

M. MONTESSORI'S IDEAS IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION OF BELARUS AND CHINA



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HISTORICAL HERITAGE IN MODERN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The article is devoted to Montessori method and its analysis in the theory and practice of belarusian and chinese education. Studying the pedagogical heritage will help to choose the alternative program suitable for preschool education in modern times.

Introduction. The processes of integration and globalization, taking place in the world educational space, draw interest to alternative pedagogical directions of the early twentieth century, among which is pedagogy based on the ideas of free education. Within the framework of this trend, absolutely new approaches were proclaimed, the essence of which was the creation of a fundamentally new school as an experimental area for the development of a child's creative personality and the organization of living space, that develops humanistic relations for children [1]. The ideas of reformatory pedagogy have received wide recognition. The great approval of the world community has been given to the pedagogical system developed by the Italian doctor, public figure and teacher M. Montessori.

She was one of the first women in Italy who completed the medical courses and received

a doctorate. Through practice and observation of children, she created the theory that was anthropocentric in its approach to the child, pedagogical at the level of application, the humanistic and alternative form of the educational process organization.

Montessori was interested in expanding the application of her "method" to normally developing children. In 1906 she accepted an invitation to the post of an observer in a children's educational institution in the Roman city of San Lorenzo. Thanks to the support and assistance of the "Society of cheap apartments" with the chairman named Edouard Talamo at the head, M. Montessori was able to open a completely new type of a preschool institution – the school for children, that was called "Casa dei Bambini" ("Children's Home"). As a result, in 1907 this institution was opened. It accepted

60 children aged from three to twelve for training. Thanks to this, a unique pedagogical platform was developed, with the help of which a socio-pedagogical experiment was carried out.

The organization of the “Children’s Home” made it possible to use the system developed by M. Montessori in practice and apply it to healthy children. Taking into account that the children with special needs and the healthy ones had the similar traits at an early age, she developed the parenting techniques that were suitable for all of them. But the techniques had to be adjusted in order to contribute to the harmonious development of a healthy child personality [1].

Heading the educational institution “Children’s Home”, M. Montessori equipped the premises in such a way that they were comfortable and cozy for the children of different ages. The sensorimotor didactic materials were specially developed for this educational institution. The pupils were staying at the “Children’s Home” from 9 am to 4 pm. At daytime they played freely and worked with all kinds of aids, went in for sports, sang, walked and prayed.

The difference between this educational institution and the author’s schools that existed at that time consisted in meeting the requirements of self-expression and self-affirmation of each child, in the use of methods and humane means to achieve success in education and upbringing [2].

Realizing her pedagogy in the environment of free education, M. Montessori, first of all, considered the creation of rules for the release of internal creative power of a pupil and his unconscious unique activity. The freedom of choice, decision-making and, as a result, the free implementation of work and play led the child in the direction of asserting the ability to organize his work and behavior, to be the “master of himself”. The educational institution of M. Montessori received a large number of positive reviews, that contributed to the dissemination and implementation of her “method” in life.

At present more and more specialists in the field of preschool education are turning to the theory and experience of the Italian humanist and teacher M. Montessori because of the unique opportunity to use an alternative method in the work with preschool children. In this regard, it becomes necessary to consider the leading conceptual provisions of M. Montessori method and their reflection in the practice of domestic and Chinese education.

Main part. M. Montessori can be mentioned among the scientists belonging to the “synthetically – anthropological” direction, that is based on “conceptually – universal, synthesizing knowledge about a person” [3, p. 5]. According to the views of the supporters of this trend, the effectiveness of education consists in a targeted impact not on children, but on their environment.

The methodological basis of the Montessori system is the statement about the “cosmic plan” for the development of the universe and the “cosmic task” of the man – to build a harmonious society. The child being different from the adult, creatively develops in the process of an active interaction with the subject and social environment.

The core of Montessori’s theoretical concept is the substantiation of child’s development sensitive periods, the interaction of an adult and a child in the educational environment, and the creation of a pedagogically developing environment.

The sensitive phases of development are the age intervals in which the individual sensitivity to external influences is observed. Sensitivity depends directly on the patterns of organic maturation of the brain, as well as on mental processes and properties. Based on the principles of sensitivity, M. Montessori singled out three phases of the development of children: the first phase (0–6) is the optimization of natural development, “the normalization of a child”; the second one (6–12) is the cultivation of the sense of responsibility to humanity and the third one (12–18) is the development of the ability to interact with society effectively.

The first phase has a distinctive feature – that is the focus of children’s cognitive activity on the physiological processes of the world around them. The main task for the child at this stage is to create the picture of the world around him, and the adult. During this period the creation of a suitable environment (the parental home) for the development of psychological balance is above all. The child becomes a creator of himself between the ages of three and six. There is a period of the greatest development of such abilities as: motor, verbal, sensual and social ones. The appropriate space in this period is the developing space in a preschool institution containing sensory and speech materials.

The second stage concentrates the research qualities of the child on the knowledge of the world around him. At the age of six or nine years, the child turns out to be an explorer who seeks to know the world by conducting experiments. There is an understanding that it is possible to use the previously accumulated knowledge.

The third stage can be characterized by the orientation of an individual towards the society and the search for his recognition. A teenager, between the ages of twelve and fifteen, finds new opportunities to strengthen his cognitive abilities. The main responsibilities are the development of mental abilities, education and continued self-education [1].

Sensitive periods are interconnected with the process of attention. M. Montessori discovered a phenomenon called “attention polarization”.

This is a steady attention that manifests itself in all children who are busy working with visual aids. There are three periods during the polarization process. The first is a preparatory one. This is the beginning of the child's activity, the decision and choice of the necessary subject in the presented environment. The final choice opens the next stage, that characterizes the child's concentration on the selected material, immersion into the game process. At the final stage, the analytical work of the mind takes place, that leads to the understanding of the meaning of the activity result.

Montessori paid much attention to the organization of the developing environment. She proceeded from the idea that didactic material is an incentive for self-development. The humanist teacher experimentally tested the effectiveness of the didactic material she created for the development of the senses of touch, weight, size, vision, hearing, etc.

Montessori attached a special role to the "hygiene of thinking", calling it the "key" that reveals the secrets of the formation of a human personality. It is impossible to teach a child to think rightly if he does not practice right thinking. For these purposes, there must be the system of sensory gymnastics.

For the normal development of a child, the spiritual freedom, spiritual food, "joy of life" are necessary. Montessori believed that it is important to take into account the hygiene of the psyche to the same extent as the hygienic requirements of physical education. Expanding this idea, she recommended that the rooms where the children were located should not oppress them with their limited size and heaps of furniture. Its simplicity, aesthetics, harmony of lines and colors – everything should have a positive effect on the receptive child's soul.

Moral education in the Montessori system is based on the education of feelings, on the connection of sensory education with mental education, on the unity of education with self-education. Great importance was attached to the educational function of self-service labor.

For more than the century the ideas of M. Montessori have been spread not only throughout the world, but also have undergone detailed analysis and systematization. The main directions of scientific research in domestic and foreign pedagogy are as the following:

- the problem of the essence of children's nature in the system of M. Montessori (Bim-Bad, K.E. Somnitelny, E.G. Tarasenko, I.N. Dichkovskaya, A.A. Timonina, Tian Zhengping);
- the essence of the goals and objectives of education (N.K. Kargapol'tseva, G.B. Kornetov, N.V. Igoshina, O.V. Salatova, E.I. Tikheeva, V.M. Chirkova, Zuo Caixia);
- content, teaching aids, organization of the developing environment (L.S. Zinoviev,

K.V. Koval, G.A. Reprintseva, I.N. Sevastyanova, A.S. Sidorenko, M.G. Sorokova, Lai Xiaoqian);

– the influence of Montessori on the development of foreign education (G.A. Volik, I.I. Dyachenko, A.F. Dorofeev);

– the use of the elements of Montessori system in Belarus and China (I.A. Komarov, L.N. Lasminskaya, G.A. Lyubina, Wu Hongcheng, Zhang Yuanyuan).

Montessori made important contributions to the development of preschool education practice in the world. The implementation of separate elements of the Montessori pedagogical system into belarusian practice began in the second half of the XX century. And now the integrative groups based on Montessori system are being opened in preschool institutions in Brest, Mogilev, Baranovichi, Vitebsk and other towns. In order to disseminate the ideas and methods of M. Montessori creative workshops, meetings and clubs are organized.

Although China has introduced this teaching method not long ago, the Chinese people are very enthusiastic about its promotion too. After the 1980s, many kindergartens sticking to this teaching method have appeared. The value of early childhood education in China also needs the comprehension of her educational philosophy, its application and localization into the educational practice of kindergartens and formation of an educational model in line with China's "Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial)" so as to better promote the healthy growth of children and the cultivation of diversified qualities.

Due to the actual political and economic environment of China in the first half of the 20th century, it could not meet the development of Montessori education methods. Until the middle of the 20th century, China's policy of comprehensively learning from the Soviet Union caused Montessori education to be seriously slandered and distorted, which further damaged it. The release of the book "Montessori Early Childhood Education" edited by Lu Leshan, a professor at Beijing Normal University marked the beginning of Montessori education in China [4]. In 1998, the earliest Montessori teacher training base in China, "Beijing Normal University Experimental Kindergarten Education Research Center" was established, affiliated to Beijing Normal University, training Montessori teachers and related professionals nationwide. Only by the end of 2002 more than 1000 kindergartens across the country used the Montessori method to guide specific educational activities. In addition to Beijing Normal University Experimental Kindergarten and Beijing Beihai Kindergarten, there are also impressive Montessori kindergartens: National Tourism Administration Kindergarten, Chinese Academy of Sciences Third Kindergarten,

Shenzhen Experimental Kindergarten, Zhuhai Boai Kindergarten, etc. In 2002, the China Montessori Bilingual Education Center was established, and later changed its name to The Chinese Montessori Society (CMS). In 2003, the first international certified Montessori teacher training course was opened in mainland China. In 2004, Qingdao Montessori Education Research Institute was established, becoming the first research institute specialized in Montessori education in China, and responsible for promoting Montessori education in China. In 2005, the China Montessori Association and the School of Education of Shandong Normal University jointly established the China Montessori Education Research Center. In 2006, the center held the first International Symposium on Montessori Education in China. Experts and scholars discussed and communicated on Montessori education at the meeting [5]. Through the promotion of various associations, the development of Montessori education law in China has been greatly promoted.

With the introduction of the relevant theories of the Montessori education method and the influence of the domestic educational environment, the application of the Montessori education method in China has gradually become widespread [6]. Shanghai Z public kindergarten has been carrying out Montessori education for more than 20 years and now it is one of the experimental parks for the Chineseization of Montessori education. There are 12 classes in the kindergarten, including 4 Montessori classes. There are special Montessori classrooms in the form of mixed-age classes, recruiting children aged 3–6 years, and each Montessori class has about 30 children. There are 12 teachers in the Montessori class in the park. All teachers have participated in pre-job training and have obtained the nationally recognized Montessori teacher qualification certificate. Relying on the Montessori education method and combining with the local culture of Shanghai, Shanghai Kindergarten Z optimizes and designs the park environment, educational content and educational methods, and sets up five working areas indoors: daily life practice area, mathematics education area, sensory education area, language education area, cultural education area.

Montessori advocates providing a “prepared environment” for young children, that includes both spiritual and material environments. In terms of spiritual environment, Montessori advocates the principles of equality, freedom and harmony in education. In the Montessori class in Kindergarten Z, the children can freely choose their favorite materials to operate. If there is the trouble caused by improper operation, in the terms of substance environment, the indoor and outdoor facilities and appliances of Shanghai Z kindergarten are very suitable for children's development needs and it is a safe, clean and beautiful

working environment. The overall tone is light yellow and light green, which makes the whole environment look fresh and warm. In the outdoor environment design, the decorations handmade by teachers are hung on the ceilings of the hall and aisle of the kindergarten, and these decorations are of regularly changed themes. The walls of the aisle are pasted with photos of the lives of children in various classes, and there are also some commonly used English conversation cards. In the middle area of the aisle, a bonsai area is specially set up, there are a variety of green plant pots that kids can water themselves. Z kindergarten also has a relatively large playground for children to perform outdoor activities such as inter-class exercises. Montessori teacher will not criticize or criticize, but patiently remind and guide.

Shanghai Z kindergarten has a curriculum with a high sense of innovation, and can integrate local traditional culture into early childhood teaching. In combination with the characteristics of Montessori teaching method, teachers have designed various types of kindergarten-based special theme courses, that are reflected in every aspect of daily life. For example, according to the characteristics of “error correction” of Montessori teaching aids, and combined with the Montessori “three-stage” teaching method, the teachers have made original teaching aids such as food maps and landscape maps, that are used in the work of kindergarten.

The core of Montessori teaching method is to observe and understand the inner needs of young children's development, discover “the secret of childhood”, determine individualized teaching goals and provide “prepared environment” to guide children to carry out orderly “work” [7]. At present, many of the kindergartens that implement Montessori teaching method in China only pay attention to formalism. In the absence of grasping the essence and core values of Montessori teaching method, they one-sidedly believe that “knowing how to operate teaching aids will lead to Montessori education”, and even some kindergartens have adopted Montessori education as a characteristic of their kindergartens in order to attract more parents. This approach not only abandons the essence of the Montessori teaching method, but also makes it difficult to truly apply Montessori education in the practice of China and it is even less conducive to the overall and healthy development of young children. The obstacles may also be caused by differences in culture cognition.

To improve the practice of Montessori preschool education in China the following measures may be preferable and urgent: overcoming formalism and cultural cognition; mastering the essence of Montessori teaching; carrying forward the advantages of using Montessori method; identifying and transforming it into the process

of localization and aligning it with Chinese newly promulgated “Guidelines for Kindergarten Education” [8].

Conclusion. The further improvement of preschool education requires not only the consideration, comparison, evaluation of modern domestic and foreign experience, but also the appeal to the pedagogical heritage of the past. In this regard the “method” of Montessori, based on free development of a child in a preparatory environment is of great interest. Its introduction into the practice of belarusian and chinese preschool institutions creates the possibility of choosing those alternative programs that will be the most optimal for a particular group of children.

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