



Education and Culture DG  
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Leonardo da Vinci

# **Research on Montessori education and the learning methods in VET in our country**

## **Materials, numbers and needs**

### **The Italian National Report**

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## 1) History of Montessori in our country.

With the 1907 opening of Dr. Montessori's first school in Rome, her surname — *Montessori* — became associated with schools applying her educational approach and educational materials in schooling tailored to children's developmental needs. World-wide, many schools implement the Montessori method for educating students in a wide range of ages, about which Dr. Maria Montessori stated:

*From the moment the child enters the classroom, each step in his education is seen as a progressive building block, ultimately forming the whole person, in the emergence from childhood to adult. All focus is on the needs of the child.*

One distinguishing feature of the Montessori method, at the pre-school age, is that children direct their own learning, choosing among the sections of a well-structured and stocked classroom, the curriculum including *Practical Life* (materials that help with practical and often daily activities, which include the refinement of fine and gross motor skills), *Sensorial* (senses and brain), *Language, Mathematics, Geography, Science, and Art*. The teacher's role is to introduce children to materials, and then remain a "silent presence" in the classroom. Montessori schools pride themselves on seeing and meeting the student's personality and intellectual needs, rather than viewing them as part of a classroom process. The students are encouraged to teach and to help each other.

### Concepts

The Montessori educational philosophy is built upon the idea that children develop and think differently from adults; that they are not merely "adults in small bodies". Dr. Montessori advocated children's rights, children working to develop themselves into adults, and that these developments would lead to world peace.

The Montessori method discourages many of the traditional measurements of achievement (grades, tests). The method instead focuses on sparking a child's interest in learning through presenting materials to students that will catch their interest. The Montessori Method does measure feedback and qualitative analysis of a child's schooling performance. The analysis does not come from grades, but from careful observation of the child. Montessori teachers do evaluate children's progress: when giving lessons, through ongoing observations in the classroom, by examining the products of their work, and by going over the Work Journal. It is simply not often obvious to children that they are being evaluated, since they are not given grades, praise, or other tokens of evaluation.

There are many ways to present these observations to parents and there is no standard way to do it. It is often recorded as a list of *skills, activities, and critical points*, and sometimes including a narrative explanation of the child's educational achievements, strengths, and weaknesses — with the emphasis upon the improvement of said weaknesses.

## Premises

The premises of a Montessori approach to teaching and learning include the following:

- *That children are capable of self-directed learning.*
- *That it is critically important for the teacher to be an "observer" of the child instead of a lecturer. This observation of the child interacting with his or her environment is the basis for the continuing presentation of new material and avenues of learning. Presentation of subsequent exercises for skill development and information accumulation are based on the teacher's observation that the child has mastered the current exercise(s).*
- *That there are numerous "sensitive periods" of development (periods of a few weeks or even months), during which a child's mind is particularly open to learning specific skills or knowledge such as crawling, sitting, walking, talking, reading, counting, and various levels of social interaction. These skills are learned effortlessly and joyfully. Learning one of these skills outside of its corresponding sensitive period is certainly possible, but can be difficult and frustrating.*
- *That children have an "absorbent mind" from birth to around age 6, possessing limitless motivation to achieve competence within their environment and to perfect skills and understandings. This phenomenon is characterized by the young child's capacity for repetition of activities within sensitive period categories, such as exhaustive babbling as language practice leading to language competence.*
- *That children are masters of their school room environment, which has been specifically prepared for them to be academic, comfortable, and to encourage independence by giving them the tools and responsibility to manage its upkeep.*
- *That children learn through discovery, so didactic materials with a control for error are used. Through the use of these materials, which are specific to Montessori schools (sets of letters, blocks and science experiments) children learn to correct their own mistakes instead of relying on a teacher to give them the correct answer.*
- *That children most often learn alone during periods of intense concentration. During these self-chosen and spontaneous periods, the child is not to be interrupted by the teacher.*
- *That the hand is intimately connected to the developing brain in children. Children must actually touch the shapes, letters, temperatures, etc. they are learning about—not just watch a teacher or TV screen tell them about these discoveries.*

## Implementation

Montessori is a hands-on approach to learning. It encourages children to develop their observation skills by doing many types of activities. These activities include use of the five senses, kinetic movement, spatial refinement, small and gross motor skill coordination, and concrete knowledge that leads to later abstraction.

**2) Today's Statistics.**

◆ **How many Montessori School are there in your country?**

In Italy there are almost 100 Montessori schools shared between 13 regions.

◆ **What about the variety of Montessori Schools (kindergarten, primary, secondary).**

Regarding the variety of Montessori schools in Italy we have most of nurseries, kindergartens and primary school, just a few of secondary courses.

**3) National and Local contact for Montessori**

◆ **Name and Location of the Montessori School.**

**Centro Internazionale Montessori**, Via Fonti Coperte 38/D 06124 - Perugia (Italia) President Prof. Luciano Mazzetti, who is al the Presidenet of Opera Nazionale Montessori in Rome  
<http://www.centrointernazionalemontessori.com>- tel.: 39-075-35 628

◆ **How do they apply the method in 2011?**

In Italy the application of the method is characterized by the immobility, that is against Montessori's ideas, as in her method nothing is previously fixed, and she encouraged to discover new learning paths, as she did. She used to say: "Education but be challenged and not undergone. This is in general.

In some Italian schools the Montessori method has having a renewal. Considering as a beliefs tenet the education message of Montessori, it has been considered that this method, as it is, is outworn and are mainly kept the fundamental principles and the psychological part of the system

◆ **How is it changed and what they are still using?**

Considering that it is actual what resists to the passing time. Montessori method is considered a "classic" and the application depends from each school. Considering their schools, they apply the Maria Montessori's idea: take out what the learner already has inside, let the learning to express what already know. Tools are various and also modern

◆ **Could the Montessori method be applied to adult training? How?**

Professor Mazzetti is very sure about the application of the method to adults, and they are already using the method with students up to 18. This method applied to adult considers the following points:

To take out what adults already have coming from the previous learning path

Give the student the self-esteem

Give the student the possibility to self-evaluate

Give the student the tools to find his/her learning path

Give the student the tools for his/her autonomy

Give the student the responsibility of his/her education as only a responsible person is a free person

#### 4) National VET situation

##### ◆ VET, an introduction

VET policies are carried out by ISFOL, the National Research Institute, which has an important role in training, social and labour policies to contribute to the growth of employment, improvement of human resources, social inclusion and local development. It's been also involved with ReferNet, the network of reference and expertise in the field of VET. In Italy VET is handled by the Regional authorities, entirely responsible for the programming process, joined by social and economic partners.

- **Private organizations partially funded and participated by the Government:**

Training courses for graduated students, for the improvement of knowledge and experience.

Training courses for unemployed and workers for new job opportunities and professional requalification

Technologically-based (internet, media, communication and sustainability)

- **Public professional schools**

Classical training for teenage students for professional preparation to enter in the labour market

Main subject fields: agriculture, hotel and food, mechanical and printing industry

- **Totally private institutions**

Wide range of courses for different learners' categories: graduated students, adult workers, unemployed people, young professionals.

Field of operation is very varied, regionally diversified according to local market

Seriousness and effectiveness is unpredictable, though many have high quality standards

#### **Educational system and place of VET, who is responsible for the design of the qualifications/curricula in VET, e.g. (is the working field involved?)**

- **Private organizations partially funded and participated by the Government**

Responsibility entirely on the Director and members of the organization

Courses organized according to National and International projects and market requirements

Labour market directly involved, teachers are often professionals in the training subject

Curricula designed by specific market experts, often also trainers in the course

- **Public professional schools**

Responsibility for the curricula design is on the Italian Ministry of Education

Courses (complete study programs) designed following the National regulations

Labour market only partially involved because teachers aren't directly involved in the labour market

Temporary training periods at private and public offices, organizations and industries are the only contact with labour market

- **Totally private institutions**

Responsibility of courses design is on experts

Courses customized on the market demand

Labour market fully involved, being the main inspiration for the institutions' training activity

## 5) Learning system

### ◆ Is competence based learning common in VET in your country? If not, what is the learning system that VET uses?

#### • Private organizations partially funded and participated by the Government

Students: courses based on their already acquired competences during school career

Unemployed workers: courses based on common systems, not particular attention on learners' competences

#### • Public professional schools

Learning and training programs standardized on National scale.

Students' competence depending on trainer and teacher's common sense and method

#### • Totally private institutions

Wide range of learning choices in many fields: languages to education, mechanic to medical, fashion to administration, mainly based on market surveys

Self-financed activity

Continuous search of new training methodologies and subjects

### ◆ Stage / internship

The integration between learning and job represents the main future challenges of the Italian system for VET.

30% of the hours are assigned to work experience to be carried out within the enterprise.

In Italy we have three categories of internship defined by the D. Lgs no 276/03, but the most innovative is the so called "High Apprenticeship". It allows people between 18 and 29 in every working field in order to reach secondary qualifications or degrees.

### ◆ Is this qualifying to get the diploma?

- Private organizations with partial State funds and participation: at the end of courses learners get an Attendance Certification, which is not a guarantee to get a job but a document proving their competence in a particular field, often not highly qualified, because of the short duration of the course. The internship is not binding for the achievement of the Certification: the regular attendance of courses is the only requirement.

- Public professional schools: at the end of the school year (Sept/Jun) students get a Diploma (degree of High School) according to their school performance. The internship period is an important and binding experience for learners: learners' final results (and the achievement of the Diploma) depend on the evaluation of the internship period.

- Totally private institutions: learners get an Attendance Certification at the end of the course. It is not a guarantee to get a job, but a document proving their competence in a particular field. The preparation is often highly qualified and the close connection with

industries and local activities give learners the possibility to get in touch with more chances of internship quite quickly. The internship is not binding for the achievement of the Certificate which only depends on the correct and regular attendance to the course.

- ◆ **What is the learning goal of the internship? (Is it an assignment, several small tasks, an integral complicated project). And can the student choose his goals?**

The goal of internships is mainly divided into small assignments and several small tasks. They usually last for short periods. Students can't usually choose their internship destination or their goals.

#### **6) Research on target groups.**

- ◆ **What do you think is needed to involve the target group in education? (motivation/ own choice for the learning path/ on the job learning instead of school).**

Motivation is one of the biggest challenge for the educators mainly for those who work with adults. For this target group it is important to take into consideration the learners' background, their knowledge, the original culture and the life style. A relaxed environment must be set up to help learners to reach and improve their self confidence and the knowledge of own capabilities. It is important for the teacher to remind the students, anytime, the initial motivations and to present not a huge program, but reachable goals. It is very important for learners to feel part of their education, with the knowledge of the proposals materials, paths and methods. The learners must feel free to choose their own learning path, but under a supervisor, who must give suggestions and methods for reachable goals . Conclusions: motivation depends on the teacher's approach and on the possibility to choose own training path, but under a supervision

#### **7) Best practices for VET in Italy**

- ◆ **How are subjects taught through specific methods?**

As introduced above, specific methods, mainly for adults do not exist in general. Most of them are from each trainer's soft skills and sensibility. The motivation is usually one of the biggest challenge to avoid early abandon.

- ◆ **Are the eventual methods used by the choice of the single teacher or are standardized by the Training center?**

Talking about Lingua Più, we apply a kind of Montessori methods to teach adults and this choice is compulsory for all teachers in approaching the students. Of course, some parts are peculiar from the teacher him/herself (see the presentation)

◆ **Please describe examples for best practices concerning on the job learning for target groups in VET.**

The public VET school in Città di Castello “Opera Pia Officina Operaia G.O. Bufalini” is a good example of job learning for the adults. It is an old school, founded in 1909 and it is an important institution in our city.

They offer a variety of courses:

- Chef
- Hairdresser
- Computer Numerical Control - CNC operator
- Mechanics
- Plumber
- Carpenter
- Barman
- Restaurant staff

Their offers are qualifying courses in the curricula training for people from 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>.

The offers are also for adults in need of qualification or requalification.

They have good connection with some local companies for internship and stages

## **8) Conclusion and proposals.**

Following the research on the target group and the offers for VET, a method for training adults seems to be important and necessary mainly to avoid early abandon. Considering the actual economical European situation, a requalification for EU people is compulsory and now cannot be postponed. After the discussion with Prof. Mazzetti, Opera Montessori President, we are convinced that our project will give an important contribution in VET teaching and early education abandon.

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