

Dr. Maria Montessori and Lord Robert Baden- Powell of Gilwell, two pedagogues.



This lecture was read during the 21 st International Montessori Congress of the Association Montessori Internationale 24 – 27 July 1991 in Nara, Japan

In June 2001 the lecture was updated since new facts came to my knowledge. These facts were found in an article in a German Montessori magazine, written by Margarete Wonesch in the fall of 2000. The update appears in italics in between the existing text.

Other facts appeared in a follow up study on Effects of Montessori Education mentioned in Montessori Mededelingen 23 – 3 March 2000. This update is also written in italics.

For those who read Dutch I recommend the article "[Dr Montessori spreekt te Ommen](#)" on this site. This article was published in May, 2008 . It contains more information on the Montessori - Baden-Powell relationship.

Dear Ladies and gentlemen,

For children on their way to adulthood, a consistent method of education, based on an explicit philosophy of education, may turn out to be a 'help to life'.

In other instances this was not the case. This turned out to be true in the case of the anti-authoritarian education, which emerged in Germany during the sixties. This theory of education was based on a wrong concept of freedom and proved to be harmful instead of helpful to growing-up children.



A consistent way of education may involve the family, the school or activities outside school and family-life. It also happens that two of these areas are involved in one theory at the same time.

Montessori education, for instance, covers the field of family as well as school. Parents or prospective parents can take a course in which they are taught how to prepare an environment for babies and toddlers. After a short while already school takes over a part of the education in the Children's House, elementary school and for a small part of children in an Erdkinderheim

Those who teach in Children's House or Elementary are trained extensively, but courses for parents do no longer exist at this stage of Montessori education. The schools that are being visited by the children are supposed to contribute to parent education. The question is whether they are able to fulfil this task properly. I think that is many

instances they are not, and therefore I would like AMI to conduct courses for parents of children from 3 - 12 years old.

This wish stems from my opinion that education as given by parents is far more important for children than school teaching can ever be. School did a good job in the 20th century. It taught all children how to read and write and conveyed the principles of arithmetic to them. This was more than most parents could do, since they hadn't mastered these things themselves and moreover they were busy for more than forty hours a week to earn a living.

The next century we will see a working week of three or four days and parents who know the three R's. So the opportunity arises for them to pay more attention to their children; to take over a part of the tasks that belong to the school now. But in this case they must be trained so that they know what to do.

Montessori-education doesn't play any part in education outside school and within the family circle. In the youth-movement of the 20th century Montessori's ideas were hardly known.

Of course these are generalisations, so let me explain what I mean by 'school' and 'youth-movement' in this speech to the 21st Montessori Congress in Nara Japan.

It is clear enough that by 'school' the Montessori-schools are meant. And when talking about 'youth-movement' I'll restrict myself to the game of 'Scouting' as suggested by the British ex-general Lord Robert Baden-Powell of Gilwell.

Lord Baden-Powell started his work as a pedagogue - like Dr. Montessori - in the early part of the 20th century. But contrary to Dr. Montessori he had already completed a successful career by that time in the military.



At the end of the 19th century the UK -like my own country- was an important colonial power. There was a lot of fighting to be done for a professional, which Baden-Powell did first in India and later on in South Africa.

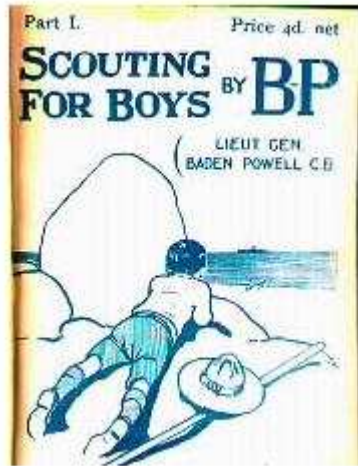
In South Africa he was the 'Saviour of Mafeking', which was besieged by the 'boeren', something that made him very famous in the United Kingdom.

This may very well have been a reason why a booklet, which he had written in India for natives who were employed by the army as scouts, got very known among English youngsters.

A war in these days was still something that could be won and was much romanticised by grown-ups as well as children.

This was still the case after World War II in Europe. This war ended when I was only six years old, but I still remember the little shed in my neighbour's garden which was

used in 1945 by older boys as a kind of military barracks from which they undertook adventurous trips. They used for instance rafts made up of empty biscuit-tins on which they sailed the ditches that surrounded the village where I lived at the time.



It must have been with a similar kind of spirit that the English boys played the game of scouting in the London parks. A brainwave of the kind that made Dr Montessori decide to apply her method of special education to another target-group also occurred to Baden-Powell. He adapted his book so that the boys could use it. He published 'Scouting for Boys' in weekly instalments.

Like the physician Montessori, general Baden-Powell became an educator. And both were very successful. It is very remarkable how at the beginning of our century new ideas spread (even without satellite TV and CNN). Within a brief space of time both Montessori and

Baden-Powell found themselves to be world famous.

Both ideas for education were - in the first place - meant to be for poor children, who needed it most. Montessori started in a working-class neighbourhood of Rome called San Lorenzo, and BP gave uniforms to his boys so that social differences would become invisible during the game of scouting.

It is true, soldiers wear also uniforms, but Baden-Powell had no intention to train little would be soldiers. Like Dr. Montessori he worked for peace and organized Jamborees after the First World War, where boy scouts from all over the world could enjoy their equality in an atmosphere of world brotherhood, as Baden-Powell called it. He was convinced that children who had lived together in this way would not take up arms against each other so easily.

The last world jamboree before World War II took place in 1937 in the Netherlands. It was the last Jamboree, which Baden-Powell attended. He was eighty years old by that time. During that year Dr. Montessori lived in The Netherlands and most surely she must have been aware of these events. Radio and press paid a lot of attention to this Jamboree.

And they are home once again after a wonderful and every to be remembered trip.

THE NEW ZEALAND JAMBOREE,
December, 1939-January, 1940.

A Scout Contingent from the United Kingdom has been invited to attend the above. Full particulars will be published later.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT

AN extremely interesting experiment in the teaching of Scouting principles to children (boys and girls) under Cub age is being made in Holland by Dr. Maria Montessori, the world-famous educationalist.

She has selected about fifty pupils from the schools run there on her methods and a number of Scouters are teaching them the principles of Scouting.

Dr. Montessori's idea, to use her own words, is to "integrate" the Scout training and that of her own educational system. She maintains that for the full and proper development of a child he (or she) "must have social experiences out of doors as well as in the classroom," and this, she says, is what Scout work gives them. The practical training of Scouting stimulates and gives added point to the foundations laid in school.

Children in Montessori establishments are instructed, from the age of four onwards, in many of the things in which Cubs are trained, as, for instance, how to move silently and in an orderly manner, how to attend and how to look after their clothes, sew on buttons, etc.

Children in schools run on her principles are shown small pictures of the various types of clouds, and from them are taught to deduce the sort of weather that can be expected to follow. But in the classroom the subject can go no further and it is here the Scouter comes in. He takes the children out Cubbing, and they are thus able to make practical application of what they have learned indoors.

Dr. Montessori is a great admirer of the Scout Movement because it has "filled an empty place in education and supplied a need of great human importance, especially for the development of moral standards."

Scouting, she says, is most helpful for the training of a character—a training which is lacking in ordinary education.

To objections that children under Cub age are too young to appreciate practical Scout principles, she answers that very young children can do more than we usually imagine they can, and that, so far as camping is concerned, they are much more interested in the serious than the lighter side of it.

The experiment which is being carried out in Holland has, so far, she declares, been a great success, both children and teachers being most enthusiastic about it. It has stimulated interest in class work enormously.

from: *The Scouter*,
April 1939,

(3/4)

Mrs Wonesch article makes mention of a correspondence between Robert Baden-Powell and Dr. Montessori on the subject of early childhood education. This was published in the English magazine 'The Scouter' in June 1939. Baden-Powell writes:

"Dear Dr. Montessori, I have heard with great interest commendation of the principles of the Boy Scout Movement and how you have borne them in mind in devising your scheme for the education of children below the Scout Wolf Cub age and mentality. I am very glad to hear that the experiment is proving successful. ... The cubs have proved successful as Patrol Leaders and thus have confirmed my feeling that you can scarcely start too early the training in responsibility and leadership as an important step in formation of character.
Yours sincerely,
Robert Baden-Powell."

Mrs Wonesch believes that more letters must have been exchanged. A letter of the hand of Dr. Montessori to Robert Baden-Powell hasn't been

identified so far.

'The Scouter' also describes the experiment more in detail: "An extremely interesting experiment in teaching of Scouting principles to children under Cub age is being made in Holland by Dr. Maria Montessori, the world-famous educationalist. She has selected about fifty pupils run there on her methods and a number of Scouters are teaching them the principles of Scouting.

Dr. Montessori's idea, to use her own words, is to 'integrate' the Scout training and that of her own educational system. She maintains that for the full and proper development of the child he (or she) 'must have social experiences out of doors as well as in the classroom.' and this, she says, is what Scout work gives them..."

A couple of years later Montessori departed for India, where -in the compound of Madras- the game of scouting must again have come to her notice.

When Mr Abs Joosten choose a couple of lectures for publication in "Door het Kind naar een Nieuwe Wereld" (Via the Child to a New World; 1940) Montessori was already living in India. In this book appears a chapter 'Social and Moral Education'.

Here Dr. Montessori describes the role of sports and youth-movements. The youth-movement - Montessori argues - enables the child to act as an independent person outside school and family. This enlarging of social space must be learned; the child must learn to live according to rules and it must be able to conduct a primitive life. There is no doubt in my mind: here Dr Montessori is referring to scouting.

When I was sixteen years old I was a boy scout and at the same time a patrol leader. A group of boy scouts consists of several patrols. The members of a patrol were 10 - 16 years old, the same vertically structured group as in a Montessori-group. So you're acquainted with the advantages. A lot of the skills that I had to learn as a boy scout in order to scout the world independently had been taught to me when I was eleven years old by those who were sixteen at that time. Where Dr. Montessori said that the child is asking us to 'help it to do it itself', Baden-Powell instructed his boys to 'Be Prepared' (which by the way in abbreviation is his own name BP). As a matter of fact the older boys prepared the newcomers and so they did it themselves.



The child likes to realise, Dr. Montessori said,
" ..that it can go through life, carrying on its back all it may need."

In 1956 my patrol carried their humble equipment on our bikes instead of on our backs. We lived in the Netherlands, you see!! In seven days we made a ride of 300 kilometres through the Netherlands, choosing our own campsites from a booklet that we got from the HQ. We carried out commands that we chose from the same booklet. We kept a log for instance which is still in my possession. I actually re-read fragments of it, when preparing for this lecture.

We needed a lot of skills during this trip: we cooked our own meals, put up our tents, fixed punctured tires, and a lot of other things. We were prepared, we acted independently; we had to put in a great effort, and we loved it!!

This independence given to us by our parents and scouters is of the same kind as the independence which Montessori propagated in 'From Childhood to Adolescence' I quote:

"There is no description, no image in any book that is capable of replacing the sight of real trees, and all the life to be found around them, in a real forest. Something emanates from those trees which speaks to the soul, something no book, no museum is capable of giving.."

Direct contact with the natural environment -propagated by Dr. Montessori- directs the power of imagination into the direction of a whole, which must be defined with precision.

In this relation Baden-Powell talked about 'following the outdoor trail'. His aims differ of those of Dr. Montessori. Life in nature develops self-confidence and inventiveness and it is a healthy way of living. But the results correspond with the characteristics mentioned by Dr. Montessori. Life in nature evokes a moral improvement and a better community spirit, Baden-Powell said. Dr. Montessori is talking of life in nature when discussing moral and social education, as I pointed out earlier in this lecture. So they shared expectations of these kinds of experiences for the development of personality in the child.

The Boy Scout - movement became very known to a broad public as a result of the moral appeal, which it made on its members. Everybody knows that a scout has to do a good deed a day. The old lady being helped to cross a crowded street by a boy scout, without wanting to, is a joke that is known all over the world.

As a boy I had a token, which I kept in my left trousers pocket until I had carried out my daily good deed. Then I transferred it to my right trousers-pocket and I was ready for the rest of the day.

But moral implications didn't stop there: becoming a Boy Scout means making a promise. This promise implies faithfulness to the scout's law, readiness to help other people and loyalty to God and the country.

The scout's law is a moral code formulated in ten articles, a way of living to be carried out if you want to be a scout.

When I reread this all in "Scouting for Boys" it seemed a little bit outdated and goody goody to me. To boys that were raised directly after World War II it still must have been the expression of a way of life that seemed good.

The scout's law is about faithfulness, loyalty, helping other people, friendship, chivalry and brotherhood, being good to animals, smiling and



whistling during difficult times and thriftiness to name a couple of items!

The idea of obedience, which we also know from the ideas of Dr. Montessori as a joyful obedience to the educator generated from free will, is seen by Baden-Powell from a different angle. It's enforced discipline and not self-discipline as meant by Dr Montessori.

Baden-Powell says that in case a person gets a command from a person with a rank higher than his own, then he is obliged to carry out what he has been asked to do. He may protest but only after having carried out what he was supposed to do.

A couple of years ago my friend Camillo Grazzini and me drove by car through the city of Amsterdam. I explained to him that every inhabitant of Amsterdam is deep down a bit of an anarchist by nature. One could observe that trait by observing the way they drive their cars. I was born in Amsterdam and - although I had been living outside this town for quite a while - I could adapt without any difficulty to this special way of driving cars since I had **incarnated** this and no other environment when I was still a youngster.

I guess that this same incarnation of a little bit of anarchism will be the reason for my personal discontentment with the explication that Baden-Powell - in a military fashion - gave of the idea of discipline.

And quite honestly I don't quite like Dr. Montessori's interpretation either, although better than the one given by Robert Baden-Powell. Montessori's interpretation gives the educator a lot of power over the child; power that can be used for the benefit but also against the interest of the child. This possibility of manipulating the child should be handled with care!!

After my years as a boy scout I have been a scouter for a couple of years. One of my tasks was to talk about the scout law and the scout promise which I mentioned a couple of moments ago, with twelve-year -old boys before they promised what they had to promise in order to be a boy scout. The boys I talked to most were physically handicapped and as a result of that fact most of the rules in the scout law had a deeper significance to them. Smiling and whistling in difficult times was more difficult for them than for healthy boys, and often they wondered how they could help others while needing such a lot of help themselves.

The way these boys thought about what they were going to promise and the consequences, which might be involved for them convinced me of the fact that it was valuable for adolescents to formulate rules for a good life for them.

There is no doubt that Dr. Montessori judged this aspect of scouting positively. In 'From Childhood to Adolescence' she writes:

" If scouting has met with such success, it is because it has brought moral content to a group of children. It puts the accent on that which one ought or ought not to do... In confirming to the rules of scouting, a new point of departure becomes attractive, a new dignity is born in the child."

And further:

"..scouting involves children who have applied voluntarily for membership in the society. And that society emphasizes, above all, a moral aim such as, for example, to protect the weak and to maintain a certain moral level; here the child may make commitments or not. No teacher obliges him to enter into the society. But if he wishes to be a member he must freely choose to obey its principles if he wishes to take part."

And finally

"The basic moral principle requires a commitment from the individual: The commitment of the individual to the group. And that is what is essential."

The question to be raised now is whether or not we find an educational principle in Montessori education that can be linked to the one we have just discussed. How does Montessori give rules for a good life to adolescents? Is there a principle that can be adopted of one's own free will?

In my opinion we find such a principle in carrying out the Cosmic Task of Man. Others, during this congress, took it upon themselves to elucidate the ideas of cosmic education. To day it was Sofia Cavaletti and on the first day of this congress Betty Stephenson. So let me be brief in this lecture. This will not be easy for me by the way!!



What does the Cosmic Task of Man mean?

If the process of evolution is understood as a way to reach harmony, contributions by animals and plants can be thought of as being delivered unconsciously.

Dr Montessori, in " The Absorbent Mind ", gave the example of the cow:

The cow eats grass and by doing so it contributes to the well being of the Earth. By eating grass the cow cuts it and fertilizes it, so that the grasses grow and hold soil with their roots. This way the wind cannot blow the soil away. In this way a good work for 'Mother Earth' is done.

In 'To Educate the Human Potential' Dr. Montessori describes how the ' Guiding Unconscious' as it were gives a task to different creatures in a certain order to restrict the amount of calcium in the Oceans. In this way life during the Palaeozoic Era remained intact. Also the trilobites, the crinoids and the protozoa are not aware of this cosmic task. You will find them depicted in your program-pamphlet of this congress.



Now let's have a look at the position of Man from a cosmic point of view:

Man can have conscious knowledge of this pursuit of harmony as the motor of evolution. And as a result of that Man has the choice to contribute to this pursuit or not, after having learned of it during the lessons in cosmic education in elementary school.

The question to be raised now is whether effects of Montessori-education can be observed with adults who have benefited from this type of education. Do they choose different aims in their adult - lives?

There is nothing that I can report in connection with cosmic education in the Netherlands at this moment. The state of implementation in elementary education is still in a rather embryological stage.

Heinrich Heine, a German poet, once said that he wished to die in the Netherlands because of the fact that everything happens fifty years later in that country. This may account for the embryological stage that I mentioned above!!

However, a research can be mentioned here on the effects of Montessori-education in general, as carried out in 1986 in the Netherlands and reported in the book 'Effecten van Montessori-Onderwijs. As you might know in the Netherlands we have a couple of Montessori-High schools. As a matter of fact - poor Mr Heine - they were the first ones to be established worldwide, ten years before Dr Montessori wrote down her ideas on such a type of school in 'Erdkinder' which is a chapter in two of her books: 'From Childhood to Adolescence ' and 'Door het Kind naar een Nieuwe Wereld'

Co-workers of the university of Utrecht have interviewed young adults that passed Montessori high school in order to measure the effects of their Montessori-education.

In choosing a career those young people act very independently. They tend to change a couple of times until they find a profession, which they really like. They like to work independently without a 'boss' looking over their shoulders.

Furthermore they want to be creative people with a lot of free time for making music, dancing, sporting and things of the like.

They have a positive attitude towards life, but they are not religious and not interested in politics.

Taking care of fellow people and the will to change society (aspects of the cosmic task) are not dominant traits in their characters. Again, this might be the result of the fact that Cosmic Education is not strongly implemented in Dutch Montessori-schools.

Ten years later, this study was carried out again in order to see whether differences had occurred with the original findings, due to changes in society. This happened to be the case. The youngsters were found to be less independent when choosing a career. Most people want to start a family and they want children.

I have come to a last aspect of comparison of the ideas of Lord Robert Baden-Powell and Dr. Maria Montessori. And this is the area of special education.

It was the merit of Mr Mario Montessori sr. and Prof. Dr. Th. Hellbrügge from Munich (Germany) that they brought the method back to the field where it came into being. Their work, laid down in the book 'Die Montessori-Pädagogik und das Behinderte' is a plea for the integration of handicapped children in groups with non-handicapped. The ratio should be 1:3.

Apart from this an individual therapy on the basis of Dr. Montessori's ideas was developed, which I will not go into now.

Our former Board member the late Dr. Jon Osterkorn did the same kind of work in integrated groups in the United States of America and also Nancy Jordan in Ireland worked in the field of special education pursuing Dr Montessori's ideas.

The work in integrated groups stresses the equality of the non-handicapped child and the handicapped. This is also the case in the scout movement.



Baden-Powell tells a curious story in 'Scouting for Boys' of two frogs, which accidentally jumped into a bowl of cream. One of them tried to get out for a short while but after that he judged it useless to try any longer. He sank to the bottom of the bowl and drowned.

The other one tried and tried although there was not much hope to get out of the bowl. But it happened to be that since he kept trying to get out, he stirred the cream into butter. And sitting on a knob of butter he was able to jump out of the bowl. And so he survived.

"So keep smiling when things get rough and you'll succeed, " Baden-Powell says to his scouts.

This frog was depicted on the scarf of the scout group of handicapped boys of which I was the scoutmaster for a couple of years. This group consisted of handicapped scouts who lived at home or in special institutions for the handicapped. During

the year we trained them as scouts by means of correspondence courses and visits which we paid them.

But during summer camps they were fully integrated with non - handicapped scouts whom we invited to the camp as their 'runners'. They did things together and the handicapped got help from the runners. But only as much as was necessary. So the runner wouldn't go for wood in order to light a fire for cooking. He would take the boy in the wheelchair to the woods in order to gather twigs for the fire. A lot of boys got real friends who also met after summer camp. They considered themselves as equals, which was a valuable experience for their further life.

During that time scouting was considered the only youth-movement to do such things for the handicapped. They were highly appreciated for doing so by the doctors who treated the handicapped. We formed scout groups in many a lot of institutions for the handicapped.

It's time for a conclusion now: Both Montessori – education and the scouts – movement are typical for the 20th century. Both were founded in 1907. But will they survive in the next century? I really don't know for sure, but I hope so for both of the movements, since it seems to me that a lot of ideas as proposed by both Dr. Montessori and Baden-Powell, can be of great value for the children who grow up in the 21st century. We mustn't hesitate to adjust our methods if necessary, but we must be careful not to water down the principles: a bad Montessori school is worse than no Montessori school at all. And the same goes for a group of Boy Scouts.

I thank you.

Books mentioned in this lecture are:

"Het Verkennen voor Jongens" (Scouting for Boys)
Lord Robert Baden-Powell of Gilwell
The Hague (The Netherlands) 1955 - 8
"De Nationale Padvindersraad"

"Door het kind naar een Nieuwe Wereld" (Via the Child to a New World)
Dr. Maria Montessori
Heiloo, the Netherlands 1953 - 2
Kinheim Uitgeverij

"From Childhood to Adolescence"
Dr. Maria Montessori
New York 1976 - 5
Schocken Books

"To Educate the Human Potential"
Dr. Maria Montessori
Oxford 1989 - 1
Clio Press

"Aan de Basis van het Leven" (The Absorbent Mind)
Dr. Maria Montessori
Amsterdam (The Netherlands) 1949 - 1
Van Holkema en Warendorf N.V.

"Die Montessori-Pädagogik und das Behinderte Kind" (Montessori-Pedagogy and the Special Child)
Theodor Hellbrügge and Mario Montessori
Muenchen (Germany) 1978 - 1
Kindler Verlag.

"Effecten van Montessori-Onderwijs" (Effects of Montessori - Teaching)
Dr A.P. Spruijt et All
The Netherlands 1986 - 1
Uitgeverij Giordano Bruno

"Zeitschrift für Montessori Pädagogik"
Montessori Verein Sitz Aachen
2000 - 4
Margarete Wonesch
"Montessori-Pädagogik und Pfadfindererziehung"

"Montessori Mededelingen"
Jaargang 23 nummer 3, maart 2000
Montessorianen in de jaren negentig
Keuzes op het gebied van werk en relaties
Jessy van der Meer, Martijn de Goede, Ed Spruijt

Sources for the pictures:

Dr. Maria Montessori	http://montessori-ami.org
Lord Robert Baden-Powell of Gilwell	found on the internet
Scouting for Boys	found on the internet
Teacher with children	© Fred Kelpin
Boy with map of Italy	© Fred Kelpin
Pictures of boy scouts	Archives of: Postgroep I 'Luctor et Emergo'