

Module 2:

Life History of Dr. Maria Montessori

And

Montessori Method

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LIFE HISTORY OF DR. MARIA MONTESSORI

2.A Maria's birth and early childhood

2.A.1 Maria's early childhood

Maria Montessori was born in the town of **Chiaravalle**, Italy on August 31, 1870. Maria's father Mr. Alessandra Montessori was a soldier and a civil servant. Maria's mother

Renilde Stoppani was a very well-educated lady.

Maria was self-confident and optimistic. She was deeply interested in change. She was brilliant and had ability to

learn and grasp things easily. She always did very well in her exams and also in sports and games, often being the head of the team.



2.A.2 Maria's Early Education

Maria graduated from the Technical School in the year 1886 with high marks. She studied modern languages and natural sciences in The **Regio Institute Tecnio Leonardo da Vinci** from 1886 to 1890. Mathematics was her favourite subject but later she made up her mind to pursue the Medical profession. Maria's father was against her interest to study medicine, as it was unthinkable for a woman those days in Italy. Maria due to her strong will and her mother's support could not be put-off from joining the course.

2.A.3 Maria - The First Women Doctor of Italy

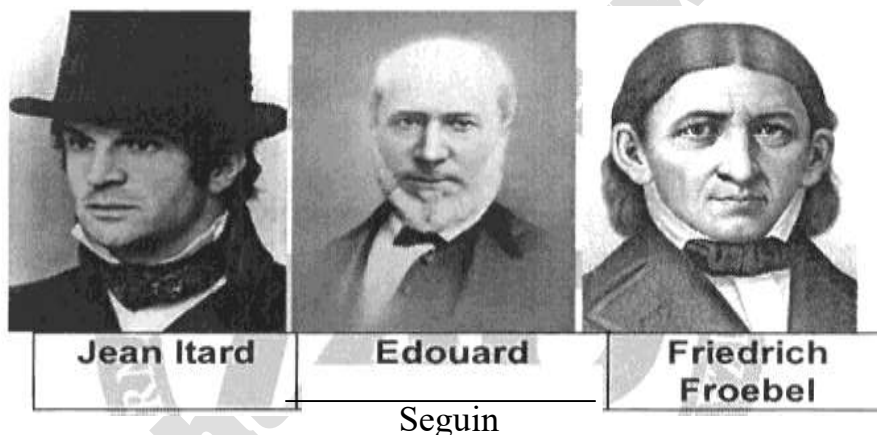
The University of Rome did not allow Maria to enrol in the medical course as she was a Woman. Hence, Maria decided to study Physics, Math and Natural Studies. In 1892, she received the Diploma of License which made her eligible to study medicine. But again her admission was denied for the same reason. Later, she was finally accommodated in the course with the help of Pope XIII's recommendation. In the year 1896, Maria presented her thesis to a board of ten men, who were greatly impressed with her work and granted her the Degree of Doctor of Medicine. *Maria was the first women doctor to graduate from Medical School of Italy.*

2.B Maria's Initiations in the Field of Education

After obtaining her medical degree in 1896, she worked as a Surgical Assistant in Santo Spirito, continuing her research in the University of Rome. She was a member of the University's Psychiatric Clinic, where she became intrigued with trying to educate the mentally challenged. This led her to discover the work of two Frenchmen, Jean Marc Gaspard Itard and Edouard Seguin who refused to accept that the mentally handicapped could not be educated and they developed activities especially for these children who exercised Sense of Sight and Touch. Maria studied their work, also read books of Friedrich Froebel, a German who formed schools for children up to 7 years.

Armed with knowledge of her teachers, she developed training programs for education of senses and the intellect. The training program was deeply influenced by theory by Friedrich Froebel.

2.B.1 The Three Educationists who deeply influenced Maria Montessori



In 1898, at an educational Congress in Turin, Maria gave a lecture about the training of the mentally challenged. The Italian minister of education was sufficiently impressed by her arguments and appointed her in the same year as the director of the Scuola Ortofrenca, an institution devoted to the care and education of the mentally challenged.

Maria accepted the appointment as it gave her an opportunity to test her theories. She developed a teaching program to enable the mentally challenged children to read and write. She sought to teach these skills not by having children repeatedly try it, but by developing exercises that prepare the children.

2.B.2 The First Montessorian Miracle

As a result of Maria Montessori's novel approach to teaching, several of her 8-years-old mentally challenged students at the institute applied to the state examination for reading

and writing and passes with above-average scores. This achievement of Maria is often described as "the First Montessorian Miracle".

2.B.3 Casa dei Bambini - The first Montessori School

The success of her teaching method with the mentally challenged children in Scuola Ortofrenca caused Maria to question the 'normal' conventional education system and the ways in which children who were weak in studies failed to learn.

To know more about the workings of the human mind, Dr. Maria Montessori returned to the University of Rome and pursued psychology and philosophy. In 1904, she was appointed a professor of anthropology at the university. Considering her experience at Scuola Ortofrenca, Maria was asked to open a school for children in a slum development project in the district of San Lorenzo in Rome. She established a school on the 6th January 1907 and named it 'Casa dei Bambini ' meaning Children's house. It began with sixty children whose parents were mostly workers.



At Casa dei Bambini, Maria developed her system of education through scientific observation of the children's ability to absorb knowledge effortlessly from their surroundings, as well as their interest in manipulating materials. Every piece of equipment, every exercise, every method Maria developed was based on what she observed children were doing "naturally" by themselves, unassisted by adults.

2.B.4 Children teach themselves

This simple but profound truth inspired Maria Montessori's lifelong pursuit of educational
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