

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

Barcelona and Montessori

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Maria Montessori lived and worked in Barcelona for close to twenty years, from the age of 45 until she was 65. Her work was greatly influenced by a long and close collaboration with Catalan institutions and society. As many of these details are not widely known in the Montessori community, I would like to give some background on Montessori's relationship with Barcelona.

We can divide her stay in Catalonia into two periods. During the years 1915 to 1921, Maria Montessori was working with the Mancomunitat de Catalunya, the Commonwealth of four Catalan provinces, that aspired to manage Catalan affairs together with the city council of Barcelona albeit it with limited powers and resources. Various pedagogues and priests promoted Montessori's arrival in Barcelona in hopes of improving education in Catalan society.

Her arrival in December 1915 marked the beginning of the first trials of the Montessori method, along with its promotion throughout Catalonia through teacher training courses, the establishment of schools, book publications, and the development of materials. An experimental school and a pedagogical research institute called "Seminari-Laboratori de Pedagogia Experimental" were established to test the method in the education of children older than five years. The initiative was off to a flying start, with the third International Montessori course and enjoying great institutional support.

The strong commitment shown to the person Maria Montessori also sparked suspicions from political parties opposed to the governing party and from some teachers and pedagogues who felt sidelined. There was also opposition from the government in Madrid, which was quick to put obstacles in the way from the outset. Maria Montessori, on the other hand, seemed to have found her new home in Barcelona, receiving support from both the religious establishment and the leading intellectuals of the time. Because of this, at the end of the international course in 1916, she was happily wooed by Catalan society and established her permanent residence in Barcelona with her coworkers Adelia Pyle and Anna Maria Maccheroni. In 1918 Mario joined her with his young wife Helen..

From these years many personal letters provide insight into her work and her main alliances, but they also reveal the reasons that led her to resign and leave Barcelona in 1921. Just two years later, in 1923, there was a dictatorship in Spain that suppressed the experimental Montessori school and the Catalan government.

Montessori, however, never broke the bond with her friends and followers and in 1927, when relations with Rome and Mussolini began to strain, she returned to establish her home in Barcelona with her family. Her second period of time in Barcelona was much more dynamic and successful than the previous one. The political change in Spain with the establishment of the Spanish Republic meant that the new government of Catalonia, the Barcelona City Council and the Spanish government gave her full support. Maria Montessori and her son Mario led the new Montessori Society and their "Crusade for Children's Rights" campaign; while starting an experimental school for children from the age of five in the doctor's family home with her collaborator Maria Antonietta Paolini, they organised activities such as technical and national Montessori courses, lectures on Barcelona radio, talks all over Catalonia and the set-up of a permanent Montessori consultancy.

A Montessori material manufacturing centre was established and the Araluce publishing house continued to publish Montessori books such as the well-known titles Psico-Aritmética and Psico-Geometría. Her projects were accompanied by Barcelona City Council initiatives such as the promotion of Montessori schools and the creation of a Montessori Municipal Institution which, in addition to being the model school, was a Montessori study centre and museum. We can also see the success of the 18th International Montessori Course in 1933 organised by the Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan government) and the Barcelona City Council. At this time the Montessori method began to spread throughout the rest of Spain. Montessori delivered three lectures in Madrid which was to herald the first Ibero-American Montessori course; its organisation was underway when the armed conflict that is generally known as the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936. The doctor had to flee hastily because of the riots in Barcelona, never to officially return to Catalonia, although Mario's wife would continue to live in Barcelona until her death, and Maria and Mario would periodically visit their Catalan friends.

Due to the Franco dictatorship and repression that was to last for forty years, this legacy and the schools were almost forgotten. Even in most biographies about Montessori, the significance of her work in Barcelona is cursorily discussed. It would be beneficial if recent publications with more information about that time helped put Barcelona in the place it deserves in Montessori history. All Montessorians are invited to learn more about Barcelona and Maria Montessori's work there.

The shared links are an excellent start::

<https://www.preceden.com/timelines/854629-montessori-and-barcelonarange=manual&start=-3155673600&end=315532800>

<https://dcanigueral.academia.edu/research#papers>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

With a Doctorate in Educational Innovation and Intervention from the University of Vic (Barcelona), Daniel Cañigüeral Viñals distinguishes himself as an educator and devoted researcher in the history of education. Additionally, he serves as a trainer for the Association Montessori Internationale, offering guidance to Montessori educators for children aged 6 to 12.

Dr Cañigüeral's comprehensive education includes a degree in Primary Education from the University of Girona and a specialisation in Inclusive Education from the University of Vic. He holds AMI Montessori certifications to guide children aged 3 to 6 and 6 to 12, along with the AMI Montessori MDDA Certificate. Much of Cañigüeral's professional journey has been dedicated to working with children aged 6 to 12 at the Palau Montessori School in Girona. His responsibilities encompassed coordination, fostering innovation within the teaching team, and providing parent engagement sessions.

Among his notable achievements, Dr Cañigüeral has conducted training sessions on Montessori education, served as a speaker at Montessori conferences and educational events, and contributed articles to specialised publications on the history of education and Montessori. Currently, he is dedicated to advising Montessori schools, conducting historical research, and directing university master's programmes for the training of AMI guides. With his extensive experience and steadfast commitment, he passionately advocates for quality education.

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