14.2 INTRODUCTION

Educational views of any thinker do not arise in vacuum. They always spring from experiences and realities of that thinker. The idea of child-centricism in education, which makes the child the focal point of education, originated due to the efforts of many educational thinkers. Madame Maria Montessori is one of them. She is the originator of the 'Montessori Method' which has ushered in a new era in child education, specially in the education of small children at the nursery stage.This unit deals with different aspects of the Montessori System of education— its concept and aims of education, underlying principles, working plan of the Montessori Method, role of the teachers, the merits and limitations of this method.

14.3 MARIA MONTESSORI (1870—1952): LIFE SKETCH

Madame Maria Montessori was born in 1870 in Italy. She was a doctor by profession. She was the first Italian to get the degree of Doctor of Medicine. For seven years from 1900 to 1907, she worked as a professor of Anthropology in the university of Rome. There she got the opportunity to come into contact with mentally deficient children. She entered into the field of education through her interest in mental deficiency and became one of the most prominent educationist of the world. Montessori studied those children intensively and derived the conclusion that mental deficiency results from dullness of senses. If their senses could be properly trained, those children could acquire some knowledge. The same method of sense training if applied to educate normal children, far better results could be achieved. Like a true scientist, she observed the fact of child development and developed her own method—the Montessori Method. She opened her first school in 1907 in Italy and named it as "Children's House". She came to India in 1939 and remained here upto 1946. She spent her time in propagating her new method and training of teachers in Madras, presently

Educational activities should be so planned that a child's individuality must be unfolded to the full." She recommended that suitable environment should be provided so that the child may grow and develop the potentialities to the fullest possible extent.

- **The Principle of Freedom or Liberty:** This principle is the outcome of the concept of education as development. Montessori believes that there should be no interference in the way of a child's growth and development. The child must be allowed maximum freedom to unfold itself without any check or hindrance. According to her, freedom or liberty is the most suitable medium for the development of a child's personality. She says : "The school must permit the free, natural manifestation of the child if he/she is to be studied in a scientific manner."

- **Principle of Sense Training:** Sense training is an important feature of the Montessori system of education. Montessori asserts that our senses are the gateways of knowledge, and therefore, on their training and development depends the acquisition of knowledge throughout life. According to her, senses of children are very active between the ages of three and seven. As such, a lot of learning takes place during this period. Montessori developed different types of apparatus for providing sense training and this enabled the children to discriminate between different stimuli which is the key to intellectual development.

- **The Principle of Self- Education or Auto Education:** According to Montessori, self or auto-education is the best method of education by which the child can learn on his own way without any interference from outside. The constant interference of a teacher kills the child's initiative and therefore, she shifted the emphasis from teaching to learning. She devised the didactic apparatus which attracts the children, keeps them busy spontaneously, leads them to learn reading, writing and arithmetic. The principle of auto education brings into prominence the child's individuality.

- **The Principle of Motor Efficiency:** Motor efficiency is complementary to sense training. Motor efficiency results from proper muscular training. She believes that muscular training facilitates other activities like writing,

with flowers, toys, pictures etc. There is also a small garden which is looked after by the students themselves.

The plan of education in Montessori method involves all those considerations which characterise a child's life. Besides the above environment of the 'Children's House', the plan of the method centres round three major types of activities which are:

- Exercises for practical life.
- Exercises for sensory training.
- Didactic exercises for teaching language and arithmetic.

Exercises for Practical Life:

The first one is the exercises for practical life which includes taking care of one's own self. The children are given training in personal hygiene. The children are taught how to wash their own hands, brush their teeth, clean their nails, comb their hair, polish their shoes, keep their dress neat and tidy, fasten their buckles etc. They are also trained to take care of their surroundings.

The children are taught to sweep their rooms, clean the dust from the furniture and arrange them as they like. They learn dressing and undressing and washing themselves. They are expected to hang up their clothes tidily. Children also learn how to use their own soap and towels. The main purpose is to give training in self reliance and liberty and also to be independent.

These practical life exercises are considered to be very helpful for motor education. Muscular education and training is given through walking, sitting and holding objects. Rhythmic exercises are also provided. Children also learn how to walk in straight lines and to balance them properly. Montessori has devised certain formal gymnastic exercises which develop coordinated movements in the child. The gymnastic exercises are specially designed to suit children's needs with special apparatus.

child to correct himself automatically. This apparatus enables even dull and defective children to receive education.

1. Didactic Exercises for Teaching Language and Arithmetic:

The third type of exercises is designed to teach writing, reading and arithmetic. A brief account of these exercises are given below:

A. Teaching of Writing: In Montessori system, writing starts before reading. According to Montessori, writing is a purely mechanical activity which involves merely muscular skill. But reading is partly intellectual. Montessori believed that while the teaching of writing is in progress, the teacher should examine the individual who writes and not the writing. There are three factors involved in writing:

(i) Recognition of the Form of Letters:— The letters of the alphabet are cut in sand paper and pasted on card boards. The children are asked to pass their finger over the letters. In this way, they gradually learned to manipulate a pencil. The same exercise is practised with closed eyes.

(ii) Learning of Phonetic Sounds:—— While tracing the letters, the phonetic sounds are also taught in three stages- association, recognition and recall. This prepares them for reading.

(III) Manipulation of the Pen:—— There are certain exercises through which the students are taught the handling of the pen. The students are asked to place a metal frame on a piece of paper and draw a line a round it with coloured chalk. The same thing is repeated by placing the metal inset. In this way, two figures are produced on the paper. The intervening figure is then filled up with another piece of chalk. While making upward and downward strokes, the pupils are not allowed to move their pencils outside the outline. Thus, they learn to control the pen.

B. Teaching of Reading: Reading, according to Montessori, "is an interpretation of an idea from the written signs and not merely barking at print. Until the child receives a transmission of ideas from the written word, he does not read." The reading materials consist of slips of paper

a " directress", whose primary duty is to direct and not to teach. She is expected to watch the child's progress as a scientist, she should be humble like a worshipper in the presence of the children, and she should deal with the situation like a doctor. The whole programme of education is to be so devised as to fit the child's needs. There only lies the teacher's expert guidance and excellent organisational ability.

14.8 MERITS OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD

Montessori's system of education attracted the attention of the educational world. It has ushered in a new era in the field of child education. The system soon became very popular throughout Europe. The chief merits of the Montessori Method are:

(i) **Scientific Concept of Education:—** Madame Montessori was a scientist and she applied scientific principles based on observation and experimentation. In her method, there is no scope for prejudice which dominates the ordinary educational system.

(ii) **Psychological Approach to Education:—** Her method aims at learning not teaching. It recognises the development from within through his own efforts. Her exercises for practical life enable the children to meet everyday life situations themselves. The Montessori Method aims at educating the children through sense training, which is based on psychological principles.

(iii) **Emphasis on Individual Teaching:——** The idea of individualisation of instruction is her most significant and major contribution in the field of education. Her method is a reaction against collective teaching. Physical and mental make – up of every child should be observed, studied and handled in different manner.

(iv) **Freedom for Children:—** Through a democratic approach to education, she was the first to enhance the dignity of the individual child and the practical aspect of liberty. Montessori wanted to give

- Lastly, her method is very costly. It requires a lot of money to set up a school on the lines as suggested by Montessori.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is Didactic Apparatus?

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Q 5: What are the names of the psychological steps of learning on which Montessori gave importance?

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Q 6: What are the exercises for practical life?

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Q 7: Name the device used for teaching Arithmetic.

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Q 8: The teacher in the Montessori system is called a ——— (Fill in the blanks).

Q 9: List the merits of the Montessori Method.

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14.10 LET US SUM UP

- Madame Maria Montessori was born in Italy in 1870. She was a Professor of Anthropology in the university of Rome where she got the opportunity to work with mentally deficient children. This attracted her attention to the field of education. She developed her own method of education known as the 'Montessori Method'.



14.11 FURTHER READING

1) Aggarwal,J.C (2006): Theory and Principles of Education, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.

2) Bhatia, K.K (2004): Foundation of Education, Kalyani Publishers, Ludhiana.

3) Majumdar, T.R. and Kundu, D (1987) Modern Theory and principles of Education, The World Press Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta.

4) Safaya,R. and Shaida, B.D.(2003):Modern Theory and Principles of Education, Dhanpat Rai Publishing Co. New Delhi.



14.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: a)1870

b) Mentally

c) Children's House

Ans to Q No 2: Individuality means that every individual is different from each other, both physically as well as mentally. Therefore, suitable environment should be created so that the child may grow and develop the potentialities to the fullest possible extent.

Ans to Q No 3: Auto education means the child can learn in its own way without any interference from outside.

Ans to Q No 4: Didactic Apparatus is a set of apparatus developed by Montessori for educating the child.

Ans to Q No 5: The psychological steps are— Association, Recall and Recognition.

Ans to Q No 6:In children's house, pupils are given exercises for practical life. They are taught how to wash their hands and clothes, how to sweep their rooms, dust the furniture, set the tables, brush their teeth, comb their hair etc.