THE HISTORY OF MONTESSORI IN AMERICA
1910-1920: A FAILED REVOLUTION

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Montessori education in America originated in the early twentieth century amidst a flurry of progressive reform, specifically educative reform. Montessori’s innovative educational approach received a groundswell of public support by 1913, but at the same time was emphatically rejected by the teacher training schools. By 1920 the American public forgot all about Montessori. What were the factors behind America’s wild enthusiasm for Montessori’s message? What were the causes of her professional undoing here at that time?

This thesis will examine progressive education and the progressive movement generally as background to Montessori’s American story. It will specifically examine the emerging kindergarten movement and how kindergartens were similar to, and different from, Montessori education. It will look at her life and her visit to this country in 1913, examining her theory of education and social reform. It will explore a number of influential American supporters of Montessori, including President Wilson’s family, the Alexander Graham Bell family and SS McClure, editor of McClure’s magazine. It will also investigate the powerful influence of her detractors, specifically John Dewey and James Heard Kilpatrick of Teachers College, Columbia University. And finally, it will explore Montessori’s interaction with each of these influential groups, concluding with an analysis of her own personality as a factor in her fate in this country between 1910 and 1920.

This abstract accurately represents the content of the candidate’s thesis. I recommend its publication.

Signed

Myra L. Rich
DEDICATION

To America’s children; the embodiment of the past, the mirror of the present and the possibility of the future.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Americans first encountered the work of Maria Montessori just prior to the outbreak of World War I. The Zeitgeist of the pre-war era was generally optimistic, prosperous and reform minded. Wilbur Wright flew an airplane at Kitty Hawk, Ford Motor Company produced millions of Model “T” automobiles, Frank Lloyd Wright built prairie-style homes and Woodrow Wilson, a progressive educator, was in the White House.

Although word of Montessori education initially reached America in late 1909 when an educational journal published an article about her work in Europe, it was McClure’s Magazine in 1911 and 1912 that propelled the Montessori name into the consciousness of the American public and educators. In 1912, Montessori’s book, The Montessori Method, ranked number two in the nation on that year’s non-fiction best seller’s list. But by 1920, despite her growing influence in Europe and Asia, particularly India, there were no mentions of her work either in academic journals or in the popular press in America. Why did she rise to such heights of popularity and so quickly disappear from the
American educational and popular scene? What were the components of her success, then failure?

This thesis contemplates those questions. It will examine her life and educational thinking as well as America’s response to her from when she first descended down the Cincinatti’s gangplank in New York in December, 1913 and beyond. It will also look at the influential Americans and American institutions such as Alexander Graham Bell and McClure’s Magazine that sought a wide reception of her ideas in America. And it will examine the influence of one group that opposed the Montessori approach to education represented by John Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick at Columbia University’s Teachers College.

But first, to appreciate the context within which Montessori’s ideas came to light in America, it is useful to examine the educational milieu in America in the early twentieth century. The educational model in practice at the time was progressive education.

**Progressive Education in America as a Context for Montessori**

When Maria Montessori’s educational philosophy arrived in America during the first decade of the twentieth century, it had to compete with an already existing educational order. This section explores that dominant educational philosophy, Progressivism. How did progressive education evolve? Who were the educational leaders
and what was the philosophy from which they created their curriculum? Progressivism held sway in America into the 1950s, long after Montessori's ideas had been initially rejected. It is useful to examine Progressivism over several decades because its growth and decline coincided with Montessori's initial failure in America and later resurgence during the late 1950s.

The development of American progressive education reflected the social changes that took place from 1870 to the early twentieth century as a response to larger transformations in the society, namely industrialization, urbanization and immigration. In his 1986 work, *Education in the United States An Historical Perspective*, historian Gerald L. Gutek places these changes in the broad contexts of culture, politics and economics.

By 1870, according to Gutek, agricultural productivity was on the rise due to the mechanization of the farm, but the nation itself was experiencing wholesale transformation from a rural agricultural base to an urban industrialized one. Between 1880 and 1910, the urban population grew from fifteen million to forty five million. By 1920, more people lived in cities than in rural areas.¹

Immigration had an enormous impact on education during this period. Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, few of whom spoke English, tended to cluster within their own ethnic groups and
often turned to the local church for support. The Roman Catholics in particular created a system of ethnic parishes, complete with schools whose teachers were usually immigrants from the same countries. Thus, immigrant children were being educated but were not assimilating into the American mainstream. A leading educational historian and administrator of the time, Ellwood P. Cubberly, wrote in Changing Conceptions of Education that these new immigrants, unlike us, were "illiterate, docile and lacking in self-reliance and initiative and not possessing the Anglo-Teutonic conceptions of law, order and government." If the dominant culture was to be preserved from dilution, then these children must be assimilated and Cubberly proposed that the agent for change should be the school. The mandated curriculum would include courses in English, American History and Civics.

The profound impact of industrialization on education cannot be overstated. The surge of population into the cities created schools overcrowded with non-English speaking children and were chronically understaffed. Further, governing districts hired teachers and administrators based on political, not academic criteria. Social Darwinism, which preached that competition among individuals would lead to more efficient, industrious workers, was introduced into the schools as an educational ethic. School administration became
centralized and curricula focused on preparing children to become members of the new industrialized workforce. The traditional teaching method modeled on an earlier rural American child which utilized memorization and recitation and expected high morals to be gleaned from the *McGuffey Readers* was now considered hopelessly out of date. The revised view was that the classics should be de-emphasized in favor of more utilitarian subjects such as applied science and economics. Schools would teach that punctuality, hard work and diligence would be rewarded by economic improvement while laziness would be punished by unemployment. Truancy laws compelled school attendance and children were organized into classes by ages.

In the economic realm, progressives decried the shift from small, individual businesses to large corporations and they urged the break up of trusts and monopolies. Yet they patterned the administration of their schools after the corporate model of central control over decision making. Local schools lost their autonomy, ceding control of curriculum, hiring, student discipline and parent relations to the school district.

In the social realm, theorists Jacob Riis and John Dewey, and the establishment of settlement houses, specifically the work of Jane Addams, came about as a counter to the fragmentation of communities by industrialization. Jane Addams in particular urged the creation of a community setting in the cities and to that end established settlement
houses. Addams promoted a form of socialized education taking the learning into the city so the child could understand the world around him, emphasizing practical experience and group effort to achieve societal reform. Specifically she called for organized youth recreation and enhanced educational opportunities for the poor.³

The plight of the immigrant raised the question that reformers of the time seeking to Americanize the immigrants were struggling with; just what was "Americanization"? Reformers settled on a vague mission statement of uplifting the immigrant's life through social education. Regardless of the varied progressive impulses, the one thing they all had in common was the assertion that education would be the essential component at the heart of their mission.

In 1892, a previously scattershot approach to reform coalesced into a united effort when a muckraking pediatrician wrote a series of articles for the influential magazine, The Forum, appraising the state of American education.⁴ Scant resources, ill-educated teachers, budget uncertainties and philosophical disagreement created hodgepodge implementation which led to the state of affairs that Dr. Rice condemned in those articles. Outraged by the apathy, incompetence and corruption manifest in city schools, Rice highlighted the rare examples of humanely run private schools and called for public school systems to be severed from politics. The articles caused a firestorm of controversy.⁵ School reform became a
national movement, a progressive movement in education. But stating
the problem was easier than creating a specific, cogent plan for reform.
Thus began the pedagogical battles of the 1890s.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was spent in defining the
problem of social reform and the schools. Some saw it as the clash
between a specialized industrial system and a broadly educative public
school system. Cries rang out for more specific, rather than general
education. Vocational schools had proliferated in the 1880s and 1890s, a
development supported by businessmen who wanted a work force
trained to meet the newly emerging industrial demands. Many saw the
traditionalists' emphasis on thinking skills as a detriment, claiming such
emphasis ignored the realities of life which paid scant attention to the
working man. Critics pointed to paltry attendance after the eighth
grade as testimony to its failure. Classicists defended their tradition,
arguing that vocational training ran counter to the purpose of public
education which was to cultivate the ability to relate, comprehend and
generalize matter to a man's specific situation.

Although no clear date can be set for the onset of the progressive
movement in education, Gutek posits that it could have begun as early
as the 1890s and waned with the onset of World War I or the 1920s, but
the larger movement lingered till the 1950s. The progressive era had
four stages; the period from 1910 to 1919 which was the genesis stage of
reform generally; the 1920s, when child-centered education became the dominant teaching method; 1930 to 1945, when child-centered educators clashed with social reconstructionists; and last, the 1950s when critics charged that the new “life-adjustment” curriculum devalued American education.8

One of the original progressive educators was Herbert Spencer, whose book, Social Statics (1850) called for education as preparation for life.9 According to Spencer, humans must adjust to the circumstances of life. He believed that man’s evolution follows the laws of nature, thus the teacher can merely provide the knowledge, but must wait for it to be absorbed by the child. Spencer held that because this educational process was slow, it could not be viewed as an instrument of social progress. Further, as an opponent of public education, Spencer said that state education would, “undermine parental freedom and corrupt the body politic with the poison of public welfare.”10 Spencer’s views were supported by William Graham Sumner, a leader in the new field of sociology, who held that “the right to vote did not imply a right to free schooling”. He excoriated faddish reformers who sought to avoid the travails of mental exercise.11

On the other side of the issue, many Progressive educational theorists promulgated a body of ideas based on German Hegelian idealism which held that education not only perpetuated the cultural
heritage, but more importantly, was the vehicle for the promise of larger social reforms. G. Stanley Hall, a widely influential American psychologist and educator schooled in German science, said that the school should fit the child, not the other way around. Hall's work brought about the enormous pedagogical shift away from the teaching of ideas toward child-focused teaching in which the teacher is to adapt to the individual needs of the child. Hall's ideas created a torrent of pedagogical studies, including those done by Freud, whom Hall brought to America in 1909 and Arnold Gesell, both of whose theories proceeded from the Hegelian ideal that education can and should be a vehicle for providing a better world. One of the major proponents of progressive education, William James, a psychologist and philosopher, rejected absolute truth and values in favor of changing values and hypotheses: the litmus test of any idea was its utility. Most reformers emphasized the role that science and systems management should play in education. To produce the necessary research, academic experts poured into the schools to study the myriad of social problems found there and proposed solutions couched in the vocabulary of systems theory.

John Dewey, another of the Hegelian idealists, explicated progressive education in America. Dewey, a philosophical pragmatist who wrote *Democracy and Education* and *School and Society*, tested his theory of instrumentalism or experimentalism in his laboratory schools.
The theory of "social learning", that is, all learning is interrelated and group oriented, emanated from his book, *Democracy and Education* (1916), which was hailed as the equal of Rousseau's *Emile*. Dewey blamed the problems in education on industrialization, theorizing that society itself is the educator and thus society must be refitted for children in order to create a "embryonic community life" in which the child is an active participant in his own training for membership in his community. A child's training should reflect the specific society within which he lives rather than adhering to the broader traditional curriculum, which Dewey viewed as irrelevant. In determining what knowledge is most essential, Dewey proposed that group knowledge, experiences in which the widest groups share, are the essentials. The things that represent the needs of specialized groups and technical pursuits are secondary. Dewey argued that the curriculum should reflect the goals of improving society to make it more "worthy, lovely and harmonious" and further, that there cannot be a "narrowly utilitarian" education for one class and a "broadly liberal" one for the other if democracy is to thrive. He called for universal education that emphasized social goals over individual goals. Dewey's central tenet of progressive education directly linked education and social action; the school should become the central vehicle for social change, educational
theory was synonymous with political theory, and therefore the educator and the school would become de-facto mechanisms of reform.

The second phase of the progressive movement, child-centered progressivism, in which general social reform focused on education, emerged between 1919 to 1930. After World War I, a major rift in the movement developed between the progressive educators and social reformers. As educational progressives became increasingly specialized, they found themselves out of step with social reformers. The focus on professionalism and academic credentials made educators increasingly aloof and out of touch with the constituencies they sought to serve. The science of pedagogy became the educators' master, with its tests and scales, graphs and measurements, in what one educator called "an orgy of tabulation." The debate over IQ tests proved schismatic for the movement. Some argued that only a certain percentage of the population was educable, others thought it was undemocratic to restrict schooling to only a worthy few and called for improved schools and mandatory education for all children. The educational democrats asserted that the tests were merely to inform educators where to begin with each student, but insisted that all children were to be educated. In 1919, the Progressive Education Association was founded as a vehicle for the private experimental schools. In these progressive schools, the child was not to be inhibited in his free development and the teacher
was to guide the child rather than instruct him. The child’s physical development was to be minutely recorded and studied.

William Heard Kilpatrick, another influential educational progressive in favor of child-centered expressionist education, advocated problem solving through child-initiated purposeful activity wherein the child would determine the activity, then plan it, execute it and judge it. Kilpatrick urged a focus on the child rather than on teaching subjects: “Teach children, not subjects” became a rallying cry.\textsuperscript{18} He sought to translate Dewey’s instrumentalist philosophy into a methodology for instruction. Progressive education shifted from child-centered experimental private schools into a wide-ranging doctrine of progressivism in the teacher training schools. A student of Dewey’s, Kilpatrick went to Teachers College at Columbia University, the preeminent teachers college in the country, where he received his doctorate and stayed on to teach Philosophy and Education. During his long tenure at Teachers College, Kilpatrick influenced thousands of teachers with a wide-ranging progressive doctrine. His project-method approach rejected traditional teaching methods of book learning which he said were indirect and second hand, and instead embraced an experiential approach to problem-solving which he said would foster a “democratic sense of community.”\textsuperscript{19}
Meanwhile in the classroom, self-expression was king. Harold O. Rigg, an influential educational progressive wrote in his 1928 work, *The Child Centered Classroom*, that children are born with the power to create, so they should be immersed in an environment that fosters that creativity. The teacher was left to interpret this mandate and the result was progressivism run wild. Critics had a field day characterizing the free-roaming child wreaking havoc in the classroom. Even Dewey weighed in as a critic of the child-centered education, attacking it for its lack of adult guidance. Indeed, he called for progressive educators to refocus on education and to give less credence to the "isms" of the divisive movement.\(^{20}\)

Freudianism was yet another expression of the child-centered pedagogy of the 1920s. Teachers had to interpret and implement the Freudian injunction to "recognize the unconscious as the real source of motivation and behavior in themselves and their students. The essential task of education was to sublimate the child’s repressed emotions into socially useful channels."\(^{21}\) Critics raged that schools were becoming anti-intellectual in their emphasis on emotions.

The 1930s progressive educators were becoming more radical. They were generally anti-capitalistic, calling for the complete disassociation of schools and business. Further, they sought an educational model that supported a revised curriculum, emphasizing the
social sciences and called for teachers and students to become more directly involved in school management. The Social Frontier became the journal of choice for progressives. Its policy statement sought, “the death of Laissez-faire individualism and the concomitant rise of collective planning and control.” Its mandate was to champion the working class through centrally planned curriculum based on their needs. Yet, as educational historian Lawrence Cremin notes, while the journal had little impact on classroom practice, it did create in the public’s mind an image of the progressive as a subversive. By 1938, membership in the official organization of progressive educators, The Progressive Education Association, had peaked. Grants for more studies came in and with it increased outside funding. With expanding membership came a broadening of the Association’s scope, which led to conflicts over agendas within the movement. Members steadfastly held to the credo of not endorsing any set of principles or aligning themselves with any set program lest “any published doctrine be regarded as rigid or universal in an association that is actually fluid and progressive.”

But by 1940, criticism against the progressives mounted. Still without a creed or platform, progressive were seen as “naively sentimental” on one hand and “dangerously subversive” on the other. Further, teachers and administrators were increasingly unhappy. The
PEA was rapidly losing membership. In a last ditch effort to resuscitate the organization, the PEA changed its name to American Education Fellowship and finally developed a creed. But by then few cared. The organization failed because it narrowed its base of support by becoming a semi-professional organization thereby losing the allegiance of the more radical elements of the movement where its vitality was rooted. 27

Another problem for progressive educators was that the families who supported the most progressive schools were primarily upper middle class. Most working class parents were not interested in radical pedagogy. Indeed, Progressive Education at the Crossroads, an analysis of the state of progressive education written in 1938 by Boyd Bode, argued that unless progressives could address the “excesses” that had built up and distance themselves from a “Rousseauian libertarianism”, the progressive movement would never extend itself sufficiently into the mainstream.28 Progressivism in practice was seen as antithetical to the democratic ideal of a common education for all.

Progressive education’s final phase emerged after World War II with something called life-adjustment education. Basically technical education, it was a further move away from traditional subjects toward more functional subjects like physical fitness, recreation, home and family life and practical arts. The philosophy behind life-adjustment education held that education should be redefined in terms broader than
academic, that school is a place for all children regardless of ability, and that education should meet the diverse needs of all students in terms of personal, social, emotional, economic and vocational requirements.29

Progressivism was a reaction to a rapidly changing America, one now mostly urban and industrial. Although the progressive education movement sprang from a humanist impulse, it was too vague, general and all encompassing. Progressives clearly outlined what they opposed but could not articulate and implement specifics for change. Lawrence Cremin recapitulated the achievements of the progressive movement in education: a more focused attention on the child, the acknowledgment of the importance of the interest of the learner, the need for the child’s free movement in his activities, a new perception of education’s role in character development, and a championing of the rights of the child.30

The History of the Nursery School and the Kindergarten

Early childhood education in America can be traced back to the mid 1800s when adherents of Froebel’s kindergarten immigrated to the United States from Germany. But the kindergarten’s roots extend back even further, to the nursery school movement in Europe. Robert Owen, a socialist cotton mill owner in New Lanark, Scotland, sought to create an idyllic setting for the children of his workers, believing that environment molds the person. By 1813, Owen succeeded in creating an
environment where children ages birth through six years old played, sang and ate regularly. Soon after, numerous philanthropic organizations in England and the Continent organized along the lines of New Lanark. Infant schools spread to Germany coinciding with Froebel's Kindergarten. By the 1830s in Germany, *Kleinkinderbewahranstalten* were established for young children, focusing specifically on the physical aspects of their well being.\(^{31}\)

In the United States, the nursery school movement (generally considered to include children 4 years old and younger) represented a variety of formulating interests, including the research-center nursery school, the co-operative nursery school, the private-school nursery school, the philanthropic nursery school and the teacher-training nursery school.\(^{32}\)

Research-center nursery schools arose as an integral part of university research programs inquiring into the concept of normal development. Theorists became convinced that abnormalities in adolescence and adulthood originated in childhood. Psychologists such as Yale University's Dr. Arnold Gesell sought to observe children in natural settings to determine normal social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. Researchers, who originally set up child observations on a casual basis, quickly realized that trained adults could facilitate the children's groups. By the turn of the 20th Century, Yale
and Columbia University sponsored just two of the many elaborately funded and equipped university nursery schools in America.

Cooperative nursery schools arose out of the need of young mothers to provide care for the children as the mothers sought work outside the home during the First World War. Nursemaids were rejected as too expensive and mothers taking turns caring for the children also did not work. Again, trained care providers solved the problem and soon the little co-op nursery school evolved into the private nursery school movement, sanctioned by pediatricians as adequate to the needs of young children.

Philanthropic nursery schools were an integral part of settlement houses and churches in which the needs of poor children were served within their own communities. Generally all-day facilities, children were tended to by caregivers who lived in the same community as the children. These inner-city sites provided meals, hygiene and a sanctuary for the children who would otherwise be on the street.

Teacher-training nursery schools filled a need created by the increased demand for trained care providers. These nursery schools were on-site at teacher training colleges and sought to bring about standards of care consistent with new theories of child development and teacher practices.
As an adjunct to, and growing simultaneously with the nursery school movement in America, the kindergarten movement (generally children between the ages of 4 3/4 and 6 years old) spread across the United States in fits and starts during the second half of the 19th century. German immigrants, fleeing the European revolution of 1848, settled in American cities such as New York City, Hoboken, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Louisville and brought with them bilingual, private schools. These schools all included kindergartens. Simultaneous with the establishment of German schools in America, the doctrines of Froebel were presented in lectures in England and America by his disciples. By the 1850s, articles began to appear in professional journals such as *American Journal of Education* and the *Christian Examiner* and other national magazines, bringing the kindergarten movement to the attention of educators. One of the earliest proponents of kindergarten in America was Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, who studied Froebel and opened her kindergarten in the 1860s in New England. Sister-in-law to educational pioneer Horace Mann, Peabody promoted kindergarten among leaders of the educational movement at large. Froebel’s idealistic philosophy that the universe is spiritual and that nature and mankind are but expressions of God, appealed to the New England Transcendentalists, Miss Peabody among them. She wrote articles such as “The Moral Culture of Infancy” and “What is Kindergarten” for the
Atlantic Monthly in 1862 and later published a monthly magazine, The Kindergarten Messenger, including theoretical articles along with informational content. The Messenger later merged into The New England Journal of Education.34

Although Froebel’s kindergartens arrived in America as early as the 1850s, the widespread acceptance of education for young children depended upon Americans’ embrace of the concept that the child develops continuously over time and also earlier than previously recognized. In the second half of the 19th century, educational theorists began to acknowledge that learning begins much earlier than age seven, the age heretofore set as the age a child begins school. Even though education for young child began to be accepted in theory, the curriculum was not clearly defined. Should a child’s kindergarten experience be just a watered down version of what is presented at the elementary grades? Child development kindergartners said no. Based on the psychological work of Edward James and T. Stanley Hall, kindergartners asserted that young children learn differently than do older children, therefore unique environments must be set up to meet those needs.

An understanding of a psychological framework for education emerged in the early 1860s in Oswego, New York. There, Dr. E.A. Sheldon began training teachers on the Pestalozziian principles of child
development. The Oswego Normal School held that teachers teach young children objectively and concentrate on self-expression rather than the language arts, which was the focus for education of older children. Oswego Normal School was the first educational institution teaching that education for young children was just as valid, yet different in its formulation from education for older children. This early childhood education concept spread rapidly and teachers who trained at Oswego were eagerly sought after.35

Another development in the theory and practice of education of young children emerged in teacher colleges, ironically at the elementary level, that of art education and work with the hands. The inclusion of art education at the elementary level originated in Europe as demonstrated at the 1851 London Exhibition and the Paris Exhibition of 1867. The art advocates made their case in America at the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876. Education authorities in this country blessed the addition of art education as seen at the Philadelphia Exposition, declaring an art renaissance in the States. As arts and crafts courses integrated into the curriculum at the elementary level, the kindergartner's earlier promulgation of them was recognized.36

As the stature of the kindergarten rose in the 1870s and 1880s, private schools readily incorporated it into their curriculum, but public schools moved more slowly. By the turn of the century, kindergartens
could be found in public elementary schools on a regional basis, but many localities were not convinced the additional cost was warranted. Materials such as paper, glue, scissors and song books cost more per pupil than did materials for older children. Also, kindergartens required more teachers per pupils than did older grades. Further, the individual states mandated the age at which children could begin school. In many states it was indeed five years old, the upper range of desirability for entering kindergarten. However, a few states named six years old as the minimum age requirement. In Alabama, it was seven years old and in Texas, eight years old.\textsuperscript{37} Educational change followed the slow pace of legislation change.

In 1912, 9\% of children of kindergarten age were in public school kindergarten, up from 5\% in 1900.\textsuperscript{38} The increase was also due in part to the formation of the National Kindergarten Association, created specifically for public relations to garner national financial support for kindergartens in public schools.\textsuperscript{39} Kindergarten educators also formed their own association, The International Kindergarten Union, which focused on curriculum issues.

But just as the public was accepting the idea of kindergarten, Froebel's kindergarten was coming under intense scrutiny by educational theorists. New discoveries in biological sciences and child development theories, especially at the university based kindergartens,
brought about schisms in the previously homogenous kindergarten movement. Philanthropic kindergartens, which were not a part of research and academic discourse, retained their allegiance to Froebel, whereas university and progressive schools began to question the rigid structure and top-down approach of Froebel. Revisionists attacked the Froebel gifts and occupations for their inadequate size for the young child’s hand, art instructors complained that the occupations were unsatisfactory as a basis for art work, and the physical education instructors did not approve of Froebel’s games for children. All complainants used the new psychology of child development as their reason for dissent.

The revisionists were led by The Teachers College at Columbia University, which was now considered the epicenter of educational thought in America. The progressives at Teachers College, led by Patty Smith Hill, John Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick, favored emerging trends in psychology and child study such as evolutional intelligence and new understandings of child development, and so clashed with conservative Froebellian theories of static intelligence and limited capacities of children under six years old. Kindergartners fretted that the internal dialog among themselves would spill out into a public discourse and threaten their hard fought gains over the past half
century. Montessori's radical proposals came to light right in the middle of this educational upheaval.⁴²
Five years after Montessori’s death in 1952, the first significant biography was penned by her devoted follower, E.M. Standing. For years, Standing’s *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* was the seminal work on the subject. Although useful as an exposition of her educational philosophy, it is both short on details of Montessori’s life and understandably reverential in its approach to her philosophy.

A second biography, *Maria Montessori, A Biography* by Rita Kramer, was published in 1976. Kramer approached the work as an objective historian unfamiliar with the sacred phrases and rituals that had become Montessori education. Kramer was given full access to Montessori archives as well as personal interviews with Maria’s son, Mario, and other members of the family. Kramer also consulted with educational historians, Diane Ravitch and Lawrence Cremin, who added critical perspectives in educational trends confronting Montessori’s appearance in America. The following biographical sketch is drawn primarily from Kramer’s work.
Maria Montessori’s life began in Italy in 1870. Her father worked as a government official and her mother devoted her life to the betterment of her only child, Maria. The family moved from their small town on the Adriatic to Rome when Maria was about five years old and there Maria encountered the larger world of urban life, both its opportunities and the hardships of many of the people. Maria’s mother, Renilde, infused Maria with the spirit of charity toward those less fortunate than her.

Maria’s father, Alessandro, a traditional Italian man who expected his daughter to fit in with the women’s roles of the day, urged her to pursue teaching until she married, yet her mother supported Maria in breaking free of the limitations of her cultural role. She wanted her daughter to have the best schooling and to fulfill her potential. The Italian schools at the time were bureaucratic, rigid and boring, offering little to their students, particularly female students. Maria learned a great deal about what schools should not be from her experiences in Rome’s grammar schools.

Maria was a smart, headstrong girl who sought an alternative life for herself. She loved mathematics and considered an engineering degree, but she also loved botany and decided to pursue an education in medicine. That there was no such thing as a woman doctor in Italy at that time did not dissuade her. Over her father’s protestations and with
the encouragement of her mother, she applied and was admitted to the University of Rome in 1890 as an undergraduate. She studied all the sciences and her grades qualified her to apply to medical school. After much effort and numerous applications and re-applications, she was finally admitted to medical school in the autumn of 1892.

The pursuit of an advanced degree in Italy was a gentlemanly activity. The graduate schools were filled with sons of the upper class whose station in life was secure and who were not expected to study very hard. Exams were a routine matter and occasional attendance in class assured a passing grade. Into this milieu strode Maria Montessori, a beautiful, feminine, very smart young woman. She turned the medical school on its ear. Not only did she attend classes, she asked probing questions, studied everything presented to her and reached for more, studying long into the night. Her father accompanied her to school every day conforming to a strict code forbidding single females to appear in public alone. The University didn't know quite how to handle the situation of one female student in a traditionally male environment. Maria had to wait till all the male students were seated before she could enter the lecture hall, social codes of the day prohibiting single females to be in free physical proximity to men. She dissected cadavers alone at night because it would be improper for both men and women to examine the naked body together. The male students at first resented
her but came to admire her tenacity. She earned excellent grades and at the end of her second year she garnered a prestigious scholarship for the next two years of study.

In her last year of medical school she secured an internship in a pediatric hospital where she attended children and their mothers. She also worked in the psychiatric clinic learning about the mental disorders of young children. She wrote her dissertation on the psychiatric disorders of young children, defended it, and took her final exams. She received her medical degree in 1896, becoming the first woman medical doctor in Italy.

Shortly after graduation, she began life in private practice and also accepted a professorship at the University of Rome's teaching hospital. She quickly became noticed in medical circles and in the philanthropic circles of educated women of Rome. In the autumn of 1896, she attended the International Women's Congress in Berlin as a delegate from Rome and gave two speeches. In the first one, she called for reforms for women of all classes and in the second one, called for equal pay for equal work. She stood in dramatic contrast to the severely dressed, stern women who shared the podium with her. Her warmth, femininity and charm as well as her eloquence as a speaker earned her rave reviews not only from the attendees, but from the press as well.
She said that men were not the enemy, instead, she said, "I think our aim should be to befriend them, not alienate them."\textsuperscript{43}

Throughout her life, Montessori engaged in mundane household chores as a part of daily life, believing they should be done cheerfully and reverently. She believed that boys should participate in maintaining the household and know how to take care of themselves, as well as know how to cook and care for children. She brought this perspective to her beside manner as well, not only treating patients' diseases, but tending to their affective needs as a nurse would. In home visits, she cared for the whole family of the person who was sick, making soup, giving baths and putting the children to bed. Montessori's educational philosophy of caring for the whole child, the whole person, began here in her practices as a doctor.

One of her tasks at the psychiatric clinic was to visit the various asylums of Rome looking for appropriate subjects for treatment at the clinic. She discovered that many children were in asylums because they had no place else to go, and that all abnormal children were treated the same as insane adults. She found the plight of these children appalling. Working with abnormal children at the clinic, Montessori found that with care and attention she was able to elicit responses from them. This intrigued her and sent her back to the library archives looking for precedents in treatment of abnormal children. She found them in the
work of Jean Marc Gaspard Itard and his student, Edouard Seguin. She poured over the works of these men and her findings would profoundly effect the direction of her work.

Itard, a French physician, had worked on the famous case known as The Wild Child of Aveyron. This boy, found in the wilderness living with the animals, was brought to Itard for care. Itard taught the boy rudimentary communication, but once the boy reached puberty, his behaviors became uncontrollable. Itard’s contribution was the innovative way he treated children wherein respect for the individual was essential to their responsiveness. Seguin furthered the work of Itard by producing specific materials and exercises for the training of the senses, which he asserted was the key to education. Their work resonated with Montessori because she was also able to elicit positive responses from children labeled unteachable. She concluded that children labeled abnormal would be better served with pedagogy than in mental hospitals.

In Montessori’s by now typical pattern of immersing herself in her work, she decided to learn all she could about education and pedagogy. In 1897-98 she audited education classes at the University and researched the history of education to gain a thorough grasp of education’s past in order to understand the present. She gained insights from the work of Pestalozzi, Froebel, Robert Owen, and Rousseau. All of these European
innovators shared the insight that the adult must respect the child if the child is to learn. Schools, she realized, should be more child-centered because young children needed different kinds of learning experiences than older children and adults.

Montessori disagreed with Rousseau’s assertion that society corrupts the child. She did not want to separate the child from society and isolate him in nature as did Rousseau, instead she called for adults to find ways to incorporate nature into the child’s learning. Montessori held that the child was capable of, and should be encouraged to master his environment, not be protected from it. Like Rousseau, she held that sense training was an appropriate means of childhood learning, but whereas Rousseau believed that sense training was an end unto itself, Montessori posited that it was a prerequisite for all future learning.45

Pestalozzi, a Swiss educator, contributed the idea that children learn best through concrete experiences rather than abstractly and that their development is ongoing, thus educational opportunities should progress from the most simple to the complex and from the concrete to the abstract.

Friedrich Froebel, a protégé of Pestalozzi introduced the kindergarten (a garden for children) to the world in 1837. The kindergarten incorporated the basic ideas of Pestalozzi and loosened them up. Froebel thought children should be set free in the
environment where they would “bloom like flowers”. He held that children would develop naturally and that play was essential to their growth. Froebel created “gifts” as a stimulus to the child’s play, various geometric objects that children could use in a variety of imaginative ways. The adult in the kindergarten would guide rather than direct the young child, and free play was the central feature of kindergarten. Froebel’s kindergartens soon sprang up all over the world. In America, the first kindergarten opened in 1855 and by 1873 it was beginning to be seen in the public school system. Although most kindergartens adopted the use of the “gifts” and prepared the appropriate setting, the teacher directed the children in group activities rather than allowing them to freely select the activities as proposed by Froebel.

Within two years of becoming a doctor, Montessori focused her energies on the plight of mentally retarded children. In 1897 she spoke at a medical conference in Turin on the causes of delinquency. Her articles were getting published and she could now influence important decision makers in government and education as well as medicine. She spoke out on the need to find the source of delinquency early while there is still time to affect a change because waiting till the children were adults was too late. She was an activist for the education of, rather than the hospitalization of abnormal children.
By 1899, Montessori spoke all over Italy and was exceedingly well received. Audiences and the press were impressed with this beautiful medical doctor, who was at once charming, feminine and articulate. She advocated the "prevention of misery, not just the relief of misery", citing poor diet and sanitary conditions as critical issues. She served as a delegate to another international congress of women in 1899 and was received by Queen Victoria. She gave speeches on ending the exploitation of children in factories. She was the subject of numerous newspaper and magazine articles and was recognized everywhere she went. By the end of 1899, she maintained a private medical practice, worked at the hospital, gave her time to the various causes on behalf of children, taught anthropology at a teacher training college for women, and read student theses.

In the spring of 1900, Montessori became head of an orthophrenic school emphasizing both medicine and pedagogy for mentally impaired children. She applied what she had learned from Itard and Seguin to her work with these children, and in teaching teachers how to teach. By now she was seen as a educator first, a physician second. She developed materials to be used with the children based on the ideas of Itard and Seguin, continually revising and improving them after observations of the children and in working directly with them. She hit upon the idea that children should be given learning opportunities in stages. To learn
a specific skill, the adult must ask, what does this child need to know how to do first? By offering "idiot" children motives for activity that led them gradually to be able to write and read with a facility thought possible only in normal children, Montessori began to wonder what this would mean for normal children.

At this same time, Montessori faced a crisis in her personal life. An affair with the co-director of the institute led to the birth of a son, whom she could not raise on her own without jeopardizing her reputation and career. She had to send the baby away to be raised by a family in the country. With the birth of this child, the abandonment by the father, and her now passionate interest in the education of normal children, Montessori was at another crossroads in her life. She gave up her work at the institute and devoted herself to the study of education. Montessori studied educational philosophy, psychology and anthropology to understand why the current schools were not working and she re-enrolled at the University to study philosophy.

The favored educational philosophers of the day were the German idealists, Herbart and Wundt. Johann Friedrich Herbart was a philosopher-psychologist who approached the study of education from a scholar's perspective. He theorized that learning has specific steps beginning with awareness of what is known, then introduction of new information, followed by relating the new material to similar ideas or
knowledge and finally internalized generalization of the material.\textsuperscript{48}

Herbert’s analysis of the procedure for learning led followers in later years to often emphasize lesson plans over content. Wundt concerned himself with the relationship between brain activity level and sensory input. He called it a “creative synthesis between mind and sensation.”\textsuperscript{49}

Montessori investigated the connections between these scientist-educators and Seguin’s psychological methods in which sense training presented concrete objects to facilitate abstract learning. She intensely studied all current forms of educating children, noting how many systems sought to teach large groups of children all at the same time in an economical way as possible. Montessori likened students taught in this way to “butterflies mounted on pins.”\textsuperscript{50} She was appalled at the poor hygiene, the enforced immobility and silence, and the use of rewards and punishments.

Montessori sought to more deeply understand the work of Itard and Seguin and toward that end she sat down and translated all their works, by hand, into Italian. From this Herculean effort came deep insights into the minds of children and how they best can learn. Everything that Montessori had done up to now, her medical training, her reformist zeal, her anthropological perspective and her solving the problems of deficient children, led her to this point, her life’s work, a revolutionary new approach to the education of normal children.
Better education for young children had to start with teacher training. Toward that end, she accepted a position at the University of Rome's teacher college, lecturing three times a week on the biology of the individual from an anthropological perspective. Later, she included these lectures in her book, Pedagogical Anthropology. The significance of Pedagogical Anthropology included her revolutionary position that to properly educate the child, we must first study and have a full understanding of the child we are educating. In her teaching at the University, Montessori incorporated the methods that she recommended to teachers working with young children, making the lecture (or the environment) interesting in an age appropriate way so the student becomes excited to learn. Montessori's lectures were always full.

Montessori's radical philosophy shifted away from current thinking that equated an immobile child with a good child. However, in her proposals to make schools more child centered, she differentiated herself from other progressives. She held that while an understanding of the needs of the child is the basis for the educational approach, such an understanding is the starting point only, for it is always the teacher who decides what the options are and not the child. In no way did she advocate a free-for-all in which children could follow any whim. The child was free "to do the right thing." The adult, in Montessori's view,
immediately intervenes if harm is being done by the child. She also expected parents to follow the same guidelines at home. Kramer writes that Montessori compared the relationship of the teacher and the student to the doctor and the patient; while it is the child who does the learning and the patient who does the healing, it is the professional, whether it be the doctor or the teacher, who is trained to know what options are available and which are most appropriate.53 The trained adult in education knows best what the developing child needs.

During these years, Montessori developed her renowned style. She was a passionate reformer and presented herself with elegance and charm, stating her messages clearly and simply, yet eloquently. No matter the venue, she was received with thunderous response. She combined scientific reasoning with the romantic flourishes of the idealist. She imbued her students with the idea that their work was more than that of a technical instructor passing on past knowledge, it was to bring out what was inside each child. Teachers have a mission, she said, to change society, their work was a calling. Maria Montessori, now thirty six years old, was about to become that agent for change herself on a grand scale.

After decades of political unrest in Italy, socialists and other reformers brought about some changes in the lives of Italians. Immigrants flooded into Rome and cheap housing was quickly erected
in good financial times to cope with the burgeoning population. When financial hard times reappeared, some of these buildings stood idle in mid-construction. One such place was a tenement in the San Lorenzano district of Rome where beggars, criminals and prostitutes now occupied the unfinished buildings. Eventually some bankers agreed to do minimal renovations so at least the poorest of the poor could live there. And move in they did, mostly the working poor and their families, including about fifty children under six years old. But because the parents worked all day, these children ran wild throughout the tenement. The building owners sought a solution to the vandalism wrought by these children and turned to Maria Montessori, who was by this time famous for her ideas about children.

Montessori, eager to try out her theories on a group of normal children, said yes. Most of her colleagues were appalled, decrying her choice to be a baby-sitter, and accusing her of devaluing the medical profession. But Montessori persisted. The building owners gave her an empty room on the first floor, but not much else, so she turned to all her philanthropically minded women friends to get the help she needed. Montessori put an untrained woman from the tenement in charge of the children under Montessori’s guidance. A mutual friend suggested the name Casa Dei Bambini, or Children’s House, and so it was named, and
opened on January 6, 1907, on the feast of the Epiphany, a significant feast day for children in Italy.55

And then Maria Montessori started her work. She still carried out all her other obligations; her medical practice, teaching and research. She visited the Children’s House when she could, sometimes only once a week. She asked for reports on the children’s activities, she brought in new materials that she revised from her work at the orthophrenic school. Montessori told the teacher not to interfere with the children’s activities so that she could observe what the children were doing with the materials she placed there.

Over the ensuing weeks, Montessori noticed changes in the children from the scared, crying, sullen children who first came to the Casa into ones that appeared calmer and healthier. She noticed that they preferred to work with her didactic (self-correcting) materials instead of the toys. Didactic, as Montessori defined it, meant an object “with its own teaching properties which encourages observations and comparisons and leads to discoveries.”56 The children became more social, communicative and cooperative. Montessori continually made changes to the materials as necessary. One of her observations was that children have a strong sense of dignity and respond positively when they are treated with respect. For example, Montessori, fundamentally concerned with hygiene and the children’s lack of it, noticed that they
did not know how to blow their noses. When she showed them how to
do it step by step, they responded with applause and appreciation and
thereafter blew their noses on their own. She continually improved the environment in response to her
observations of the children. She removed the large table and replaced
it with several small tables and chairs that she designed and had made.
They were scaled down to be child-sized so the children’s feet could
touch the floor and were light enough so that the children could move
them about by themselves. She hung blackboards at their eye level, and
brought in plants and animals for the children to tend. She hung art
prints at their eye level, and brought wash basins and soap for each child
to care for his own cleanliness. Montessori also observed that children,
once shown how to do something, wanted to carry out the activities for
themselves with minimal assistance from the adult. They did not appear
to be interested in rewards for doing activities, but rather in the doing of
the activity itself. She concluded that it was in the nature of the child to
do things for himself regardless of the external payoff. She added
gardening, physical activities, serving lunch and pet care to the list of
activities.

Some observers asked her what her method of discipline was. To
that she replied,
A room in which all the children move about usefully, intelligently and voluntarily, without committing any rough or rude act, would seem to me a classroom very well disciplined indeed.\textsuperscript{58}

Montessori theorized that if children were permitted to move about at their discretion choosing what interested them, they would manifest self-discipline because of their deep interest in the work. She made it very clear however, that there was a world of difference between freedom and anarchy. Children were free to do what was appropriate under the authority of the adult.

Montessori also extended her work with children to the parents and the community in which they lived. She expected the parents to confer with her regarding their children and to carry out self-help activities at home. Maintaining that "no one can be free unless he is independent," she encouraged the parents to help their children learn to take care of themselves.\textsuperscript{59} Granting that this took more patience on the part of the adult, she said that the difference between teaching the child how to do it and doing for him is that "the former is the work of the educator, the latter is the easy and inferior work of the servant."\textsuperscript{60}

Parents were at first reluctant to get involved, but seeing their children come home so happy and changed, they became curious. Parents began to take pride in themselves and their children and the community in which they lived, cleaning the place up, planting flowers and improving
some personal habits. It was essential in Montessori's view that the woman in daily charge of the Casa also live in the community, which she did. The teacher served as an example for the children and their families of how to live respectful lives and the children could relate to their teacher as one of their own.

The second Casa Dei Bambini opened in San Lorenzo on April 7, 1907. These children and families responded to the environment just as positively as did the children in the first Casa. Montessori had been working on materials to facilitate the early reading and writing of the children and this she implemented now to immediate public acclaim. By April of 1908, the press discovered the schools and people flocked to see these "new children" who were polite and clean, concentrating on their work and happily enjoying themselves without an adult telling them what to do. By 1909, there were five Casas. The Montessori method had now also been adopted by the Swiss public school system which removed the Froebellian materials. Montessori conducted her first teacher training course in that year.

Advocates urged her to write down her theories, which she did, publishing a book titled in translation, *The Montessori Method*. The book outlined her methods and theories. She traced the history of her work giving due credit to Itard and Seguin and detailed her teaching methods, but most important of all, she stated her teaching philosophy.
The fundamental tenets of the Montessori philosophy are:

- The spontaneous self-development of the child is based on the true nature of the child, which can be observed.
- The adult is not the center of attention but observes the child and provides what is needed.
- The child is to be free to choose and free to repeat the activity.
- The adult must develop a keen skill in observation to know what the child needs next for his development.
- The child is a self-determining learner in need of guidance as opposed to being taught.
- The goal of education is to achieve control of one's self. The child needs to "experiment with significant objects in order to evolve."\(^{61}\)
- All of the exercises and the way they are carried out facilitate the child becoming the master over his own body.
- All the activities have two purposes; the immediate practical one - putting the material away, for example, and the indirect one - in this case, to create a sense of personal power and orderliness by putting the material away.
- The didactic materials serve as materialized abstractions of a quality.\(^{52}\)
- All lessons are direct and simple, such as teaching the color yellow by using a yellow cube rather than offering some vague explanation of
the sun, which has many other and potentially confusing properties besides yellow.

- The experiences in the early years shape a child for life. She considered this tenet one of the essential contributions of her work. Essentially, Montessori was a social revolutionary who believed that the individual's transformation originates in the appropriate school and societal transformations originate with the individual.

    The name Montessori began to spread even wider. Throngs came to see the children of San Lorenzo, but soon Montessori and the owners of San Lorenzo parted ways and she established a new demonstration class at a Franciscan convent. Montessori now gave much of her attention to the training of teachers, conducting international courses at the convent in both 1913 and 1914. Her book was translated and the visitors now included government officials, journalists, doctors, and educators not only from Europe but from all over the world. People waited days to get an audience with her, and once they saw the children many went home to start Montessori schools and organizations of their own.

    The first reports of Montessori's work to reach America appeared in 1909 in the educational journal, *The Kindergarten Primary Magazine*. An article detailed how teachers needed to take a new, more passive, role in relation to the child. Traditional teachers did not like this idea, did not
approve of early writing or reading, nor did they like the descriptions of Montessori’s exercises in practical life such as sweeping and scrubbing. The teachers equated these activities with preparing the child to become butlers and waiters and they thought that these tasks promoted child labor. Further, they criticized Montessori’s use of self-correcting materials, complaining that they seemed too much like training and would hinder the child’s free expression.

Numerous American educational and psychological professionals visited Montessori in Rome, including Arnold and Beatrice Gessell, William Heard Kilpatrick, G. Stanley Hall and S.S. McClure of McClure’s Magazine. Harvard University expressed interest in undertaking the English translation of her book. The first American Montessori school opened in Tarrytown, New York in 1911, and another soon followed in Boston. Montessori was persuaded to conduct a training for English speaking teachers from America and England.

She was now forty years old, and decided to give up everything else to devote herself fully to the now named Montessori movement. She stopped practicing medicine and resigned from teaching at the university in order to oversee the entire Montessori operation. This included teacher trainings and guiding the increasingly large number of faithful followers to her movement, which meant that Montessori had to
support herself and her family solely on the income from trainings and lecturing.

The Montessori Message Spreads to America

The growth of the Montessori movement coincided with the proliferation of newspapers and magazines in America. By 1912, her work was reported in educational journals such as American Education, Journal of Educational Psychology, The Kindergarten Review, Pedagogical Seminary, and The American Primary Teacher. Articles appeared in popular magazines such as Ladies Home Journal, Dial, Scientific American, the Delineator and Contemporary Review. But it was McClure’s Magazine that catapulted Montessori to a household name by 1912.

S.S. McClure had made his reputation and magazine with his uncanny ability to understand the American mood and to sense what Americans wanted to read. Montessori was perfect for McClure’s Magazine. When the first articles on Montessori were published in 1911, the response at the magazine was so overwhelming that McClure immediately commissioned additional articles. Readers wanted to know when her book would be translated into English, wanted to obtain the didactic materials to use with their own children, and wanted to know where they could take the training.
By 1912, interest in Montessori exploded across the country. Americans of influence began to involve themselves in the Montessori movement. The Alexander Graham Bell family set up a Montessori society to promote Montessori in America. The didactic materials became available for sale to the public, with a warning that they were not toys and were to be sold only as a set, not individually. The English translation of the *Montessori Method* was soon published under the auspices of Harvard University. The introduction, written by Harvard's Henry W. Holmes, urged American schools to adopt the Montessori approach. The first edition of 5,000 copies sold out in four days, and six months later the sixth edition of the book was released. *The Montessori Method* became the second largest selling non-fiction book in the United States in 1912.64

The US Department of Education published numerous booklets on educational subjects and in 1912 after the publication of Montessori's book, the USDOE published their analysis of the book and of Montessori's method. Assuming that certain changes could be made to the Montessori method because of different social conditions in America, and that more time could be allowed for American children to acquire the ability to read because of the English language's more difficult phonetics than Italian, the DOE concluded that the Montessori approach "could be readily integrated into American schools."65 Teacher colleges
in several states gave lectures on the Montessori approach, and the number of articles on Montessori mushroomed. Parents grabbed Montessori’s book off the shelves and clamored for more.

The *New York Times* was not so impressed. In an August, 1913 article, the *Times* disparaged the popular appeal of Montessori:

>(T)he methods of Maria Montessori have been threatened with complete suffocation at the hands of the dilettante enthusiasts, whose destructive power is as that of the tribes from the North and who are responsible for the word “fad” being in the dictionaries at all.\(^{66}\)

More books appeared on the subject, including *A Montessori Mother* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, in which she explained the basic Montessori principles in simple terms that encouraged mothers to use Montessori methods in the home. She compared the Montessori approach favorably with the kindergarten.

> In the kindergarten the emphasis is laid, consciously, or unconsciously, but very practically always, on the fact that the teacher teaches. In the Casa Dei Bambini, the emphasis is all on the fact that the child learns.\(^{57}\)

Fisher wrote another book shortly after the first one, entitled *The Montessori Manual for Teachers and Mothers*. Also in 1912, the Montessori American Committee originated to promote Montessori education in America.

Maria Montessori was furious with both the creation of American organizations and books written about her method. She insisted that
any organization or publication with her name on it must meet with her prior approval and be under her direction. Nevertheless, Montessori societies sprang up all over the world and the need for teachers reached critical proportions.

In January, 1913, Montessori conducted an international training course in Rome presented in Italian and translated into English. Students came from all over the world. Montessori, self possessed on the podium and dressed all in black, spoke of the need for a new kind of teacher, one whose primary concerns were the careful preparation of the environment and the keen observation of the children as they worked. She mesmerized her students, many of whom, as Dorothy Canfield Fisher observed, became devoted followers, like “nuns about an adored Mother Superior.” Two Americans who would figure large in Montessori’s life attended this international training; Helen Parkhurst, who would later split from Montessori and create a school called the Dalton Plan, and Adelia McAlpine Pyle, an American heiress who would later translate many Montessori lectures and courses into English.

Montessori’s trainings did not convey a university degree or teaching credential on the graduates, so students knew that they were following an independent track tied to the Montessori method. Montessori likewise received no income from a university, her only source of revenue remained the trainings and lecture fees. Though she
tightly controlled the rapidly growing Montessori movement, she did welcome funding from those outside the system who supported her ideas.

Among the contributors were members of the Alexander Graham Bell family who, in 1913, created the Montessori Education Association as an outgrowth of the Montessori American Committee. Mrs. Bell was the president and board members included Dorothy Canfield Fisher, S.S. McClure, Margaret Woodrow Wilson, the president's daughter, and the US Commissioner of Education. The purpose of this organization was to promote Montessori in America and to train teachers. Once again, however, Montessori balked at the idea that anyone other than herself could conduct teacher trainings, to the point of stating her objections publicly and in print. In a letter to the editor in The New York Times in August, 1913, Montessori wrote,

I feel it would be premature to establish training schools which were not under my direct supervision, so that for the present, no training courses for the preparation of teachers except those held here in Rome, will be authorized by me."

Critics increased as Montessori's popularity rose. The American education establishment frowned on her proprietary stance, accusing her of cultivating a church not education. They charged that allowing children free choice would create egomaniacs. Her defenders answered the criticisms by explaining the difference between anarchy and
freedom. All this debate heightened public interest to the point that Montessori’s defenders urged her to come to America. No doubt, S.S. McClure also saw Montessori’s visit to America as a great source of revenue. In November, 1913, Montessori and McClure set sail for America.

Montessori Visits America

By the time Montessori and McClure landed in New York on December 3, 1913, McClure had done his job; the press was there in force to greet her. Reporters mobbed her hotel suite where Montessori calmly answered all their questions. She told them that she was in favor of the vote for women and supported a woman working outside the home. Her patience, forthrightness and charm won the press over. All the major New York papers reported on her arrival in positive terms.\(^7^2\) The New York Times published an advertisement for her books on page six a few days after her arrival.\(^7^3\) One reporter called her one of the “half dozen most prominent (women) in the world”, and another said that within a few years her system would “modify all existing educational systems and theories and . . . take their place.”\(^7^4\) The New York Tribune noted that Montessori said “Americans are the most intelligent people in the world.”\(^7^5\)
The next day she traveled to the capitol, met the Alexander Graham Bell family and visited the school they had established in Washington. Margaret Wilson also greeted her with apologies from her father, the President, who excused himself because of the flu. On December 6th, Montessori gave her first lecture in America at the Masonic Temple in Washington, DC, during which she also showed films of the children working at the Casa Dei Bambini. After the lecture, she was feted at a lavish reception at the Bell home where she was greeted by leaders of Washington society and politics. The receiving line, in addition to Dr. Montessori and her interpreter, included Mrs. Bell, Margaret Wilson, the US Commissioner of Education, and the wife of the US Secretary of the Interior. The *Journal of Education* weighed in that week with its perspective,

> Whatever may be thought of the Montessori method of dealing with children and of Mr. McClure’s method of dealing with the public there can be no question as to the general effect of any group of personalities that can make any educational event such a fad—we use the term appreciatively—as to fill a large auditorium with persons, most of whom pay two dollars each in order to demonstrate their interest in education.

On the following Monday, Montessori returned to New York where she spoke at Carnegie Hall to one of the largest audiences ever gathered to hear a speaker there. Thousands were turned away at the door. John Dewey, who was by now famous at Columbia University
and was also the president of the National Kindergarten Association, appeared on the dais with her, and many notable American educators were also in attendance. S.S. McClure introduced her as the "greatest woman educator in history." She spoke for over two hours and showed her movies of the children at the Casa. Again the response was overwhelming; press reports the next day effused with praise.

On Tuesday, she traveled to Philadelphia to meet with Helen Keller. News reports of the meeting flashed all over the world headlining "the four it took for the two to have a conversation." Their complicated, yet engaging discussion revealed that they had a similar goal; the liberation of the oppressed wherever they may be.

Montessori filled every day in America with lectures, meetings and interviews. She returned to New York where she again met with opinion makers at the highest levels including the president of Columbia University. Next, she went to Boston to meet with the faculty of Harvard University, and on to New Jersey where she visited Thomas Edison and took a tour of his laboratory. Returning to New York, she gave a final speech at Carnegie Hall to another wildly enthusiastic audience. She then traveled to the midwest visiting Pittsburgh and Chicago were she met with Jane Addams of Hull House, and on to J.H. Kellogg's sanitarium retreat at Battle Creek, Michigan. She returned to New York for one last reception, then sailed to Europe on the Luisitania.
on Christmas Eve, 1913. To the reporters who were there to see her off, she made one last statement about America:

Your wonderful country is one of the hopes of the civilized world. The feel of youth is in the air and soil. You will rear here the greatest race the world has ever known. It is in your blood. The mixing of the peoples of the earth will produce a great posterity. No country has the heritage to leave to its children like the heritage of the American people. America is glorious. Glorious because of its achievement, of course, but more than that, glorious because of the thought it has taken for its children. And I must bow with humility to the American mother. She is one of the wonders of your growing men. 

After a three week visit she was gone. This trip would mark the high point of her popularity in America. Montessori returned to Rome to conduct another international training from February to June of 1914, including forty five Americans in her course.

After her departure, McClure continued to promote Montessori in America, showing her films and giving lectures on the method and reaping the profits. Although he did nothing illegal, he failed to inform Maria Montessori of what he was doing. He did however, send her news clippings and kept her abreast of developments in America, hoping she would return to America for another tour.

In April, 1914, McClure sent his brother to Rome to speak to Montessori about a possible return visit. McClure proposed that Montessori and McClure create an institute in America where she could train teachers and continue to develop her methods. What happened
next is unclear, but the meeting ended when she declined the offer and denounced McClure. Montessori was upset because McClure kept all proceeds from his lectures in America. She demanded that he share the proceeds, and further that he cease negotiating on her behalf. She called for the dissolution of the Montessori American Committee, the cancellation of all contracts for McClure’s lectures and ordered McClure to seek better terms for her with the manufacturer of the Montessori materials. She warned that only after all these conditions were met would she consider future possibilities in America, but they were to be on her timetable and on her terms. McClure, amazed at the far-reaching consequences of what he felt was a petty dispute, concluded that someone poisoned her against him. He cut all his ties with Montessori and wrote off the whole episode as a poor investment.

Other investors and supporters also became disenchanted with Montessori, including the Bell family. The Bells’ dispute with Montessori, like McClure’s, arose over who would speak for the Montessori approach and who would control Montessori activities in America. Given all their efforts on behalf of the Montessori movement and Maria Montessori personally, they felt she insulted them instead of appreciating their efforts. For Montessori’s part, she feared the “distortion and exploitation” of her ideas. She was an idealist who saw
the whole of society changing as a result of her ideas and wanted to maintain control of them.

Montessori did return to America in 1915, this time under the auspices of the National Educational Association. The organizers of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in California invited Montessori to demonstrate her methods at the exposition. The National Educational Association held its 53rd annual convention in Oakland to coincide with the Exposition, as did the International Kindergarten Union. Both these groups invited Montessori to address them. She also gave her third international teacher training course in San Francisco from August to November, 1915. She created a demonstration class at the Exhibition with a glass wall on one side and bleachers set up so observers could watch the children actually working in a Montessori environment. The class met everyday from nine till noon, and quickly became a favorite attraction at the Exposition. Visitors lined up early to secure bleacher seats. Twenty one children, chosen from over two thousand applications made up the class and because the children came from various cultures and spoke different languages, they used sign language to communicate.

Press reports of the "miracle" of the Montessori approach heightened expectations of parents who were promised "the perfect mental and physical child" according to the San Francisco Chronicle.
Teachers from the NEA and the International Kindergarten Union also watched the class with great enthusiasm. Her model classroom at the Exposition was so successful that it won both medals awarded for Education. But Montessori rejected all offers to remain in the United States including a plea from Margaret Wilson. Montessori made one last visit to America in 1918, but it was a personal, not a professional visit, and after that she never returned to this country.

After Montessori's departure, the Montessori groups in America began to splinter and fall apart. Disputes over money and control, as well as a lack of trained teachers, helped quash the movement. By 1917, most of the American Montessori organizations had disbanded.

Montessori continued her work in Europe. In 1926 she spoke on the topic “Education and Peace” at the League of Nations in Geneva. In August, 1929, Maria and her son Mario founded the Association Montessori International, the parent body that would oversee all Montessori activities from then on. A.M.I. was headquartered first in Berlin, but moved to Holland in 1935, where it remains today. Jean Piaget attended Montessori's International Conference in Rome in 1934, and then returned to Switzerland to start a Montessori society there. By the 1930s Dr. Montessori was preoccupied with the topic of peace and how the new education would bring about a renewed, peaceful world.
By this time, Montessori was a world traveler, and did not consider any one place her home. She traveled, gave trainings and lectures, and wrote books on her ideas on the child and on society. In 1939, World War II broke out while she was lecturing in India and because she was an Italian in English-controlled India, she and her son were interned in India for the duration of the war. While in India, Dr. Montessori observed the cultural practice of mothers and babies remaining together for as long as possible. This image of millions of mothers with their babies and toddlers inspired her to consider Montessori applications for children under three years of age.

Maria Montessori, now in her seventies, beheld the world around her embroiled in war. The combination of her age, the world scene and the influence of the eastern religions, created in her the desire to speak out and write forcefully and almost exclusively about peace. Her last books addressed this subject as a synthesis of her life's work.

After the war, Montessori returned to Holland at the age of seventy six. The Nobel Committee nominated her for the peace prize in 1949, 1950 and 1951. Maria Montessori died on May 6, 1952 in Holland. When word of her death reached America, newspaper readers were surprised that she had been still alive, so far had her personal reputation and her educational approach fallen into disfavor in this country.
Montessori education failed to reach widespread acceptance in America by 1915, even though just two years earlier she caused a sensation. This section will continue to investigate why America did not embrace Montessori in its schools at that time.

In all great social movements, agents of change encounter the status quo. The success or failure of those movements depends on the cultural acceptance of the new replacing what is already established. Sometimes change occurs readily because the old is no longer perceived as viable and is ready to crumble from within as exemplified by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Other times, it is because the innovation is so powerful that the status quo quickly becomes extinct, such as with the invention of the automobile in America. But at other times, change occurs when the power of the innovation coincides with the readiness of the society to accept the change, such as in the case of scientific knowledge about smoking rapidly reversing smoking as a socially acceptable activity in America.
Conversely, when a change does not occur irrespective of the intention of the innovator, there is also a relationship between the successful status quo and the innovator. Such is the case with Montessori's first appearance in America during the second decade of the twentieth century. This thesis will examine the forces of the innovator and the status quo in that epoch. On the side of innovation was the status of American popular culture and the American appetite for the new; America had an educated populace that read voraciously. Into that milieu came S.S. McClure and *McClure's Magazine*. The philanthropic impulse in America was also a force in the efforts of the Alexander Graham Bell family. The status quo is represented by the entrenched professionalization of progressive education and the influence of Columbia Teacher's College and of William Heard Kilpatrick, in particular. And finally, there was Maria Montessori herself. The power of her ideas and her charismatic personality brought the Montessori idea to America in a tidal wave of enthusiasm, but that same personality was largely responsible for its subsiding almost as quickly.

**The McClure Connection**

The Montessori idea first landed upon the American shores not in the traditional boat of orthodox American education, but on an entrepreneurial skiff built of guts, hope and chance, skippered by S.S.
McClure. S.S. McClure, publisher of McClure's Magazine was intrigued with the European educational phenomenon, Maria Montessori, and her "new children". But what attracted him most to the subject was the combination of the controversy over her methods and the immense popularity of them. Controversy and popularity sold magazines and McClure needed to sell a lot of them and fast. His magazine was on the brink of bankruptcy and a successful collaboration with Dr. Montessori would turn his fortunes around.

By 1895, McClure’s Magazine had been published for two years. It flourished in the midst of the golden age of magazines which lasted from 1890-1915. McClure’s was an excellent magazine featuring the freshest writers as well as editorial excellence, and it was innovative and current. In its very first issue, McClure included interviews with Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison.

McClure attributed the success of his magazine to his own experience. He had spent his youth and early adulthood in numerous jobs all across America. As was the custom of the time, he secured ready lodging in people’s homes, especially in the rural areas which he felt gave him specific advantages in his later career as a magazine publisher. He observed that, contrary to the stereotypical impression held by highbrow editors, country people were not at all ignorant and were extremely interested in greater issues affecting the country. By
staying in hundreds of country homes, McClure found rural Americans very interested in everything he was interested in and McClure was interested in everything. By 1895, *McClure’s Magazine* went head to head with the highbrow magazines of the day, *The Century, Harper’s, Scribner’s* and *The Atlantic* and rose to the top of that illustrious heap. The primary ingredient in *McClure’s* success was its publisher’s curiosity and enthusiasm. Every issue of the magazine burst with excitement about the newest inventions, the newest ideas, and what was happening at the forefront of American culture at the time. McClure included in his magazine everything he himself wanted to know about because he trusted his experience and instincts that this was also what his readers wanted. And he did it for a cheaper price. Recalling those times when he himself could not afford to buy anything to read, he charged .15, comparable to the “cheap magazines” of the day, instead of .35 charged by his highbrow competitors.

McClure published new, exciting authors such as Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Lewis Stevenson, Ida Turbell, Willa Cather and Stephen Crane, as well as Booth Tarkington and Frank Norris, who wrote *The Octopus*, Lincoln Steffens and Jack London, O. Henry, Theodore Dreiser, H.G. Wells, Bram Stoker and Joseph Conrad.

He was not afraid of controversy. He hired investigative reporters, paying them well to research issues in depth even if that took a long
time, and telling them to write their articles only when they were ready. Ida Tarbell's investigation of Standard Oil Company was done under the auspices of McClure's. She wrote nineteen articles in all for the magazine. He did the same for Lincoln Steffens' expose on corruption in government, as well as articles on the beef trust, the railroads, patents and medicine.

But by the second decade of the twentieth century, despite his genius for spotting new talent and his brilliant magazine editing, McClure's poor business practices caused him to lose control of the magazine and he subsequently had to make ends meet through lecturing and promoting new talent. Enter Maria Montessori. In 1913, one of his last editorial masterpieces for the magazine was a review of The Montessori Method. McClure was particularly impressed with Montessori's ideas about more freedom for the child because one of the many jobs he held as a young man was as a teacher. McClure recalled that he had great concern over the plight of children sitting in desks in rows all day long. The piece on Montessori generated a flood of mail into the magazine, mostly from parents who wanted their three-year-olds to read, too. Alexander Graham Bell, who knew McClure well, told him that "the introduction of the Montessori system in the United States [was] the most important work that McClure's Magazine had ever done." McClure seized his chance.
McClure knew that Montessori had motion pictures of the children at work, and determined that if he could get the American rights to them, he could revive his career by lecturing on the Montessori method. McClure went to Rome in 1913 and secured a deal with Dr. Montessori. For her part, Montessori thought McClure was a rich and powerful American who could secure a future for Montessori in America. Their Contract, signed on November 14, 1913, gave McClure exclusive rights to the films in North America. He agreed to pay Montessori 10% of the net profits of his lectures. He was also able to secure exclusive management rights to Montessori in North America for 20% of the profits for any lectures she held in this country. In return, McClure would cover the expenses of her voyage to America.

By the end of the American tour, relations between Montessori and McClure had soured and soon after she returned to Europe she disavowed their relationship entirely, believing he sought to exploit her. In a letter to McClure in March, 1914, she wanted to know why there was no money being sent to her, where were the profits from the sale of the materials? “I alone stay without anything” she complained. McClure’s biographer asserts that McClure’s biggest mistake in dealing with Montessori was that he never made his position as a promoter perfectly clear to Montessori.
In any case, without her relationship to McClure, Montessori no longer had a champion in the American popular press. Thus, just as quickly as she had rocketed to the top of American popular interest, so she faded into obscurity, finding favor only in smaller and smaller groups of niche educators and faithful followers.

Montessori Collides with the Alexander Graham Bell Family

Just about the time that Montessori’s relationship with McClure was deteriorating into acrimony and distrust, another opportunity presented itself with the potential to change the future of American education. The story reads like a Greek drama; great heights almost achieved, but lost through misunderstanding, pride, and each parties’ past experiences flashing before them like a red warning light to beware; Montessori’s mistrust of McClure and Alexander Graham Bell’s experience in his own litigation involving ownership rights of an idea and product.

Alexander Graham Bell embraced an educational philosophy similar to that of Maria Montessori. Like Montessori, Bell held negative childhood school memories of regimentation, reprimand and recitation, and thought that children deserved better. He recalled his experience to a Chicago reporter:
The system of giving out a certain amount of work which must be carried through in a given space of time, and putting the children into orderly rows of desks and compelling them to absorb just so much intellectual nourishment, whether they are ready for it or not, reminds me of the way they prepare pâte de foie gras in the living geese.98

Mrs. Bell, deaf from early childhood, was enthusiastic about Montessori's training of the senses, especially the eyes and the sense of touch.99 Her husband read with interest the McClure's articles from 1911 and especially appreciated Montessori's scientific approach to observation. By this time a grandfather, Bell watched with intense fascination as the Grosvenor children (his grandchildren) and neighbors participated in a Montessori class in the Bell's summer home in Nova Scotia. This successful experience convinced Mrs. Bell to invite Anne E. George, the preeminent American interpreter of Montessori education, to open a Montessori school in the Bell's home in Washington, DC during the school year, 1912-1913 with a class of 25 children.100 The influence of the Bell family was far reaching and a Montessori school in their home brought Montessori education into the limelight in America. A group of American parents were so taken with the Montessori approach that they created an organization to spread the Montessori message. They organized the Montessori Education Association (MEA) in the spring of 1913 and elected Mrs. Bell the first president.101 The Bells underwrote the Montessori Education Association.
In 1913, the Bells moved the school to its own larger facility for sixty children on Kalorama Road and inaugurated a Montessori magazine, *Freedom for the Child*. Their influence and prestige was so widely hailed that the *Washington Star* said of Mrs. Bell in 1914,

> no American woman today is working with more zeal or more practical results to convey Maria Montessori's message of liberty to mothers and their children than is Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell.

When McClure announced that he was bringing Montessori to America, the Bells and the MEA did the majority of the advance work, hosting an important reception in their home as well as publicizing her visit and lending their name as proponents of Montessori education.

Trouble for the Bells and Montessori emerged over who had authority to speak for Montessori. When relations soured with McClure, the Bells were still willing to underwrite whatever was needed for Montessori education to flourish in America. Trained teachers were the most pressing need, but after Montessori left America at the end of 1913, she still prohibited anyone other than herself from training teachers. Montessori insulted Mrs. Bell by not answering Mrs. Bell's correspondence and requests to sponsor teacher trainings. To make matters worse, by the Spring of 1914, Montessori called for the disbanding of any Montessori organization in America not under Montessori's own direct control. In a letter to Mrs. Bell, Gilbert H.
Grosvenor, her son-in-law, and editor of *National Geographic*, stated it succinctly when he referred to the difficulty in dealing with someone of Montessori’s “peculiar disposition”, noting that “she seems to me to lack the faculty of knowing who her friends are.”¹⁰⁴

In 1915, Montessori returned to America without the involvement or knowledge of the MEA.¹⁰⁵ The Bells were shocked not to be notified of Dr. Montessori’s latest arrival in America. In reflecting upon the failure of the relationship with Montessori as of September, 1915, Alexander Graham Bell dictated his recollection of the history of the Montessori Education Association. He recounted that the MEA had expended great energy and expense to bring Montessori to America in 1913, worked closely with her, and looked forward to continued relations. But after Montessori left America for Europe, communications ceased. Mrs. Bell’s letters were not answered and then in 1915, Montessori returned to America without a word to the MEA. Bell noted that ambassadors from MEA were dispatched to California where Montessori was lecturing and teaching to ascertain Montessori’s intentions. They were greeted tersely and were handed a document entitled, *General Regulations for the Formation of an Authorized Montessori Society*. Some of the provisions included:

(Each Montessori society) shall have as Corresponding Secretary a person chosen or . . . approved by Dr. Montessori herself. Montessori schools shall be held only by
a Montessori graduate and they must be exponents of the pure Montessori without any admixture of other methods, without additions or modifications. No Society shall be authorized to publish a Bulletin. The Bulletin must come from the Center. The word Center means the office of Dr. Montessori herself.  

Bell commented on the Regulation's declarations that in America there is no "authorized society" representing Montessori. Bell fumed that these Regulations ignored the fact that the MEA has existed here since April, 1913 and that it was recognized by Dr. Montessori during her first visit to the US under its auspices.  

Bell detailed slight after slight in an exasperated and bewildered tone. He then posited three possible scenarios for action on the part of the MEA: to dissolve the Association, to change its name, leaving out the word Montessori, but continuing in the work, or just to leave it all alone. Bell recommended this final course, stating that we could, of course, criticize many points in her proposed relations for the formation of an authorized Montessori society, but my judgment is that we should avoid criticism at the present time, assume a general friendly attitude toward her and ask her how our society can cooperate with her.  

One can imagine Bell contemplating the specter of protracted litigation over who has authority to use the Montessori ideas and materials. Alexander Graham Bell had already experienced the American litigation system in all its complexity during months of wrangling with competitors, the Patent Commission, attorneys, and the
Courts regarding the rights to his telephone Patent No. 174,465. It had been the most extensive litigation over patent law in American history to that time.

Grosvenor had it right, Montessori did not know who her friends were. The Bells’ prestige and genuine interest in Montessori already had won the ear of the US Secretary of Education and the President of the United States. The Bells had the capital to invest and the time to devote to this most worthy cause. What Montessori either failed to recognize or ignored with the Bells was that they were not interested in profiting from her, their interest was authentically philanthropic. At this juncture, the Bells decided to persevere, but not precipitate any innovations so as not to antagonize Dr. Montessori. But there was no doubt that by 1915, their collaboration had come to an end.

Maria Montessori was not able to forward her innovations from the proprietary stage to the institutional stage because that would have required delegation of authority and loosening control of the innovator’s hold on the proliferation of the original creation.
Montessori, Dewey and Kilpatrick

Montessori's most ardent critic was William Heard Kilpatrick, the most famous education teacher in America, ensconced in the most prestigious teaching university in America at the time, Columbia University's Teachers College. Teachers College, founded in 1887, was by the turn of the century the center of educational study in the United States. Kilpatrick was a star. He drew students internationally and his classes were always full. He was such a tremendous revenue source that by the 1930s Columbia dubbed him "the million dollar professor." 112

Kilpatrick, a Southerner educated in the strict tradition of recitation, repression and religion, traveled to Baltimore in 1891 for his graduate work at Johns Hopkins. There, in the more electric atmosphere of intellectual inquiry and higher academic standards, he encountered the intellectual ferment he found lacking in the South. The cooperative atmosphere in which professors worked with their students instead of just lecturing at them, inspired Kilpatrick to seek a teaching degree. He studied educational theorists Page, Spencer, Froebel and Pestalozzi and concluded that cooperation between adult and student rather than an adversarial relationship was essential to successful education.

Kilpatrick developed the "Project Method" of education, wherein students would learn even without the physical presence of the
teacher. In his own teaching, he allowed students to move about the room, he eliminated corporal punishment, added field trips and abolished commencement as being too competitive. He used concrete learning tools in teaching geometry and he eliminated report cards. He believed that the goal of education was to create an internal locus of control in the child, enabling him to become an independent learner. Further, he believed if children were given relevant material and treated with respect, they would behave and respond appropriately. Kilpatrick was personally charming and all his students loved him. He in turn could remember students names sixty years later. He believed that teachers should "deny the self and selfish inclinations" and devote themselves to the service of the institution where they taught.

Kilpatrick became interested in the field of educational studies that focused on Herbert Spencer and William James, particularly the subject of the relationship between the student's interest and his level of success. He took an ad-hoc course from John Dewey which also focused on student interest. Taking this course from Dewey proved to be a turning point in Kilpatrick's life and pivotal in his influence in the evolution of American education in the twentieth century. Dewey theorized that to be effective, school curriculum should begin with what the student is interested in, rather than with prescribed subject matter. In a talk given in 1904, Dewey argued that the future of education would no
longer focus on memorization, but rather, emotions and feelings would be most important. He was emerging as a staunch proponent of the socialization theory of education; society before individualism.

Some people seem to think - and many more seem to act - as if the individual need consider only himself and his own interest, or only himself and his family and his immediate group.\textsuperscript{116}

He also said that “[E]ducation must be a social process, on the procedural side; and it must aim to bring high quality social living into effect.”\textsuperscript{117}

In 1907, Kilpatrick enrolled in the Teachers College at Columbia University to earn his Ph.D, and specifically to work with John Dewey. John Dewey, who came from the University of Chicago in 1904, taught in both the Philosophy Department at Columbia and in the Teacher's College. The two men connected immediately. Dewey considered Kilpatrick “the best student I ever had.”\textsuperscript{118} To Kilpatrick, Dewey may have been a brilliant philosopher and theorist, but he certainly was not an eloquent speaker or teacher. During class, Dewey would think out loud and would often pause mid-lecture to consider something new. Kilpatrick decided that Dewey needed an interpreter because even the brightest students could not comprehend him and Kilpatrick contrived to fill that role.
Two critical aspects of Dewey’s thinking that intrigued Kilpatrick were interest and effort. To Dewey, “interest” meant an attraction, a quality presented by the student, rather than instilled by the teacher, and “effort” was the student’s self-motivated pursuit of interest. One flowed naturally from the other and were therefore inseparable.\textsuperscript{119}

From these ideas, Dewey’s theory of “experimentalism” emerged which emphasized “process, continuity of nature and inductive method of science.”\textsuperscript{120}

Kilpatrick accepted all of it, calling it Deweyism. Deweyism rejected absolutes, authority, and a priori thinking as too dogmatic and artificial, and pronounced that education must correspond to the realities of the world, realities which by their very nature were constantly changing and could never be static or fixed.\textsuperscript{121} Kilpatrick wrote:

\begin{quote}
(P)hilosophy is forever changing, i.e., does not make a permanent deposit of truth on which it builds; this is true in a measure, but the explanation is that in an ever-changing society the old solutions will not fit.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

Further, Kilpatrick asserted that “A thing is good or evil according to whether it makes life good or evil for all concerned.”\textsuperscript{123} A new, progressive approach to education was emerging by 1910, with Dewey and Kilpatrick at the helm.

Kilpatrick defended his dissertation in 1911 and became an assistant professor at Teachers College. But he was somewhat depressed at the
state of his career. (He wouldn't be dubbed the “million dollar professor” for another twenty years.) Forty years old, he did not yet have a son, nor a permanent home, he missed the South, and was dissatisfied with his subordinate position at Columbia. He wanted a position with more prestige, influence and authority; one in which he would be at the center of Teachers College. Kilpatrick sought fame.

At that very same time, the Montessori phenomenon had reached the United States. Parents, students and the general public were clamoring for anything Montessori, and Montessori education was emerging as the first educational force to rival the kindergarten in fifty years. The University became alarmed by Montessori’s rapidly growing popularity and decided to send Kilpatrick and a team to Rome to observe the Montessori method in practice and report their findings. In preparation, Kilpatrick bought a set of the Montessori didactic materials for $50 and read Dr. Montessori’s book. Kilpatrick was of two minds about her ideas. On the one hand, he found Montessori’s work unorthodox, but on the other, thought there might be some value in her promotion of freedom for the child which was similar to Dewey’s interest and effort. In a diary entry of April 12, 1912, Kilpatrick wrote:

I am reasonably sure that we cannot use it (the Montessori method) thus so in America. I do not object to the notion of the liberty, in fact that seems very good. The sense of
training seems to be carried too far and to include some indefensible areas.\textsuperscript{127}

Although Kilpatrick had studied Italian specifically to talk with Montessori, once face to face with her, the translations and interpretations left Kilpatrick dissatisfied with the actual interview. He couldn't always tell whether Montessori did not understand or if she chose not to answer him. After visiting a few Italian schools implementing the Montessori approach, Kilpatrick noted that many of the children seemed “free, almost to the point of doing nothing.”\textsuperscript{128} He was also gratified to see children using the didactic materials in ways other than specifically prescribed by Montessori, which seemed to suggest that her specific prescriptions for their use were too limiting. “The children use the material for all manner of construction not intended by Madam M.”\textsuperscript{129}

Kilpatrick returned from Rome, and on August 7, 1912, initiated a series of lectures on his observations and opinions of Montessori which were well attended. Pleased with himself, Kilpatrick wrote in his diary that night, “I felt that I gripped the crowd and from the number of expressions that came to my ears, I judge that I made a good talk.”\textsuperscript{130} He was also satisfied to learn that his colleagues at Teachers College agreed with his negative evaluation of Montessori's methods.
Kilpatrick's assessment entitled *The Montessori System Examined* was published in 1914. It was the publication of this monograph on top of his lectures and comments in academic journals that cemented academic rejection of Montessori. Although he appreciated her concept of giving children more freedom, he dismissed her approach as being behind the times and derided her system as lacking in imaginative play. He disagreed that sense training was a necessary precursor to later learning. He dismissed her enormous popularity to the narrowness of its focus and concluded that she contributed nothing to educational theory.

The question of a permanent contribution turns on whether there have been presented original points of view capable of guiding fruitfully educational procedure. What novel and original ideas have we found that could at the same time bear the scrutiny of criticism? The scientific conception of education is certainly valid. Madam Montessori may, in a way, have come upon it herself; but no one could say that the world did not have a fuller conception of it prior to her. The most that can be claimed on this point is that her advocacy and example have proved stimulating. Her doctrine of education as unfolding is neither novel nor correct. In the doctrine of liberty she has made no theoretical contribution; though probably her practice will prove distinctly valuable. Our kindergartens and primary schools must take account of her achievement in this respect. Her doctrine of auto-education will at most provoke thought; the term is good, the idea old. Her utilization of "practical life" activities, more specifically her solution of early tenement-house education, must prove distinctly suggestive. It may well turn out that the Casa Dei Bambini is after all her greatest contribution. The sense-training which to her seems most worth while, we decline to accept except in a very modified degree. The didactic apparatus we reject in like degree. Her preparation for the school arts should prove very
helpful in Italy. It is possible that her technique of writing will prove useful everywhere. If so, that is a contribution. With this the list closes. We owe no large point of view to Madam Montessori. Distinguishing contribution from service, she is most a contributor in making the Casa Dei Bambini. Her greatest service lies probably in the emphasis on the scientific conception of education, and in the practical utilization of liberty.¹³¹

In his keynote address at the April, 1913 meeting of the International Kindergarten Union, Kilpatrick denounced Montessori as merely derivative of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel. He criticized her methods for lacking free play and stories, and her theories for taking too narrow a view of the function of the school.¹³² He concluded that “Montessori has then, the spirit, but not the content of modern science.”¹³³ In an article for Kindergarten Review, Kilpatrick criticized Montessori for not knowing the doctrine of formal discipline, even though she was practicing it. Formal discipline is a “systematic refinement of a sense organ so that it may be better used whenever that sense may be desired.”¹³⁴ Not only had she not heard of it, complained Kilpatrick, but she was unaware that it had been rejected by modern psychology. In an address to the North Carolina Teachers Assembly in November, 1913, he called Montessori’s didactic apparatus, “a very expensive and well-nigh useless toy.”¹³⁵

Kilpatrick’s attacks devastated the Montessori movement. Educators read his book and his articles, listened to his lectures and
parroted his opinions. Kilpatrick’s dim view of Montessori became the educational establishment’s view as well.\textsuperscript{136} After a visit to Rome in 1914, the National Kindergarten Association reported to the US Bureau of Education that Montessori’s emphasis was on the development of the individual rather than “group work”, and was notable for its dearth of creative expression.\textsuperscript{136} The chorus became a litany: the materials were too restrictive in their use, inhibiting the teacher; the approach lacked free play and stifled imagination; and too much emphasis was placed on the individual at the expense of society. In 1915, \textit{Sunset Magazine} published an article entitled, “The Montessori Eclipse” claiming that Montessori education failed because it focused on the individual, who “does not need stimulation; rather he needs to be guided into interwoven patterns of social activity and social discipline.”\textsuperscript{137} By 1920, the assessment of Montessori in American education read like an epitaph. In \textit{Public Education in the United States} by E.P. Cubberly, who echoed Kilpatrick’s words, wrote that

Montessori had been rejected by most American educators because of her erroneous psychology and her system’s premature emphasis on formal learning.\textsuperscript{138}

Although Montessori and Dewey may have shared the same ultimate goal to reform society, Montessori’s perspective was the exact opposite of Dewey’s. From her medical background, she saw each teacher as a doctor ministering to an individual patient, whereas Dewey
took the broad social view of the educational philosopher proselytizing to society as a whole. Montessori's idea that a better society emanated from the improvement of the individual was at odds with the Progressives. Progressives held that socialization produced better individuals and that the primary task of school was to institute that socialization. Progressive education would assimilate all those immigrant children into American life so that social reform could take place. The question, "What was the role of education?" would be answered by the paradigm that prevailed, and, in hindsight it is clear that Montessori lost, and Kilpatrick, Dewey and the Progressives won.

Characteristically, Montessori seemed to care little what others thought of her educational approach. She didn't even read Kilpatrick's book until 1919 and her response was to say simply, "(H)e should open his eyes. I can't help it if things he says are impossible continue to happen."
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST WAVE

Montessori’s personal perspective on education was first and foremost that of an individual healer rather than that of a broadly defined educational reformer. As a medical doctor, she perceived maladies as remediable. Her clinical experience and experiments led her to conclude that the plight of abnormal children could be remedied through education and this education-as-remedy approach did not change when she encountered normal children. Heal the child and the rest will follow. Foster the development of healthy, curious, motivated individuals and society can not help but improve.

Montessori’s prescription for an individual-oriented education intersected with an early twentieth century American optimism fueled by technological and communication advances like the telephone and cheap means of printing. Information was the coin of the realm, and social discourse was our favorite pastime, so her rise in popularity was swift and not at all surprising.

Montessori was a genius, the progenitor of a revolutionary approach to education. She formulated an auto-education philosophy
and methodology encompassing characteristics of rational cognitive
development and organic holism that would stand the test of time into
the 21st century. 143

But as an agent for change, she was a disaster. She would not live
to see Montessori education become widely accepted as the pre-eminent
alternative in American education. During her lifetime, she contributed
substantially to the squashing of an American interpretation of her ideas
due to her lack of faith in influential advocates of her theories. She did
not, and perhaps understandably could not, comprehend the enormity
of the influence of the Alexander Graham Bell family. By severing
relations with the Bells, she lost all that influence, and with it any
opportunity for an American embrace of Montessori education.

Montessori lived life on her own terms. She overcame every
obstacle to achieve what she set out to do. She went to medical school,
competed in the world with men, and sought to change the world’s
perception of the nature of young children. However, this same drive
to go it alone blinded her to her own shortcomings. She chose not to
have a partner either in her personal or professional life; someone to
collaborate with, someone she had confidence in who would tell her
things she needed to hear. She ultimately trusted no one. She had
many sycophants and followers and she admired men of great minds.
But she had no peer and her work stagnated because of it. She spent all
her time and energy spreading the word and thus had no time to continue to investigate, to innovate. She would not listen to reason that she needed supporters like to Bells, for example. Montessori understandably had no concept of American trends and marketing. Yet, she had no one in place to help her with these realities, no one to manage her business affairs and to promote her in this country. Going it alone cost her America in 1913 and beyond.

Maria Montessori’s messianic perspective prohibited collaboration and consequently she would not sanction teachers who were not personally trained by her, nor allow any other person or group to speak for her on behalf of her ideas. Years later, Montessori blamed the failure of the American Montessori movement on America’s insistence on trained teachers.

In America, experiments never succeeded because they looked for the best teachers, and a good teacher meant one who had studied all the things that do not help the child, and was full of ideas which were opposed to the child’s freedom.  

The movement sputtered in America between 1914 and 1960 because she refused to change that perspective. Americans tend to take an idea that they like and tinker with it till it becomes their own, but Montessori could not possibly understand that trait. Ironically, the champion of the individual could not comprehend the individualism at the core the American character.
The negative influence of Kilpatrick and Dewey was substantial and damaging in education circles, but I believe it could have been overcome by capitalizing on the groundswell of public endorsement in 1913. But Montessori fought poorly in both arenas. She lost the professional education battle because she neither concerned herself with, nor responded to, her opponents' position. She had long since divorced herself from the University system and thus had no base for publications of her work in scholarly journals, nor any meaningful influence in academic institutions. That Teachers College may have seen her ideas as a threat to their entrenched system did not concern Montessori at all. She neither refuted their objections nor engaged in professional dialog. In explaining why she never responded to their attacks, she said,

> If I am going up a ladder... and a dog begins to bite at my ankles, I can do one of two things, either turn around and kick at it, or simply go up the ladder. I prefer to go up the ladder. 144

Thus, the Progressives won the professional educational war with little effort and without taking a casualty of their own. American popular culture initially accepted her but she needed emissaries to maintain and expand her influence. Instead, she estranged all those who supported her including professional educators Henry V. Holmes of Harvard University and Dr. P.P. Claxton, US Commissioner of
Education, her media champion, S.S. McClure and her organizational champions, the Bells.

As consumers, Americans clamor for a commodity that they perceive will enhance their lives, but if it is not made available to them, they will look for a substitute. American popular opinion accepted Montessori in 1913, but she did not deliver the goods. Her attitude and recalcitrance created the shortage and that very silence eventually destroyed the first Montessori movement in America. There was nothing to buy and so her idea evaporated into the ether.

I think Montessori could not have conceived of what it would take to systematically transform American education. Her celebrity status and her brilliant ideas were not enough by themselves to overcome the entrenched educative model in place, nor provide the organization and people needed to meet popular demand. It would be almost a half century before another innovator would come along and reinvigorate the Montessori model for a new generation of Americans eager for educational excellence for their children.
Afterward

The Montessori movement stalled in America between 1920 and 1960. For forty years, Montessori education grew in other countries as either an alternative to public education or as the public school curriculum, while in America, progressive education remained the dominant curriculum. But after the second world war, the American cultural landscape changed dramatically and the ripple effect created a new opportunity for Montessori education in America.

With the war over, ten million GIs returned home. In 1946, a record 2.2 million couples got married and within the five years, they had 32 million babies. The middle class swelled with these new families seeking all the advantages denied them during the war; a house of their own, a family, and all the goods and services now flooding the market. By 1955, the unprecedented demand for housing was met by the new subdivisions carved out of the former potato fields and apple orchards across America. The rise of the suburbs had begun. And these families wanted the best for themselves and their children. 145

The decade of the 50s provided unheard of prosperity for millions of Americans. The population increased by 28 million, GNP rose twenty five percent and wages rose twenty percent, with twenty five percent of
all housing having been built in that decade alone.¹⁴⁶ Coinciding with the new prosperity, Americans increasingly returned to the church. By 1960, sixty three percent of the population attended church services as compared to fifty percent in 1940 and twenty percent in 1860.¹⁴⁷

Just as every other facet of American life had to confront the enormous changes in America during the 1950s, so too did education. The GI Bill afforded a college education to millions of returning servicemen who otherwise would have had no opportunity for higher learning. Almost 8 million veterans took advantage of the GI Bill and proved to be serious, if not intensely career-oriented students.¹⁴⁸ Women were also attending college in higher numbers than ever before. One study indicated that women in the post W.W.II era were twice as likely to attend college as their mothers, yet often did not graduate. Frequently, they dropped out to marry college-educated men and start families. Two-thirds of college educated women between 1946 and 1949 were married within about five years after graduation.¹⁴⁹

The impact of so many families on the public schools was staggering. By as early as 1950, demographers were confounded by eight million more children than even they had planned for. Trained educators were in short supply because so many of them left teaching during the war. Buildings were so woefully inadequate to meet the demand that desperate teachers held class in closets and hallways. By
1960, the student population increased by 13 million over 1950. Communities had to confront the extraordinary costs of the emergency demand for trained teachers, infrastructure and materials, such that by 1960, expenditures per pupil rose an astonishing 370 percent over 1940 levels. And the curriculum in place in 1950 was also coming under intense scrutiny.\textsuperscript{150}

The issue of educational curriculum in the 1950s was a complex mixture of politics, pedagogy and cultural psychology. The communist scare underlaid numerous critiques of the progressive curriculum. Pamphlets such as "How Red is the Little Red Schoolhouse?" published by the National Council for American Education, on the one hand, and This Happened In Pasadena, an indictment of the firing of a school superintendent because he was a progressive, on the other, all linked progressivism with atheism, Communism and criminality.\textsuperscript{151} The Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957 convinced many Americans that American schools were inadequate to the task of training engineers, scientists and mathematicians for the careers needed in the space age. A Gallup poll taken in that same year revealed that seventy percent of those surveyed agreed that Americans students must work harder to keep up with the Russians.\textsuperscript{152}

Pedagogically, progressive education was ripe for criticism. The "Life Adjustment" curriculum, adhering to Dewey's prescription of
learning through experience rather than lecture, had morphed into an aggressively anti-intellectual atmosphere of pleasant days passed in pursuits such as life studies and football. By the mid 1950s, almost half of all high schools offered no foreign language, compared to almost eighty four percent in 1910. Educational critics produced a number of highly influential books that shocked the American public. Why Johnny Can't Read and Educational Wasteland, among others, called for intellectual rigor to be returned to the classroom. These critiques mobilized small pockets of this new generation of educated, articulate Americans searching for an educational model that they hoped would equal the aspirations they had for their children. One such person was a young, Catholic mother named Nancy McCormick Rambusch.

Nancy Rambusch first came across the work of Maria Montessori in the late 1940s as an undergraduate student in Toronto, when her professor of psychology handed her Montessori's book, The Montessori Method. Later, while studying philology in France, she read the book in French. Rambusch identified with Maria Montessori's personal Catholic perspective and concluded that a Montessori education was ideally suited for young Catholic children. By 1952, Rambusch had returned to the States, got married and had her first child.

As an intentional Catholic parent, I became committed to providing for my children the best possible education and, if I could, one very different from my own. Like many of the
young parents I was to work with, I was very dissatisfied with the narrow type of religious and intellectual formation I had received as a school child in a parochial setting.\textsuperscript{155}

Returning to France in 1952, Rambusch attended an international Montessori conference originally intended as a tribute to Montessori. But between the planning of the conference and the scheduled date, Montessori died, thus the conference turned into a "lament for a leader irreparably lost."\textsuperscript{156} At that meeting, Rambusch met with Maria's heir, Mario Montessori who now headed AMI, the international Montessori organization. She informed him of her intention to start a Montessori type school in the United States, whereupon he dismissed her reference to a Montessori "type" school. "Madam", he scolded, "there is no such thing as a Montessori 'type' school, there is only a Montessori school."\textsuperscript{157} Once back in the United States, Rambusch published the first article on Montessori in decades. "Learning Made Easy", appeared in the inaugural issue of \textit{Jubilee}, a magazine that Rambusch described as "a liberal Catholic publication aimed at a young educated audience. It was the first of many articles relating to Montessori which I wrote for this publication during the next five years."\textsuperscript{158}

In 1954, pregnant for the second time, Nancy returned to Europe to take her Montessori training and assessed the European Montessori training in the negative. With the death of Maria Montessori, her followers were at a loss as to how to proceed. Nancy found the training
to be disorganized with content mostly derived from anecdotes of Maria’s life. There were no prerequisites for the training and there was little contact with children in functioning Montessori environments.

She returned home to New York and set up a small Montessori environment in her home for her own children and a few of her neighbors. In 1956, the Rambusch family left New York for Connecticut.

When I arrived, I located a small group of wealthy Catholics who were dissatisfied with the local parochial schools and were interested in starting a Montessori school. One of them Georgeanne Skakel Dowdle, knew of Montessori education through her sister whose children attended a Montessori school in Ireland. Dissatisfaction with existing educational arrangements and affluence were to prove the prime ingredients in launching the new American Montessori movement. Thus was the Whitby School born, the first school of the American Montessori movement and the Montessori revival in America.¹⁵⁹

Rambusch subsequently founded the American Montessori Society to train teachers in the American interpretation of Montessori. She assiduously spread the message of the new Montessori, writing articles for women’s magazines and appearing at parent nights all across America. Rambusch completely sidestepped the public education question, as least in 1960, focusing her attention instead on parents who were willing to pay tuition for their children’s education. She initiated parent study groups for those who wanted to start schools wherein parents created the structure for the individual schools. Many of these parents, in turn went on to take the Montessori training and thus the
system spread. Further, Rambusch insisted on academic rigor in the teacher training programs to meet the educational demands of American parents.

During the last forty years of the twentieth century, American Montessori education flourished. By the 1970s, there were Montessori schools and teacher training centers all across America. Rambusch turned her attention to public school Montessori and was instrumental in creating the first Montessori curriculum in a public school in Cincinnati, Ohio in the 1970s. The Montessori curriculum then broadened to include infant/toddler programs, elementary, as well as middle school and secondary schools. It branched out into Head Start and day care. Currently, many public school districts offer Montessori magnet schools, two of which are located in Denver, Colorado.

The questions asked in 1913 and 1960 will again be pondered in the twenty first century: How wide to broaden the Montessori reach at the risk of diluting the unique curriculum. Or, paraphrasing Nancy Rambusch, do we make America ready for Montessori or do we tailor Montessori to meet the needs of America?
ENDNOTES


6. Lawrence Cremin's *The Transformation of the School* covers this period in detail.


14. *Democracy in Education* (New York, 1903), 231, as cited in Gutek, 125.


42. Snyder, Agnes. *Dauntless Women in Childhood Education 1856-1931*, (Washington: Association for Childhood Education International, 1972) 95-96. Patty Hill Smith said of Montessori, "We have in America today educators far in advance of any from foreign shores. When will we hear the voice of the prophets in our midst and put an end to the importation of foreign systems as such, none of which meet the needs of our democratic society? The error may be repeated in introducing the Montessori system." This from her speech, "Some Hopes and Fears for the Kindergarten of the Future" Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the IKU, Washington, DC, 1913, pp. 95-96 as cited in Snyder.


46. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 82.
47. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 92.
48. Forest, Ilse, The School for the Child from Two to Eight, 24-25.
51. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 97.
52. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 118.
53. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 118.
54. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 110.
55. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 112.
60. Montessori, The Montessori Method, 98.
61. Fresco, Montessori Materials Contained in Some of the Catalogs Published in New York, London, Bucharest, Berlin, Gonzaga from 1910 Up to 30s, 173.
63. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 158.


73. “Books by Montessori” New York Times, Dec. 9,1913, 6


76. “Dr. Montessori’s Visit to America” Beinn Bregh Recorder Jan. 9, 1914, 428-429.


83. The original purpose of which was to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal, but had expanded into a celebration of American culture and achievements.

84. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 216.

85. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 301.

86. Kramer, Maria Montessori, A Biography, 360.


88. Lyon, Success Story: The Life and Times of S.S. McClure, 134.

89. Lyon, Success Story: The Life and Times of S.S. McClure, 134.


95. Contract between Maria Montessori and S.S. McClure dated November 14, 1913, from the McClure Manuscripts, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, copy obtained from Special Collection, Millbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, MG136, Box 11, Series 10.1, folder 1.


108. Bell papers, 7-16.

109. Bell papers, 7-16.


128. Kilpatrick personal diary entry of June 4, 1912, as cited in Beineke, 69.

129. Kilpatrick personal diary entry of June 12, 1912, as cited in Beineke, 70.


141. Kramer, *Maria Montessori, A Biography*, 258


154. Applebaum, Phyllis, Diss. NY University, 1971, 125.


“Kindergartens in the United States-Statistics and Present Problems”


