

Setting Children Free: Movement in Montessori's Theory of Education

Gabrielle Pati (November 19, 2010)



Among those attending the symposium organized in honor of Maria Montessori at the Scuola d'Italia Guglielmo Marconi, there was the mayor of Chiaravalle, her hometown, who introduced the movement "Slow Look", an organization that encourages people to step back and "gustare lentamente" (slowly taste) the world around them. The event was also attended by the children of the Italian National Olympic Committee, who exemplify today what Dr. Montessori envisioned years ago: that motor activity, and exercise above all, in children can promote well-being and happiness

On November 12th [La Scuola D'Italia](#) [2] held a symposium on "The importance of motor activity of the child in the educational philosophy of Maria Montessori", exploring an unconventional idea that ensures children develop to their full potential: never confine them.



This past October Dr. Maria Montessori was the first woman honored for Italian Heritage Month. All across New York events were held celebrating this revolutionary thinker, one of the first Italian women to become a physician.

At the symposium -organized and financed by [Coni](#) [3] Representative in the US Mico Delianova Licastro- Headmistress Anna Fiore of La Scuola D'Italia welcomed speakers and Montessori enthusiasts which included Dr. Richard Ungerer Executive Director of the [American Montessori Society](#) [4], Dr. Lucio Lombardi, Director of the [Chiaravalle Montessori Foundation](#) [5], Daniela Montali the mayor of Chiaravalle, Italy, General Consul Francesco Maria Talò, Riccardo Viale, Director of the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [6] in New York, and Joseph Sciamè, President of the [Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of NY](#). [7]

Mrs. [Rita Kramer](#) [8], who wrote the revered biography "Maria Montessori: A Woman for all Seasons", spoke about Montessori's innovative approaches to caring for children who were regarded as 'idiots' by the majority of society. Kramer explained how Montessori "set free their personalities in a marvelous way" by emphasizing child-centered learning that included adequate intellectual and physical stimulation, prompting cognitive development in the most seemingly hopeless cases. Many times Montessori's 'idiots' became better students than children considered to be normal learners, and thus Montessori "was hailed as the woman who would change the world by changing its children," said Kramer.

Dr. Maria Montessori, the revolutionary 20th century Italian female physician, stressed in her educational philosophy the element of movement as a positive factor in the cognitive development of children. Before society was sensitive to the needs of special children, they were often isolated and confined in rooms with little nourishment for the mind or soul, muscles atrophying, labeled as hopeless and regarded with little attention and care from doctors or teachers. Montessori's dedication to the study of children with special needs turned the world of education upside down in a time when there were barely any women even daring to enter the world of medicine. From a small town in Le Marche (Chiaravalle) with a feminist sentiment embedded in its gentry, Montessori traveled the world helping children and communities regain their dignity and re-evaluate standard, and often faulty, approaches of caring for children.

Maria Montessori grew up in Le Marche in a

town called Chiaravalle in the province of Ancona. This town facilitated women's self-reliance and independence in the early 20th century due to the fact that it had a tobacco factory in which women worked. Montessori grew up in this environment in which the coming of age women had more opportunities for advancement and careers, compared to women others part of Italy. She was audacious and brilliant, motivated to pursue a life of study, research, intellectual and humanitarian work, and never let anything hold her back, even Fascism.

Montessori got her degree in medicine and opened a school in Rome called the Casa Dei Bambini, in which she studied children that were considered 'idiots', incapable of learning. Her research led her to realize the importance of sensory and motor activity within the child, and arrived at the theory that any child could learn with effective support and care from educators and doctors.

Interestingly, the mayor of Chiaravalle introduced at the symposium a movement called "[Slow Look](#) [9]", which is an organization in Montessori's home town that encourages people to step back and "gustare lentamente" the world around them, including nature, special places and food and solitary moments that can be cherished in today's spinning world.

Montessori enthusiast ended the evening by honoring the children in [CONI](#) [10](Comitato Olimpico



Nazionale Italiano) who recently traveled to Italy to compete in sports events. These children exemplify today what Dr. Montessori envisioned years ago: that motor activity, and exercise above all, in children can promote well-being and happiness. From the looks at the kids at La Scuola D'Italia it seems Montessori was indeed right.



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Links

- [1] <http://newsite.iitaly.org/files/coni1290201780jpg>
- [2] <http://www.lascuoladitalia.org>
- [3] <http://www.coniusa.com/>
- [4] <http://www.amshq.org>
- [5] <http://www.chiaravalle.org>
- [6] <http://www.iicnewyork.esteri.it>
- [7] <http://talyculturemonth.org>
- [8] <http://itakramer.com>
- [9] <http://www.slowlook.it>
- [10] <http://www.coni.it>