement analysis
- ❖ Silence exercise
- ❖ Good manners
- ❖ Tidy rooms

The full application of these principles could revolutionize adults teaching, enabling the promotion of confident, autonomous learning among adult students by eliminating or at least alleviating the major causes of stress and inhibition.



The 12 Montessori Learning Principles into 4 macro categories

1) Macro Category: ENVIRONMENT - This is the key of the Montessori method to foster autonomy

Suitable environment: the surroundings must be able to function as the real “teacher”

Tidy rooms: things should be easy to find and use so that learners can work on their own.

2) Macro Category: THE DIDACTICAL MATERIAL (TEACHING TECHNIQUES)

Self-directed learning: learners choose learning goals, means, evaluation criteria

Self-control of mistakes in didactical material for self-correction and evaluation

Learning by doing: learners discover rules through successful or unsuccessful use of the spoken language

Better learning through repetition: activities are designed to solicit repetition

Choose own learning time: learners self-pace, deciding when and for how long to work.

3) Macro Category: TEACHER’S ROLE

The teacher is an “observer”, not a lecturer: observation permits perfecting materials

Silence Exercise: the teacher promotes self-awareness and control through total silence or a kind of

Good manners: the teacher treats students with respect and expects the same from them

4) Macro Category: RESEARCH FOR THE DIDACTICAL MATERIAL

Movement analysis of learners: their body language during lessons and with the materials they are currently using. To know learners and to test the material (see also: The teacher is an “observer”, not a lecturer)

Sensitive learning periods: (or the equivalent states in adults) are taken into consideration in preparing the environment and the learning materials.

Where we started

With FROJOL project we adapted the 12 principles to the six Montessori characteristics selected by the Dutch Montessori Association:

- 1 Head, heart and hands
- 2 Learning by choosing
- 3 Reflection
- 4 Social learning
- 5 Integrated learning
- 6 In and outside the school building

In Frojol Manual, for each of those 6 characteristics we gave a general explanation of the principle, then we checked the possibility of transferring it into VET and suggested different ways in which these principles can be applied both in the classroom setting and in on the job learning. We also highlighted the main Montessori principles we referred to for the application.

With MMLT project, we started from what we called a kind of band-aid: the application of some of the 12 Montessori principles to the resolution or alleviation of the main stress causes that adult learners usually suffer. Those stress causes were defined after researches and interviews with many trainers and teachers in EU.

The 10 main stress causes are:

- Fear of teacher’s expectations
- Need of immediate results
- Difficulties in memorization (for personal deficiency and/or psychological blocks)
- Need of grammar structure before starting speaking a foreign language
- Fear to make mistakes
- Peer pressure (from class mates)
- Time pressure due to scheduled programs
- Sense of loyalty towards own native language and culture
- Difficult in using the target language avoiding literal translation
- Lack of self-confidence

In MMLT Manual for each of the 10 stress causes we supplied:

- Symptoms
- Suggested activities and approaches
- Reference to Montessori principles

- How those Montessori principles are applied to children

Then we dedicated a Chapter for the full implementation to adults, with practical examples of Language lessons to Adults with the application of Montessori Method. To allow teachers to build up their own Montessori Class for Adults, we gave hints and suggestions.

We believe that the full application of our Methodology for Adult training, based on Montessori Method, would foster learners autonomy and eliminate the main causes of stress, both in on-the-job training and in a foreign language learning.

For more info please refer to the Manual FROJOL and Manual MMLT.

Peculiarities of Montessori teaching in general and implemented with adults

Montessorian adult teaching can be defined as an informal, task-based, real-life post-communicative approach fostering autonomy, and the quintessence of problem-solving learning.

Montessori teachers are respectful of the intelligence and integrity of the learner who is to be assisted but not directed. Learners are not empty recipients to fill with predefined “knowledge” but active agents.

Montessori teachers cultivate honest relationships with their students. Montessori teachers will accept to learn from their students, observing the informal ways they seek to acquire a second language to meet their needs

Montessori teachers get familiar with their students by using needs analysis and personal interviews and chats.

Montessori teaching is informal and in constant evolution. In Montessori teaching there is no official textbook for any course, there is no pre-established program or goals, no standardized evaluation criteria for all learners. Thus Montessori students acquire, besides linguistic and interpersonal intelligence: intrapersonal and existential intelligence vital for deciding goals. To a lesser degree, they may also develop their logical-mathematical and naturalistic intelligence.

Montessori teaching is based on the exploration of the environment: indeed, Montessori students not only explore the classroom environment, but also the whole world, to which the classroom materials connect them.

The 3 Maria Montessori’s maxims we should refer to when teaching adults

In “The Child in the Family” (1950), Montessori lists three maxims:

1. Observe all the reasonable activities of the child and try to understand them
2. Satisfy as much as possible the child’s desire to act: do not serve him, but educate him to become independent
3. Since children are more susceptible than we think, we must be very cautious [i.e., honest ethically] when dealing with them

...translated....

Really understand your students, from the inside.....

Really help them become autonomous.....

Really establish a relationship of honesty and trust....

And thus be open to teaching like that.....

....that is...

- no institutional program and no Individual Learning Program....but evolving research that starts with questions that students feel as urgent
- no textbook but a series of tasks, the sum of which will be the program
- no exams but self-evaluation and group evaluation, with remedial resources available.

Do teachers accept to teach like this?

If they do, then their role will change and their role will be:

not to teach,

not to judge,

not to correct homework

not to correct exams,

not to attend boring meetings to “program” course syllabi,

not to look up answers to student questions (they should learn to do it themselves),

not to motivate students,

not to discipline students,

not to do anything during a lesson except present the materials and then observe how they are used, in order to know what to eliminate, change or introduce for the next time.

Do teachers accept to teach like this?

Most of teachers, when interviewed or during seminars, think they already apply the Montessorian principles in part.

But when they say this, they are thinking of the external manifestations (the 12 principles)

What about the internal maxims (The 3 Maria Montessori’s maxims) that should guide their behavior?

So, we ask teachers if they really apply these three, asking the following questions, for them to think:

A. Do you really establish a relationship of honesty (questioning things with your students)?

- Do you question your Institution, your course, your textbooks for their effective relevance to the real needs, interest and aspirations of your students?
- Can you talk frankly with your students about your limits as teachers, your partialities, etc?
- Do you recognize the arbitrariness of any exam, including yours, in spite of your best efforts?
- In general, do you really create relationships of honesty (questioning things with your students)?

B. Do you really help your students become autonomous (meaning self-directed)?

- Do you permit your students to plan their course of studies according to their priorities?
- Do you have your students use mostly self- correcting materials? Do you make remedial materials available to them, in case the self-correcting materials reveal weaknesses?
- Might you (or do you) permit/teach self-evaluation and group assignment of final marks?
- In general, do you really help your students become autonomous (which means self –directed)?

C. Do you really understand your students, from the inside? (doing things with them?)

- You know what you think is best for them, but do you know what they really think is best?
- Do you know what would make them really want to study you discipline, marks aside?
- Do you create occasions (e.g. by doing things with them outside the classroom), so that you can become aware of their inner aspirations (the ones they themselves see confusedly)?
- In general, do you really understand your students, from the inside (doing things with them)?

And... what about this conference?

Are we applying Montessorian principles here?

- Are we really establishing a relationship of honesty and trust with you?
- Do we really know you and your needs and aspirations, from the inside?
- Are you learning to self-direct your growth as teachers or managers?

No!

References

[1] The Montessori Method, Montessori, 1912

[2] The Child and the Family, Montessori; 1950