

A consideration of Maria Montessori's pedagogical activities influential in Japan: discovering the establishment of the first Casa dei Bambini

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INTRODUCTION

Italian early childhood education continues to be influential as indicated by the current situation that Reggio Emilia approach accepted in Japan. In the last century, Dr. Maria Montessori (1870–1952) formed theories in early childhood education, which have now been implemented in Montessori schools. She was born in Italy, and opened her first nursery school in 1907, the Casa dei Bambini located in San Lorenzo, one of the poorest areas in Rome at the time (Giardiello, 2015).

The Montessori method is still used for a most recent scientific theory in the field of education. For instance, the investigation of the effect of Montessori method on social competence and behaviors of 3.5-5 years-old-children on their emotion regulation skills was reported (Dereli et al, 2019), and the study that investigated the effects of Montessori Training Program for Mothers on math and daily living skills of Montessori children ages 4 to 5 years old, showed the effect of the program (Yıldız et al., 2019). In a study toward Japanese children, 144 subjects in nursery school and/or kindergarten took part of the study. For present the standardized information on simple and easy-to-use evaluation of fine motor skills in disabled children, unbuttoning and buttoning were performed on the basis of Montessori education system(Ohtoshi et al., 2008). These researches suggest that Montessori's pedagogical approach has been up to date for over 100 years.

According to the history of Japanese education, the fact that modern early childhood education started as a model of foreign countries is recognized as a clear and well-known fact by previous research findings. In the first half of the 20th century, during the Taisho Free Education Movement, Montessori method was one of the most prestigious theories in the early childhood education. The method spread as educational information and influenced the kindergarten curriculum at that time (Nagae et al., 2019).

Now in the 21st century, as the trend of Japanese education, the competencies are discussed in the revision of the national curriculum and competencies expected to be developed in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. For cultivating qualities and

abilities, teachers would be expected to support appropriately and effectively individual initiative (Matsubara & Kosaka, 2017).

Furthermore, the growing interests in non-cognitive (socio-emotional) competence exist in the field of early childhood education in recent years (Nishida et al., 2019). Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman (2017) calls for a social policy toward early childhood interventions designed to enhance both cognitive abilities and such non-cognitive skills as confidence and perseverance. In connection with that point of interest, an educational theory of the Goodness-of-Fit model (Thomas & Chess, 1977) is noticed again in some Japanese educational institutions (Nishida et al., 2019).

On the other hand, educations to deal with the diversity of children are debated in our country. Concerning children who need special education, it is considered necessary to carefully analyze the current state of inclusive education with reference to the examples of UK and Italy, which are the advanced countries of special needs education (Kim et al., 2019). Recent years, child poverty and child abuse are also serious social agendas for early childhood education.

In Japan, where there are many problems related to early childhood education, the Montessori theories might give us useful suggestion at the present time when educational supports for individuals are needed from early childhood.

This study aims to consider the prospects of early childhood education and welfare, approaching the Dr. Maria Montessori's pedagogical activities. For the first step of the study, this note aims to clarify the meaning of the establishment of the first Children's House, the Casa dei Bambini, in the working-class area of San Lorenzo, Rome.

METHOD

Method of research: 1) literature research, and 2) on-site investigation

Subject of research: 1) published literature relevant to the Montessori method and, 2) the Casa Dei Bambini located in San Lorenzo, Rome

Period of research: 1) August to November 2019, and 2) September 2019

Method of analysis: Examine the results comparing literature research and on-site investigation

RESULTS

1. Background of Montessori as an expert pedagogue established Casa dei Bambini in the working-class area

In 1902, Montessori embarked on a new stage in her career eventually teaching anthropology

at a pedagogical school for the training of teachers, which had been instituted at the Faculty of Education (Facoltà di Magistero). By 1906, Montessori was gaining attention as an expert pedagogue and had become well known in the liberal and radical circles of the Roman elite (Foschi 2008). Eduardo Talamo (1858–1916), civil engineer and general manager of the Roman Institute of Real Estate, approached Montessori to direct the educational activities of the Casa dei Bambini in the working-class area of San Lorenzo, Rome. At that time, a large-scale restructuring took place in the area with overcrowded tenements in terrible living conditions. The establishment of the first Children's House, provided Montessori with an opportunity to create a 'real experimental laboratory' in which to observe children closely and develop what she referred to as a revolutionary new pedagogy (Babini, 2000).

2. The location of San Lorenzo in Rome

Figure1. shows current map of Roma for tourists. Sightseeing spots frequently visited by tourists are indicated by ○, and few spot could be found there in San Lorenzo area. From the last century and now, the area is near the Roma terminal station "Termini Station", but it might be an area where citizens usually live with different from tourist sightseeing.

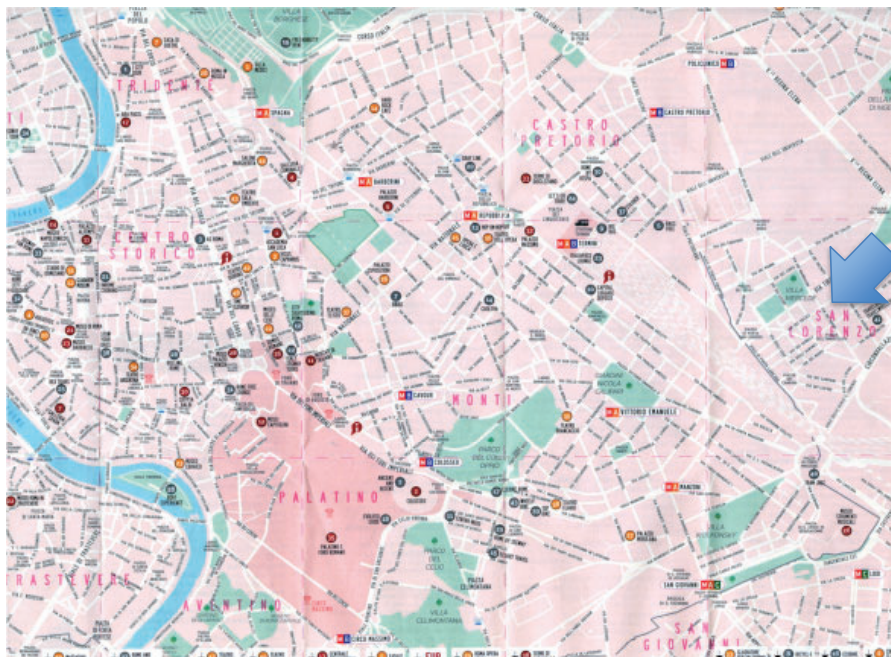


Figure1. Roma map (source: ROMA PASS)

3. The first Children's House, Casa dei Bambini

Dr. Maria Montessori opened the first Children's House, Casa dei Bambini, in Via dei Marsi 58 in January 1907. Figure2. shows the current view of the house seen from Via dei Marsi. The doorplate of "Casa dei Bambini" is visible to anyone who passes here. Figure3. shows the display board on the left wall of the passage, leading to the classroom, explaining the Montessori

achievements and the relationship with this Casa dei Bambini.



Figure2. Casa dei Bambini, Via dei Marsi



Figure3. Explanation board

4. The classroom in the Casa dei Bambini



Figure4. Entrance to the classroom
dembini, Via dei Marsi

The classrooms were set up using small rooms in a large residence. There were 6 classes surrounding the middle of the square courtyard. The Casa dei Bambini was seemed very simple and casual, that anyone including children might feel easy to enter the classroom.

The teachers were also friendly, so the attitudes are far from the assumption of Japanese respecting “great legacy”. Montessori teachers kindly opened the classroom and explained the Casa dei



Figure5. Simple plate of the class



Figure6. Appearance of Casa dei Bambi

Bambini to visitors. There have been placed treasured materials in the classroom extremely light, “light enough for a child to carry” (Montessori, 1965) chairs for infants, tables, kitchen set, stove and so on specially ordered by Montessori at that time.

5. Sense of perspective to childhood in Roma

Peoples’ sense of perspective to childhood might be shown in the public transport tickets in Roma (Figure7) that children's paintings appear on.

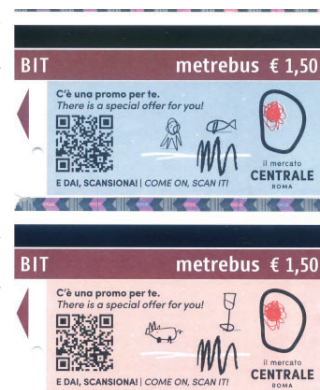


Figure7. Painting on ticket

DISCUSSION

1. The aspects of women's rights and children's rights

In her early work, Montessori began to advocate both women's and children's rights first coming to the world's attention in 1896 when she was invited to serve as a delegate of Italy at the International Congress for Women's Rights in Berlin where the conference adopted her proposal for equal pay for equal work. Following this success and the favourable media attention Montessori gave three further lectures at the 1899 International Council of Women in London (Babini, 2000). Her deep-rooted political convictions would lead the statement of improvement on the lives of young children and their families, in the deprived conditions of the newly industrialised cities. Her convictions might be reinforced by a strong sense of social justice, conditioned not only by her professional career but also by personal events that happened to her.

Montessori viewed the education of young children as forces which socializes and liberates them; with the establishment of Children's Houses women would be liberated, and children would no longer prevent women from working and reaching their full potential. Montessori's vision on the Children's Houses was that; it would form the core of a broader project of homes for the future where public intervention would ensure working mothers' support in their new role by innovations. At the time of the opening of the first Children's House in 1907, the Italian feminist movement was at its height state. It was during this period that Italy experienced a period of significant growth and modernisation and it was the image of the 'professional woman' that Montessori wished to promote (Giardiello, 2015).

Dr. Maria Montessori was the first female medical graduate in Italy, and she mentioned women's rights. The first Casa dei Bambini in the working-class area of San Lorenzo, might be a real experimental laboratory for both social and educational fields, aiming to realization of both women's right and children's right. This issue addressed a century ago, realization of both women's and children's right, still exists in the society of Japan today.

2. Relations of educational theory STEM and Goodness-of-Fit model

Montessori method is presumably composed of sufficient scientific aspects. As soon as Montessori had her class of young children, she wished to create within the Casa dei Bambini a 'field for scientific experimental pedagogy and child psychology' (Montessori, 1912). She began this task, as was her desire, with no preconceived ideas about how the children should perform, preferring instead to retain the only essential point of reference 'carefully recorded observations of the children • • • without clinging to any dogma about the activity according to the age of the child' (Montessori, 1912). The pedagogical attitude presented here by Montessori for scientific

experimental pedagogy might give us useful suggestions to a theory of STEM education from early childhood.

On the other hand, Montessori believed that each child should have the freedom of movement and the independence to choose when and what to learn, and that each child should not be directed by the teacher. Therefore, it is clear that Montessori had a deep respect for the distinct individuality of the child whose unique identity should be recognized through close observation. These observations of the children's spontaneous activity and how they learn in different ways were incorporated into the design of the didactic materials and the pedagogical method of working with the materials (Giardiello, 2015). The pedagogical views based on the respect for each individuality of children were obtained through the close observations. The views could influence upon the Goodness-of-Fit model in early childhood education.

Consideration concerning these theories has not been conducted enough, so these are issues in the future studies.

CONCLUSION

Establishment of Dr. Maria Montessori's first Casa dei Bambini in the working-class area of San Lorenzo was presumably meant to a real experimental laboratory for both social and educational fields, aiming at realization of both women's right and children's right. This issue of realization of both women's and children's right that she addressed a century ago still remains in modern Japanese society.

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