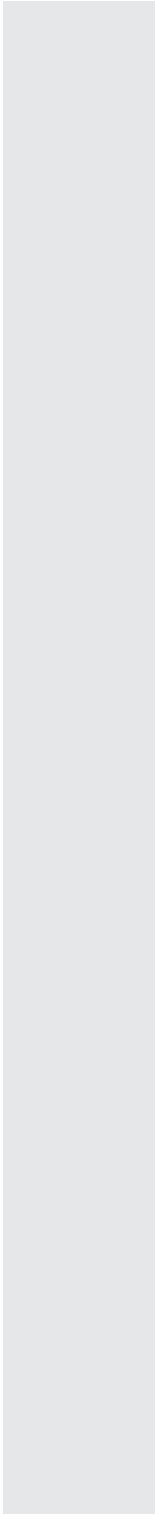

**STUDIES
AND
ARTICLES**



Christine Quarfood

<https://doi.org/10.26881/pwe.2024.58.03>

ORCID: 0009-0002-6880-7989

University of Gothenburg

christine.quarfood@lir.gu.se

The multifaceted Montessori movement, and its pioneers

Summary

On the eve of World War I, a new movement took shape, promoting the educational ideas of Maria Montessori. The success story of the Montessori method is well known, but how are we to understand the organizational network surrounding it? This article explores some aspects of the Montessori movement's early history, drawing on social movement theories. In the first part, I argue that the Montessori movement of the interwar era should be conceptualized as a social movement organization (SMO) with AMI as its social movement infrastructure (SMI) and with its own specific cognitive praxis. In the second part, I approach the movement from another angle, more from the inside so to say, to assess how three Montessori pioneers – Anna Maria Maccheroni, Claude Albert Claremont and Nazareno Padellaro – understood and tried to implement this cognitive praxis. I particularly focus on their widely differing interpretations of Montessorism – the movement's central creed about the child's liberation.

Keywords: Montessori movement, cognitive praxis, Maccheroni, Claremont, Padellaro

Słowa kluczowe: ruch promujący metodę Montessori, praktyka poznawcza, Maccheroni, Claremont, Padellaro

On the eve of World War I, a new movement took shape, promoting the educational ideas of the Italian medical doctor Maria Montessori. Initiated on a small-scale basis, as part of a social housing project in 1907, Montessori's innovative preschool programme rapidly expanded into a large-scale enterprise, crossing national and cultural borders. By the 1930s there were Montessori schools and preschools in about sixty countries around the world, and her seminal work from 1909, *Il Metodo della pedagogia scientifica*, had been translated into a dozen languages. The success story of the Montessori method is well known, but how are we to understand the organizational network surrounding it?

This article sets out to explore some aspects of the movement led by Montessori, describing its development during the interwar period, and discussing how to draw the line between the movement at large and the diverse Montessori societies composing it, as well as between close disciples, sympathizers, and fellow travellers.

The first part deals with questions about the organizational structure of the Montessori movement, drawing on sociological movement theories. Although the movement had

a commercial side, marketing teacher training courses as well as patented teaching aids – the famous “Montessori apparatus” – it also had a social agenda, challenging established notions about childhood, parenting, and schooling. The liberation of the child was the motto of the Montessori movement.

The second part takes a closer look at three Montessori pioneers, who paved the way for the Montessori method’s introduction into new national and cultural contexts. A microhistorical biographical framework is applied to assess how these movement intellectuals – Anna Maria Maccheroni, Claude Claremont, and Nazareno Padellaro – interpreted the Montessorian creed about the child’s liberation. What precisely, did the child have to be liberated from, and what was the ultimate purpose of this liberation? In what ways could the practical methods of the movement bring about a solution, and how should one conceptualize the truly liberated child?

The Montessori movement as a social movement

Social movements have often been considered as paradigmatic of modernity. Connected as they are to the growth of the public sphere, they have undoubtedly contributed to political and cultural transformations. The very term “social movement” was coined at the beginning of our modern era, in the wake of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. While historians have duly studied the classical labour and women movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the educational reform movements of the same period, researchers in the field of social movement studies have focused almost exclusively on the contemporary movements of post-industrial society, emerging from the 1960’s. For instance, student movements, peace movements, antiracist movements, and environmental movements, to name just a few. According to Berger and Nehring, research attempting to bridge the wide gap between the social sciences and history is still in its infancy. They cite Koselleck’s claim, that historical research is “in need of theory,” adding however the remark that “sociological research can also benefit from the rich insights of historical research in order to test its theoretical assumptions” (Berger, Nehring 2017: 2–6, 13–15).

In a similar way, attention has been drawn to the lack of dialogue between researchers in the field of social movement studies and educational researchers. For a long time it was, as Tricia Niesz points out, a question of mutual neglect. “Not only did the field of social movement studies overlook topics of education and learning,” but likewise, most educational researchers of the last century “appeared somehow immune to the influence of this large and active field of scholarship” (Niesz 2019: 224–225). In fact, even within the sociology of education field, interest in social movement theories was scarce. There were several reasons for this failure of communication, for instance a top-down perspective on educational change, which, according to Kai Heidemann, identified “elites, experts, and authorities” as the “primary agents of education reform.” The many ways in which “grass-root actors and social movements can act as influential drivers of educational politics and

reforms «from below»” (Heidemann 2022: 41–42), consequently received less attention. And although recently, social movement scholars have increasingly addressed educational themes, most of this research concerns adult education programmes of the more informal kind and learning processes occurring within activist and protest groups, with no bearing on the established educational system. As Heidemann concludes, “the institutionalized setting of formalized education” still remains “a highly significant but relatively under-theorized realm of social movement and agency” (Heidemann 2022: 43, 47).

From the horizon of intellectual history, I have in my previous research on Montessori as a public intellectual of the interwar years, reconstructed the culture-critical message delivered by her movement, and how it was received in the wider European debate context. Many interpreters, in their attempts to explain the “Montessori phenomenon,” have emphasized Montessori’s charismatic leadership style, as well as her innovative educational method. They all agree about her movement’s impact but seem to consider it as simply a reform movement of the professional kind, operating in the school sector, rather than as a social movement. Although Kramer in her biography focused on Montessori’s celebrity as a movement leader, she also lamented the fact that Montessori preferred gathering her followers around her, making them “the nucleus of an organization which became a universe of its own” (Kramer 1976: 378) instead of cooperating with other professional educationalists. Povell, in her study of Nancy McCormick Rambusch’s revival of American Montessori education in the 1960s, applied the social movement term in relation to the professionalization process initiated with the creation of The American Montessori Society (AMS) 1960, but did not discuss whether the term could be applied to the movement led by Montessori (Povell 2010: 112–137). For my own part, I have found helpful the distinction made by sociologist Håkan Thörn, between movements intent on accomplishing reforms within the established system, and more genuine social movements. Movements of the latter kind have the utopian dimension in common, sharing the conviction that “a radical transformation of society is possible and that it can be brought about through collective action” (Thörn 1997: 46–47).

I will here indicate some important turning points in the early stages of the Montessorian enterprise, in order to demonstrate the relevance of social movement theories and terminology for the history of education. In my opinion, the Montessori movement of the interwar years presents a clear-cut case of the kind of entrepreneurial social movement organization (SMO) discussed by researchers of the so-called resource mobilization paradigm. With this school of thought, focus shifted from an actor perspective to a collective group perspective. The crucial question was no longer why people joined a movement, but how a movement managed to mobilize resources in order to achieve its aims (Buechler 2011: 116–117).

Initially, most movements have a rather loose network structure. Social movement communities (SMC) recruit members in the local community and are usually led by some highly dedicated key-figures. However, for a movement to get off the ground and gain a wider influence, it is necessary to mobilize as many followers as possible around the common cause, while also developing a more formalized organizational structure capable of sustaining collective action for a longer period of time. External support is of the utmost importance.

As Berger and Nehring state, “it is a well-known fact that social movements depend on the (mass) media to reproduce themselves, to frame their message and to broadcast their claims” (Berger, Nehring 2017: 8). Apart from media attention, elite patronage provides financial support, and supportive associations, although not part of the movement – for instance churches, self-help societies, and school institutions – facilitate the transition from movement formation to social movement organization, (SMO). In most cases successful SMO’s present a differentiated internal structure, with a clear division of labour between leaders, paid staff and volunteers, as well as formal membership criteria and clearly defined statutes and procedures (Mc Carthy 1996: 141–143; Kriesi 1996: 152–154).

The Montessorian enterprise fits well into this pattern. During the initial phase 1907–1909, when there was a loose network, but not yet a real movement, support was obtained from a few local institutions promoting philanthropic pursuits. Under such auspices Montessori’s first Casa dei bambini saw the light of day, as part of a real estate company’s social housing project in the slums of Rome. In 1908–1909, the socialist self-help society Umanitaria in Milan opened two Montessori preschools for working-class children, and a Casa dei bambini for orphans was meanwhile run by Franciscan nuns in Rome. There was also much moral support from feminist organizations and high society ladies (Alatri 2015: 75–96, 119–135). The turning point from local network to movement came in 1909, when elite patronage from Baroness Franchetti financed the printing of Montessori’s *Il Metodo*. This manual explaining the new educational method, became the proud manifesto of the movement now taking shape, and served as a textbook for the many Montessori teacher training courses succeeding one another, from 1909 onwards (Quarfood 2022: 11–13).

A phase of rapid expansion followed in 1910–1915, when the new educational movement was internationalized. Montessori gained worldwide fame, and her schools spread across the globe. Helpful in popularizing the movement’s message was the press. “McClure’s Magazine’s” promotional campaign, launched in 1911, prepared the ground for the English translation of *The Montessori Method*, 1912, which immediately became a bestseller (Gutek, Gutek 2016: 57–108). As public interest grew, the first national Montessori societies were established, in the United States and in the United Kingdom as early as 1912, and in Italy in 1913. On her lecture-tour in the United States 1913, Montessori was greeted by the “New York Tribune” as “the most interesting woman in Europe” (Kramer 1976: 186). During World War I, she returned several times to the United States, and her live-model Montessori class exhibited at the San Francisco Panama-Pacific Exposition 1915, aroused great interest (Quarfood 2022: 14, 31–36).

Around this time began the process of consolidation, transforming the wide Montessorian network into a social movement organization with centralized leadership. The policy document “General Regulations for the Formation of an Authorized Montessori Society” presented in 1915 to the American branch of the movement, stated that no school or society could use Montessori’s name without her authorization. Furthermore, the memorandum declared that in matters relating to teacher training and teaching aids, Montessori societies had no permission to act independently. Already in 1909 Montessori had patented her didactic

materials, which were generally distributed under licence from her directly (Murray, Douast 2023: 199–201; Gutek, Gutek 2016: 197–201).

Another step towards increased professionalization was the introduction of paid staff, such as secretaries and lawyers. After a schism with the Montessori Society of the United Kingdom, in 1914, Montessori employed C A Bang as her authorized representative for all kind of business transactions and contacts with authorities and media in the United Kingdom. This process of gradual professionalization also meant a differentiation between ordinary movement members – mostly teachers – and a cadre of leaders recruited from this group, making a career within the movement (Kramer 1976: 244; Quarfood 2022: 67).

One might perhaps argue that this shift towards centralized control was more due to commercial interests than to idealistic goals. Remarking on the dual character of Montessori's enterprise, how the movement quickly "became a business" with Montessori as the "brand name," Kramer nevertheless pointed out, that Montessori as a freelance movement leader had no other option but to "support herself and her dependents on the proceeds of her training courses and the royalties from her books and didactic materials." Neither did this consolidation process and the commercial aspect diminish the radicalization of the Montessori movement's message, which notably intensified during the 1920s and 1930s (Kramer 1976: 156; Quarfood 2022: 53–55).

The New Education Fellowship (NEF) created in 1921, functioned as a social movement infrastructure (SMI) uniting reform educationalists of different nationalities and pedagogical creeds. While many educational organizations affiliated themselves to this broad network, the Montessori movement held its distance, disapproving of NEF's eclectic spirit. Having created her own social movement infrastructure – Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) – in 1929, Montessori became somewhat more inclined to cooperate. The first AMI congress was held together with the NEF congress in Helsingör 1929, and the same arrangement of joint conferences was repeated in Nice in 1932. The relationship between the two network organizations remained however tense, as is clear from the state of research concerning NEF (Brehony 2004: 748; Van Gorp et. al. 2017: 256–270; L'Ecuyer 2020: 655–672; Kolly 2021: 51–57).

To conclude, I would like to refer to the concept of cognitive praxis, as defined by Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison. They distinguish three dimensions of a social movement's cognitive praxis, roughly corresponding to the "knowledge constituting interests" discussed by Jürgen Habermas. In the first place, there is always a shared worldview, articulating demands for the transformation of social structures, a creed providing movement members with a larger framework of meaning, thus contributing to new perspectives and new social identities. In my previous research on the Montessori movement, I labelled this worldview "Montessorism." Secondly, there is also a more practical dimension, involving the means to achieve the movement's goals, such as new technologies proposed by the movement in alternative to traditional methods and procedures. This corresponds, of course, to the very structured educational tools and school environment designed by Montessori. The third dimension of cognitive praxis concerns the movement's communication with society

at large, the ways in which the movement gets its message across, for instance through participation in the wider public debate, through conferences, study-groups, and various kinds of networks facilitating the dissemination of the movement's knowledge production (Eyerman, Jamison 1991: 45–119). I dwelled particularly on this subject in my previous study, situating the European branch of the Montessori movement in the wider debate context of the interwar years.

Three Pioneers

I will now present three Montessori pioneers who contributed in different ways to the dissemination of the Montessori movement's message. The pioneers in question published articles and other texts, making it possible to assess motivational drives behind their commitment to the Montessorian cause. Although not established intellectuals in the academic sense, they will here be considered as movement intellectuals, of the kind described by Eyerman and Jamison.

Maccheroni (1876–1965)

Among the many pioneers assisting Montessori in her quest, the musically gifted teacher Anna Maria Maccheroni was in a class of her own. She belonged from the very start to the innermost circle of trusted collaborators. Maccheroni made a significant contribution in spreading the Montessori pedagogy, and she also designed the musical programme of the method, a musical education based on rhythmical movements, inspired by Dalcroze's eurythmics. As unassuming as Montessori was self-confident, Maccheroni in her memoirs described herself as a "nullity," grateful to serve the magnificent movement for the child's liberation. Macc, as Montessori called her, possessed in a high degree the powers of observation and the practicality required of a Montessori teacher. She claimed she had learnt more from observing Montessori's interaction with the Casa dei bambini children, than from reading her books. As the daughter of two teachers, she seems to have been almost predisposed for the teaching profession. Since childhood, she had heard discussions about school matters at the dinner table (Maccheroni 1947: 1–2; 1956: 8–9, 17, 21; Alatri 2015: 97–98; Pironi 2022: 57–62).

Before attending the first Montessori teacher training course in August 1909, Maccheroni had already worked for almost a year as head of the Umanitaria Society's Casa dei bambini in Milan. Despite a chronic affliction which led to several outbreaks of illness, Maccheroni became the solid rock Montessori could lean on. Highly appreciated for her ability to master all the technicalities of the method, she was entrusted with important assignments, one after the other. In 1910 she was called back from Milan to Rome, in order to direct the Franciscan convent's Casa dei bambini, which served as demonstration class for the teacher training courses 1910–1911. In 1915, she started up the Spanish experiment with Montessori education. At a liturgical conference in Barcelona, that year, she presented the

Montessori method as an instrument for religious education (Maccheroni 1956: 37–48, 55–75, 97–113; Alatri 2015: 99–102; Pironi 2022: 62–67). To a younger colleague in the 1950s she described the Barcelona years as the happiest period of her long teaching career. It was in Barcelona that she further developed the musical education programme, in cooperation with the music teacher Señor Gibert, of the Barcelona Montessori school (Galeazzi Fresco 1966: 11–14).

While World War I raged, neutral Spain offered the Montessori movement a safe refuge. After the war, Montessori would reconnect with her many European followers, assuming control over a movement which for some years had developed rather freely. Maccheroni was now sent on an inspection tour, to prepare the ground for the forthcoming Montessori training course in London in 1919, and to determine which of the British Montessori schools held an acceptable standard. In 1922, she was sent to Amsterdam on a similar mission (Maccheroni 1956: 119–129, 132).

In addition to this supervising role Maccheroni also functioned as a movement intellectual, writing many articles about the method in the movement's journals. The NEF journal *The New Era*, to which she contributed an article in 1920, presented "Signora Maccheroni" in the following way: "She has the authority of one who has accompanied Dr. Montessori from obscurity to fame; and to her devoted co-operation is due in no little part the practical detail of the method, especially on the musical side, which has now been so fully developed" (Maccheroni 1920: 35).

The article described the process from disorder to order in a Montessori school, probably the one in Barcelona, with children between 2 1/2 to 11 years. Maccheroni had to start with a few older children, "who had no other «education of the movements» than that which children receive at home who have to «keep still» and who are helped in everything" (Maccheroni 1920: 35). It was only in the third year, when the class was wholly formed of children admitted at the age of three, that full results were obtained: "Discipline had become a thing entirely forgotten, so natural and obvious did it seem for movements of the body to be tranquil, and for work to be «ordered»" (Maccheroni 1920: 36).

Maccheroni was to write the first biography of Montessori. *A true Romance. Doctor Maria Montessori as I knew her*, published 1947, also appeared in a somewhat expanded Italian version, in 1956. The memoirs described some episodes in the Montessori movement's early development, from the faithful assistant's perspective. Although many names were mentioned, the main focus was on matters concerning curriculum, practical work, and child psychology. Above all, Maccheroni tried to convey the respect for children's capacity, as the true Montessorian spirit.

Maccheroni interpreted Montessori's message within the framework of her strong Christian faith. Adults should realize their shortcomings, see the beam in their own eye, instead of putting all the blame on the children. A central theme, especially in the Italian version of the memoirs, was Montessori's epochal discovery of the child. The child's true nature had revealed itself as rational and orderly, rather than capricious and messy, a result obtained by working diligently with the didactic materials. Through the musical exercises, the Casa

dei bambini children also acquired a graceful bearing. Short practical lessons given by the teacher demonstrated the right way to open a door, or how to pour water from a bottle into a glass without spilling a drop. Maccheroni recalled her experience as directress of a demonstration class in Rome, during the 1913 International Montessori course: “How well I remember the noise of the first days! It was not really disorder, it was only that the children could not walk without making a noise, could not utter a word unless with a very loud voice” (Maccheroni 1947: 41). Instead of making reproaches, Maccheroni acted as a role model: “Every morning I did a few exercises, such as walking very quietly, talking very softly, running on up toes” (Maccheroni 1947: 41). Maccheroni knew she had succeeded when one of the girls, not only “walked noiselessly,” but also made a drawing where “the coloured pencil lines were so light that I could hardly see them” (Maccheroni 1947: 42). Bodily control and self-discipline had been mastered.

Claremont (1890–1967)

The Montessori Society of the United Kingdom, founded in 1912, initially functioned as a broad platform welcoming all reform-minded groups to join the fight for the child’s emancipation. *Times Educational Supplement* spread the word about the new approach to child-rearing, fostering independence at an early age. “Individual work” became the catchword of the British Montessori debate (Brehony 2000: 118–119, 123–128; Cunningham 2000: 210, 218).

British sympathizers tended at first to focus on the message about the child’s liberation, while paying less attention to the specific methodological claims advanced by the movement. In the spirit of classical liberalism, freedom of choice was considered essential, and thus many concluded that methodological pluralism must be compatible with a Montessori approach. Such eclecticism was however rejected by those who had attended Montessori’s training courses. As dedicated followers of the Montessori movement, they shared the conviction that liberty was not simply a precondition for an enlightened education. The child’s liberation could only be the end result of a process achieved through the correct application of the Montessori method. If mixed with other educational programs, the Montessori method would not yield the intended results. Claude Albert Claremont, who at the time of the first London based Montessori course 1919, published *A Review of Montessori Literature*, expressed views of this kind. He was not merciful in his criticism of Montessori supporters who embraced the freedom principle, while at the same time discarding the very method which ensured the realization of this freedom. Although Claremont could appreciate all kinds of pedagogical reform endeavours, he saw no reason why Montessorians should compromise their own beliefs, for what could Montessori education offer the world, if the method was diluted beyond recognition (Claremont 1919: 3–4, 8–9, 11–12, 16–17; Quarfood 2023: 12)?

As a participant of the 1913 International Montessori course in Rome, Claremont had put his plans for an engineering career definitely on the shelf. He advanced to the position of course assistant and translator at the following 1914 training course. Claremont was

deeply impressed by Montessori, whose importance for the field of education he deemed comparable with that of Darwin for the life sciences (Kramer 1976: 242). Montessori had assured him that “those who study most will always be in the forefront of this movement” (Claremont 1919: 3). To dedicate one’s life to the Montessori movement was thus to serve science. In Rome, Claremont also attended the lectures of Sante de Sanctis, a prominent expert in the field of neuropsychiatry, who had been Montessori’s colleague at the University. Back in England Claremont studied biometrical statistics under the famous eugenicist Karl Pearson and took courses in physiology and pathology for Ernest Starling and Edgar Kettle. Claremont registered as a member of the British Psychological Society (Claremont 1940: 5).

Claremont made several contributions to the NEF journal “The New Era,” which presented him in its first number, in 1920, as a “writer who has endeavoured to obtain as profound an understanding as possible of Dr. Montessori’s work” (Claremont 1920a: 11). In the article he addressed the problem of social reform. There was much talk during the war of “a new brotherhood” when “class distinctions would be obliterated,” but it all came down to nothing with the peace. “The New Era” failed to appear. Mere words could not bring about social reforms, for if that was the case “one could reform the world with a telegram!” (Claremont 1920a: 11), as Montessori once wittily remarked. To change society, one had to change the mindset of the individual, through educational means. In Montessori’s view both sides were right in the nature-nurture controversy. A social-environment perspective was fully compatible with a biological standpoint. “But although education can never transcend the limits set by heredity: it has as a matter of fact, never yet reached them,” Claremont asserted. “We are all of us under-developed, all but partial realizations of our true selves” (Claremont 1920a: 13). Claremont went on to discuss Montessori’s freedom principle, which he distinguished from the classical liberalism of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, as more up to date: “It has become apparent, and never more so than to-day, that the intervention of the Government is necessary at certain points of the economic system in order to enable the free forces of the individual to expend themselves usefully” (Claremont 1920a: 14). For Montessori, freedom was not merely a “removal of restrictions,” the child must also be offered “the things which it needs for its development” (Claremont 1920a: 14) the best possible conditions of life.

Has Dr. Montessori made a true Contribution to Science? was the title of Claremont’s next article, in the third and fourth 1920 issues of “The New Era.” His answer was affirmative. Based on systematic observations in a controlled environment, Montessori’s experiment was possible for others to repeat. But instead of conducting observations in ordinary school environments, she had “transformed the school itself into the laboratory” (Claremont 1920b: 84), the Montessori apparatus answered to the child’s need “to co-ordinate his movements,” and to “develop his senses and powers of perception by seeing, hearing and touching things” (Claremont 1920c: 117). Results were amazing. Preschool children worked “when we thought their sole wish was to play.” They behaved in a dignified manner, “which we had thought was only possible for grown-ups.” They took an interest in the real world “when we thought that a nightmare of vague and chaotic fantasy was the natural food for

their minds” (Claremont 1920c: 115). With the apparatus, Montessori believed herself to have extended hygiene “to the realm of the mind.” Just as hygiene eliminated unnecessary or injurious food stuffs, the lessons in the Montessori schools, stripped of all superfluous adornment, brought “fresh air and light” into the mental world (Claremont 1920c: 117).

Claremont’s next contribution to “The New Era” was less lyrical. In 1921, the schism within the British Montessori Society deepened, between the eclectic faction closely allied to the NEF movement, and the more orthodox faction to which Claremont belonged. In a vexed letter to the editor, Alexander S. Neill, Claremont complained about the exaggerated way in which psychological inhibitions were condemned as harmful complexes, in the NEF journal. A distinction should be made between repression and the constructive mechanism of normal inhibition, enabling us “to behave as harmonious wholes, and not as disjointed bundles of reflexes” (Claremont 1921: 140–141). With the eclectic faction finally out maneuvered from the Montessori Society, Claremont’s leadership position was definitely consolidated. The British Montessori Society was in 1923 granted permission to establish a Montessori Teacher Training College, with Claremont as its principal. It was first situated in Letchworth and then moved to London. Students dedicated the last term of their two years of study to Montessori’s London course. At a time when the European Montessori movement was expanding in all directions, the regularly recurring London courses provided stability and secured fidelity to the method (Quarfood 2023: 12).

Returning once more to the pages of “The New Era,” Claremont in 1928 described the situation within the British Montessori movement. In spite of lack of support from the authorities, the movement was thriving, with branch societies in London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Birmingham, and Nottingham. But this was not owing to the numerous professors who had written books about the Montessori method, without having “spent even a week in a Montessori school.” No, “what has been achieved has come from below” from the teaching staff, Claremont declared. Elsewhere, in Holland and Italy, the University and the government had been the moving forces, but the British Montessori movement, was “almost entirely a teacher’s movement” (Claremont 1928: 75–76).

The core-group of Montessorians led by Claremont, has not received much attention. Most educational historians, like Cohen, seem to assume they were just a bunch of “worshipful followers” unable to take interest in Montessori’s “pioneer investigations in early cognitive learning” (Cohen 1973: 64). Nevertheless, it was thanks to this valiant group that Montessori’s legacy was safeguarded in a time of general decline for progressive education. And Cohen’s description of orthodox Montessorians as uninterested in cognitive learning issues, is utterly misleading as far as Claremont is concerned (Cohen 1973: 51, 61–64). In the highest degree a movement intellectual, Claremont was the author of several popular science psychology books with suggestive titles, such as *The Chemistry of Thought* (1935). Claremont also contributed articles to scientific journals, for instance “Acta Psychologica” and “Mental Health.”

With the creed of Montessorism as his guiding light, Claremont ventured into the field of child psychology, questioning the connection between play and imagination, which for so long had been taken for granted. Fantasy-play had in the Montessori preschools been replaced by more adequate behaviour, furthering the development of intelligence. But it was in no way a question of behaviouristic conditioning. In his book *The Innumerable Instincts of Man*, 1940, Claremont rejected the Pavlovian view of instincts as mechanical reflexes, adhering instead to McDougall's theory of goal-directed psychological drives. McDougall had however tied the instincts too closely to the emotions, not taking into account the possibility of a knowledge instinct. Claremont's assumption of an interaction between intelligence and instinct, the first years of life, was clearly inspired by Montessori's hypothesis of sensitive periods (Claremont 1940: 20, 27–57, 65–84, 104–110, 181; Quarfood 2022: 114–120).

For all his praise of science, Claremont was a romantic at heart, with an unwavering faith in the child's potential. Like his wife Francesca, author of colourful historical novels, he was a practising Catholic. In his literature review of 1919, he mentions how a picture in the Vatican of the Madonna lifting the veil of the *Infant Messiah* could be interpreted as symbolizing the way in which Montessori had disclosed the advent of the "New Child," which perhaps one day would save the world (Claremont 1919: 21).

Much later, in an article 1957, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of "the first Casa dei bambini from which the whole Montessori movement had descended" (Claremont 1957: 12) Claremont referred to Montessori's dictum "Vediamo che cosa fa (let us see what the child does)" (Claremont 1957: 13) in an attempt to define the "fact-finding outlook" (Claremont 1957: 14) of "the more scientifically minded Montessorians" (Claremont 1957: 15). Through her freedom from preconceptions, Montessori had discovered the child's normal tendencies. The crucial issue was now that of obtaining recognized status for Montessori teachers, who, otherwise, would risk being squeezed out of the school system, as uncertificated. Unfortunately, British colleges granting Teacher Certificates were still pledged to old-fashioned educational methods, for the simple reason that "the majority of schools are still using these" (Claremont 1957: 15).

Nancy McCormick Rambusch, who in 1960 revived the dormant American Montessori movement, founding AMS, had in 1954–1955 completed the AMI teacher training course in London. She was not particularly impressed with the training offered by Montessori's British disciples. Too much focus was on the didactic apparatus, which however, was not demonstrated with children present. "Students had to imagine what child responses to it would be. They also needed to ponder what all of it might mean in the context of their own culture-specific educational settings" (McCormick Rambusch 1983: 32–33). McCormick Rambusch's attempt to adapt the Montessori method to the American way of life led to increasing tension between AMS and AMI, and in 1963 there was a parting of ways (Povell 2010: 61–87, 112–137). At that time Claude and Francesca Claremont had settled down in the United States, starting up AMI-affiliated schools in Santa Monica and Atalanta.

Padellaro (1892–1980)

The Montessori movement gained momentum at a turbulent time, when educational methods became increasingly mobilized for various political purposes, from the left to the right. For a decade, between 1924 and 1934, the Italian fascist regime tried to install the Montessori method on a grand, national scale. Montessori and her son Mario willingly cooperated with the regime. The Italian Montessori Society, in 1924 reorganized as the Opera Nazionale Montessori, was from 1926 led by the right-wing philosopher Giovanni Gentile, with Mussolini as its honorary president. As minister of education from 1922 to 1924, Gentile included the Montessori primary school programme as part of the major school reform he undertook (Quarfood 2022: 129–144, 169–176).

The alliance between Montessori and Mussolini has been compared to a marriage of convenience, where both parties disregarded differences of opinion, while furthering their own aims. Montessori hoped that Mussolini would ensure the consolidation of her movement, and Mussolini was of course interested in a method known for its efficiency in instilling discipline at an early age. But there were also aspects of the cultural critique of the Montessori movement that could appeal to the regime. “It is the adult that must change, not the child,” Montessori declared in her opening speech to the 1930 International Montessori training course in Rome. Some fascists seemed to have interpreted this refutation of adult power as fully in line with their own doctrine. Nazareno Padellaro, for instance, believed that parents and schoolteachers had far too much influence over future generations, and that youth organizations like the Balilla movement, created in 1926, had an important task as a counterweight to this influence (Quarfood 2022: 222–225).

When Padellaro became involved with the Montessori movement, his political career was on the rise. He had published two essay books on school matters, *Scuola Fascista*, in 1927, and *La Scuola Vivente*, 1930. In his capacity as superintendent of the elementary schools of Rome, Padellaro was appointed administrative head of the state-sponsored Scuola di Metodo Montessori, the Montessorian teacher training school inaugurated in 1928. During the 1930s and 1940s, he also edited schoolteacher journals – “Il Primato Educativo” and “Tempo di Scuola” – propagating Giuseppe Bottai’s school reform, a reform which strengthened the fascist party’s grip on Italian schools. In 1940, Padellaro was promoted to director general of the elementary schools of Italy (Meda 2013: 266–267; Quarfood 2022: 205, 223).

The regime’s support of the Opera Nazionale Montessori intensified in 1926, the same year as dictatorship was definitely established, and the youth organization Opera Nazionale Balilla was created. Montessori, who was on friendly terms with Balilla’s leader Renato Ricci, seems at first to have misjudged this organization as simply another scout movement, without realizing the underlying purpose of political indoctrination. She also got along well with Padellaro, who was honoured with the task of writing a new foreword to her *Manuale di pedagogia scientifica*, published in a revised edition in 1930 (Quarfood 2022: 176, 184–191).

Padellaro’s foreword focused on Montessori’s child-centred message, hardly mentioning the practical method described in the handbook. With Montessori’s return to Mussolini’s

Rome, the “cult of childhood” had returned to its place of origin. Padellaro reframed Montessori’s message within the fascist myth of Imperial Rome. He interpreted the legend of Romulus and Remus as the first expression of this cult. Wildness, symbolized by the she-wolf nursing the twins, had now entered into an alliance with childish innocence. As Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, with its worship of the infant Jesus, the powerful cult of childhood was reinforced, and finally reached its highest expression with Montessori’s teachings (Padellaro 1930: 7–13; Quarfood 2022: 226–227).

Padellaro belonged to a subgroup within the fascist movement. The aim of the *Scuola di mistica fascista*, led by Nicolo Gianni, was to make the hero-worshipping *Il Duce* cult the main instrument for the fascistization of Italian society. Fascism was to be turned into something resembling a religion, a mystical creed that even children could embrace. Sacrificing oneself for the glory of the nation was a vital component of this faith. Most leaders of the mystical school lived as they learned when they died on the battle fields during World War II, but Padellaro survived. After the war he was soon rehabilitated, having many contacts among educationalists. In 1948 he obtained the post of director general of the department for the Combat against illiteracy at the Ministry of Education. The former fellow traveller of the Italian Montessori Society now became one of its post-war members (Gorla 2012: 25–67; Quarfood 2022: 224).

The multifaceted Montessori movement

There was a certain ambiguity to the Montessori movement’s message about the child’s liberation, a message which could be interpreted in very various ways. While in terms of methodology the movement gave clear instructions for the proper use of the didactic materials, the teacher’s task and the organization of the school environment, its vision of the liberated child – the very heart of the method programme – was less clear. What exactly did the child have to be liberated from and what was the ultimate purpose of liberation?

The musically gifted and practical-minded Maccheroni seems to have valued the didactic apparatus as a most wonderful instrument for the child’s liberation. Liberation understood, not primarily as the removal of external obstacles, but rather as a conversion, from an inner state of chaotic disorder to a state of harmony. The Montessorian child’s exemplary self-discipline was, in its rhythmical bodily control, both morally and aesthetically pleasing.

Although Claremont shared Maccheroni’s fascination with the apparatus, he evaluated it from a more scientific point of view. Having studied engineering and the life sciences, he believed he was in a better position than the average educationalist to judge the merits of Montessori’s technical innovation. Against the liberal pedagogues’ advocacy of methodological pluralism, he argued that liberation could only be achieved through the application of Montessori’s field-tested method. The child had to be liberated from an outdated preschool education, which stimulated idle fantasies and play, instead of furthering the development of intelligence.

As Padellaro's example shows, Montessori's child-centred message could lend itself to political interpretations. In his capacity as school administrator, Padellaro had of course a pragmatic interest in the implementation of a method known for its disciplinary efficiency. But as a fascist ideologue, he also believed in the necessity of myths. Completely disregarding the rational aspects of the Montessori method, he reframed the Montessorian critique of authoritarian parental power as a cult of childhood rooted in Rome's glorious imperial past. The liberation of the child was thus conceived as a liberation from parental authority, in order to strengthen the bond between the state and the new generations.

References

- Alatri G. (2015), *Il mondo al femminile di Maria Montessori*. Roma, Fefè Editore.
- Berger S., Nehring H. (2017), *Introduction: Towards a Global History of Social Movements*. In: S. Berger, H. Nehring (eds), *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective. A Survey*. London, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brehony K. (2000), *Montessori, Individual Work and Individuality in the Elementary School Classroom*. "History of Education", 29(2).
- Brehony K. (2004), *A New Education for a New Era: Creating International Fellowship through Conferences 1921–1938*. "Paedagogica Historica", 40(5–6).
- Buechler S. (2011), *Understanding Social Movements*. London, Paradigm Publishers.
- Claremont C. (1919), *A Review of Montessori Literature*. London, J.M. Dent and Sons.
- Claremont C. (1920a), *Montessori and the New Era*. "The New Era", 1(1).
- Claremont C. (1920b), *Has Dr. Montessori made a True Contribution to Science? I*. "The New Era", 3(1).
- Claremont C. (1920c), *Has Dr. Montessori made a True Contribution to Science? II*. "The New Era", 4(1).
- Claremont C. (1921), *Repression and Inhibition. Letter to the Editor*. "The New Era", 2(1).
- Claremont C. (1928), *The Montessori Movement in England*. "The New Era", 9(1).
- Claremont C. (1940), *The Innumerable Instincts of Man*. London, Eyre and Spottiswoode.
- Claremont C. (1957), *Montessori in Britain: Fiftieth Anniversary of Dr. Montessori's first School*. "Mental Health", 17(1).
- Cohen S. (1973), *The Montessori Movement in England 1911–1952*. "History of Education", 2(2).
- Cunningham P. (2000), *The Montessori Phenomenon: Gender and Internationalism in Early Twentieth-Century Innovation*. In: M. Hilton, P. Hirsch (eds), *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Progress 1790–1930*. Edinburgh, Pearson Education Ltd.
- Eyerman R., Jamison A. (1991), *Social Movements. A Cognitive Approach*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Galeazzi Fresco V. (1966), *Ricordo di Anna Maria Maccheroni*. "Vita dell' Infanzia", 15(1).
- Gorla F. (2012), *La mistica fascista nell'ideologia e nella politica religiosa del regime*. "Storia in Lombardia", 31(3).
- Gutek G., Gutek P. (2016), *Bringing Montessori to America. S.S. McClure, Maria Montessori and the Campaign to Publicize Montessori Education*. Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press.
- Heidemann K. (2022), *Pathway of Education Reform from Below: Theorizing Social Movements as Grassroot Agents of Educational Change*. "Confero", 9(1).

- Kolly B. (2021), *Maria Montessori, pedagogical orthodoxy and the question of correct practice (1921–1929)*. “Rivista di Storia dell’ Educazione”, 8(2).
- Kramer R. (1976), *Maria Montessori. A Biography*. New York, Putnam.
- Kriesi H. (1996), *The organizational Structure of new social movements in a political context*. In: D. McAdam, J. McCarthy, M. Zald (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- L’Ecuyer C. (2020), *La perspective montessorienne face au mouvement de l’éducation nouvelle dans la francophonie européenne du début du XXe siècle*. “European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’Histoire”, 27(5).
- Maccheroni A. (1920), *The Opening of a Montessori School*. “The New Era”, 2(1).
- Maccheroni A. (1947), *A True Romance. Doctor Maria Montessori as I knew her*. Edinburgh, The Darien Press.
- Maccheroni A. (1956), *Come conobbi Maria Montessori*. Roma, Edizione Vita dell’Infanzia.
- McCarthy J. (1996), *Constraints and opportunities in adopting, adapting and inventing*. In: D. McAdam, J. McCarthy, N. Zald (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- McCormick Rambusch N. (1983), *The American Montessori Experience*. In: J.P. Chattin-McNichols (ed.), *Montessori Schools in America: Historical, Philosophical and Empirical Research Perspectives*. Lexington, Ginn Custom Publishing.
- Meda J. (2013), *Padellaro Nazareno*. In: G. Chiosso, R. Sani (eds), *Dizionario Biografico dell’Educazione 1800–2000*. Milano, Bibliografica.
- Murray A., Douast C. (2023), *Fidelity Issues in Montessori Research*. In: A. Murray, E.M. Tebano Ahlquist, M. McKenna, M. Debs (eds), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Montessori Education*. London, Bloomsbury.
- Niesz T. (2019), *Social Movement Knowledge and Anthropology of Education*. “Anthropology & Education Quarterly”, 50(2).
- Padellaro N. (1930), *Futura Olim. Prefazione*. In: M. Montessori, *Manuale di pedagogia scientifica*. Napoli, Alberto Morano.
- Pironi T. (2022), *Anna Maria Maccheroni: la pioniera delle prime Case dei Bambini*. “Gli Argonauti”, 2(1).
- Povell P. (2010), *Montessori Comes to America. The Leadership of Maria Montessori and Nancy Mc Cormick Rambusch*. New York, University Press of America.
- Quarfood C. (2022), *The Montessori Movement in Interwar Europe. New Perspectives*. Cham, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Quarfood C. (2023), *Maria Montessori. Life and Historical Context*. In: A. Murray, E.M. Tebano Ahlquist, M. McKenna, M. Debs (eds), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Montessori Education*. London, Bloomsbury.
- Thörn H. (1997), *Modernitet, sociologi och sociala rörelser*. Gothenburg, Department of Sociology, University of Gothenburg.
- Van Gorp A., Simon F., Depaepe M. (2017), *Friction and Fraction in the New Education Fellowship, 1920s–1930s: Montessori(ans) vs Decroly(ans)*. “History of Education and Children’s Literature”, 12(1).