



Book Review

The Bloomsbury Handbook of Montessori Education

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The Bloomsbury Handbook of Montessori Education is the first comprehensive collection of scholarly work that spans the spectrum of Montessori education, including historical, political, geographic, pedagogical, scientific, and cultural perspectives. It offers different entry points for those interested in various aspects of Montessori education—advocates, researchers, academics, parents, and teacher educators—to expand their current knowledge about the Montessori pedagogy and movement. The handbook approaches known ideas with an interdisciplinary lens.

Maria Montessori's critical writings and radical approaches cemented her legacy. Now, nearly 115 years after her first publication, essential dialogues and critical reflections are emerging about complex social issues in the context of Montessori education. These dialogues recognize the strengths and limitations of the Method as well as the harmful and disrespectful ways Montessori education has entered different communities, countries, and Indigenous lands.

This valuable resource brings together historical and current issues concerning education globally. This is not a how-to guide for Montessori classrooms but rather a text intended to inspire conversation, research, and reform for the advancement of the Montessori movement and the field of education more broadly. The handbook contains 62 chapters with nearly 100 authors and contributors from 25 countries, representing a comprehensive collection from Montessori researchers, historians, academics, and advocates from around the globe.

Divided into six parts, *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Montessori Education* is constructed in a somewhat chronological order. The format allows the reader to first gain historical perspective to better understand the pedagogy. This handbook combines biographical and political histories, education history and philosophy, and Montessori education timelines, which together provide important context for how the Montessori movement and pedagogy have evolved. The handbook also brings readers up to date on the global reach of Montessori

education, the current state of Montessori research, and an introduction to contemporary considerations for the world we now inhabit. The approach allows the reader to reflect on the global reach of the philosophy, implications of implementation, and practice through presented research and lived experiences. Each part and chapter provides critical analysis connecting traditional and long-standing beliefs about Montessori theory to new ideas and research. An analysis of Montessori's writings and history—through contemporary literature and research in gender, diversity, culture, and colonization of Indigenous lands and communities—is included.

The handbook invites readers to reflect on beliefs and biases and demonstrates that change is needed. By elevating contemporary voices, the handbook lets readers see the Montessori philosophy as a living pedagogy that can grow, embody, and respect the cultures and languages in their communities. Recommendations for advancement reflect current research and honor the voices of those who have been underrepresented in the Montessori community.

Part I. Foundations and Evolution of Montessori Education

Part I of the handbook is composed of four chapters focusing on Montessori herself, her life, and the historical landscape, which highlight the framework in which the Montessori pedagogy was developed. Commonly known facts about Montessori and her early years are included: family history, university experience, and her now-famous entry into the study of early childhood and the Casa dei Bambini experiment, which catapulted her to the global stage. Part I references the many historical writings and research about her life (Babini, 2000; Gutek & Gutek, 2016; Kramer, 2017; Moretti, 2021; Povell, 2009). This part also includes crucial information about the political landscape of Montessori's time and her role as a feminist, including the fact that her first public appearance was political, creating further space for understanding her scientific and political approaches in attempts to secure equal rights for children and women. Part I of the handbook concludes with the philosophy of Montessori and explains that she did not create her philosophy and approach to education in an egotistical bubble. Instead, the last chapter in Part I highlights the many philosophers, educators, and contemporaries who inspired her.

Part II. Key Writings of Maria Montessori

Part II encourages further reading of Montessori's publications. The chapters in Part II are devoted to sharing Montessori's writing sequentially by publication date and theme, and they then move to her later scholarly writings. Part II begins with *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini* or *The Montessori Method* (Montessori, 1909/1912), first published in 1909. Various editions were published; the last edition, published in 1950 and entitled *The Discovery of the Child* (Montessori, 1950/2004); the significance of the revisions through the years are discussed. The level of detail outlined in the evolution of Montessori's book *The Montessori Method* (Montessori, 1909, 1912) includes citations of notable authors and researchers of her time. It is also punctuated with historical time stamps for a greater regard for new language and variations in later texts. This provides evidence that Montessori believed that her philosophy and pedagogy needed to be fluid to respect new ideas. Part II looks at the driving force behind Montessori's pursuits. Her personal spiritual understanding of the child and the desire for peace moved her to promote the rights for children to meet their fullest potential.

Part III. Montessori Pedagogy Across the Lifespan

Part III is composed of six chapters outlining the Montessori environment and pedagogy in each of the Montessori age levels. Beginning with the youngest age groupings, the lifespan discussions review the approach for birth to 3-year-old Montessori settings, routinely called Nido and Toddler communities (Campanelli, 2021); it continues with the Children's House for 3- to 6-year-olds, Elementary for 6- to 12-year-olds, and the Erdkinder for adolescents ages 12 to 15. Part III culminates with the adult/teacher transformation.

Part III offers specific examples of didactic materials and environment descriptions, and it connects readers to key tenets of the philosophy, such as the planes of development, sensitive periods, and the prepared environment. This chapter briefly connects culture, the prepared teacher and environment, and, using Montessori's writings, the responsibility of the adult to children and families. Later chapters revisit this conversation to note instances where inclusivity of culture has not been honored in communities and where failures to respect and hold space for noncolonial traditions and

beliefs are criticized. The last chapter of Part III focuses on the teacher and the transformation to becoming a Montessori guide. The chapter explores aspects of human development that are foundational for Montessori teachers, definitions of competence, and the reflective internal and external evaluation process.

Part IV. The Science of Montessori Education

Part IV is composed of 10 chapters highlighting areas of Montessori research, gaps in current research, future research questions, and ideas to extend the work. In the first three parts of the handbook, we see how many of the chapters intersect with areas of research. In this part, Montessori theories are supported with current empirical findings. The beginning of Part IV provides foundations for Montessori research, with the first chapter offering evidence from modern neuroscience for Montessori's key hypotheses (i.e., importance of touch and parental stimuli, the existence of critical periods and language structures, the importance of movement for brain development, and the role of working with the hands for thinking and language development).

The next chapter introduces the benefits of a Montessori-research logic model and is followed by a chapter on establishing Montessori fidelity for research purposes. As the field of Montessori research and outcome assessment for different aspects of the pedagogy grows, researchers need such tools as they make the case for what constitutes "authentic Montessori environments" and outline the theory of causes and effects leading to Montessori outcomes. Part IV then provides new areas of research for discovery and discussion, as well as Montessori connections to current research in neuroscience. Chapters include research on motivation and self-determination, executive functioning, memory, and various areas of neuroscience, including a fascinating new area of research: error monitoring. *Error monitoring* is the intrinsic ability to correct a mistake or error and to prevent that mistake from happening again. The research aligns with evaluating risk taking in educational settings and suggests important benefits of Montessori education in fostering healthy error monitoring. Current research regarding Montessori education is promising and is bridging gaps among policy, educational stakeholders, decision makers, and education reform. The authors and contributors for Part IV identify areas of limitations in recent studies and provide critiques in research design. More research is needed related to inequality, stereotypes,

and social injustices in marginalized communities where Montessori exists and where it could expand. Part IV concludes with a call to further advance Montessori research in each of these areas.

Part V. Global Montessori Education

Part V presents case-study examples of local adoptions and cultural adaptations of Montessori pedagogy across more than 25 countries. The section begins by bringing readers to the roots of Montessori education and its origins in Italy. Each chapter has a similar structure, with a focus on the beginnings of the Montessori movement in the country or region, followed by the impact on communities, education laws, and politics that influenced a progressive choice such as Montessori education. Most chapters in this part include the postwar period and the evolution of Montessori education in different countries. The chapters in Part V close with the contemporary landscape, including who funds Montessori education and how the Montessori movement is connected to local Montessori organizations and trainings. Throughout Part V, a recurring theme of barriers to expansion and access is highlighted. Barriers to access include limited understanding of respecting cultural needs, necessary adaptations of Montessori practices while maintaining fidelity to authentic principles, cost of materials, and a limited number of well-trained Montessori teachers. The aspects of accessibility and inclusion will prevent some countries from accepting or expanding the Montessori pedagogy.

Notable case studies in Part V include (a) Montessori education in Ireland and the historical background for the development of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, which is the Montessori approach to teaching biblical stories; (b) the Montessori movement and Method in Germany and their significant impact on how teachers are trained to support children with disabilities; (c) the effort and investment to include Montessori schools in Saudi Arabia's commitment to increase kindergarten enrollment by 78%; (d) Australia's Montessori community and the development of a new area of research and practice: Montessori for dementia and aging; (e) Indigenous language and cultural preservation in Canada; (f) the United States Montessori community's work in implementing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives; and (g) Puerto Rico's story of successfully maintaining Montessori programs after natural disasters and recent political challenges.

The authors in Part V acknowledge that more work is needed in Latin America and Africa to understand Montessori history and in the best strategies to be respectful of all cultures and beliefs. Latin American and African countries often experience Montessori education as implemented by religious and relief organizations. Despite the intention to educate and serve rural, low-income, and disabled children, the approach historically promoted or perpetuated western colonization.

Part VI. Contemporary Considerations Regarding Montessori Education

Part VI comprises the remaining 10 chapters of the handbook. Chapter themes cover a variety of topics, including Montessori education and technology, teacher preparation, gender, inclusion, plurilingual environments, Critical Race Theory, Indigenizing of Montessori education, Montessori interventions for persons with dementia, and Peace education. Perspectives are shared and supported by research, lived experiences, and reflective practices that allow a critical review of the Montessori pedagogy. A sampling of critical thoughts includes further analysis of a statement in an earlier chapter that Montessori materials and approach are gender neutral. This statement is explored using current thoughts on gender and education. Another example relates to cosmic education, which is the Montessori framework for educating children ages 6 to 12, described at length in Part III. The universality of cosmic education is challenged in Part VI, as many Montessori teachers approach the stories and fables from a colonial lens, and they exclude origin stories from Indigenous communities. By offering critiques of the Montessori pedagogy and movement through the analysis of contemporary social issues, authors in Part VI provide a space for personal and professional evaluation, reflection, growth, and, most importantly, a call to action.

Conclusion

The Handbook of Montessori Education advances scholarly perceptions of Montessori philosophy and pedagogy, providing a global and critical analysis. The volume highlights the positive influences of Montessori education for children throughout the world and the social, ethical, ethnic, and national nuances that may not have been considered previously in the Montessori movement. The handbook provides future considerations for Montessori advancement, research, and reform to

overcome Montessori education's image of elitism and noninclusivity. The handbook is a valuable resource for those seeking scholarly discussion of Montessori philosophy and pedagogical practice, for those wanting insight on Montessori and education reform, and for practitioners and teacher educators facing contemporary educational challenges around the world.

About the Author

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