

5-8 January, 2009

26th International Montessori Congress



Don't let this opportunity for a unique Montessori Congress pass by. Eminent speakers from within and without the Montessori community will address topics relating to the Four Stages of Development, from refreshing angles. But more than that, the Congress will also live Montessori by giving ample opportunity for observation, silence, flow, and beauty in a historic Prepared Environment — the grounds of the Kalakshetra Foundation. Follow literally in Maria Montessori's footsteps, for it is at Kalakshetra

(now in the city of Chennai, previously Madras) that she gave her first Indian course in 1939. It is a place of art, culture and learning.

And, the Congress' dates were not chosen at random: January 6 is the birthday of the Casa. Moreover, 2009 celebrates 70 years of Montessori in India, and 80 years of AMI.

Have a look at the general programme and the inspiring breakout sessions, and decide immediately that you

should block these dates in your diary! The Congress is open to all interested; participants do not have to be a member of AMI or an AMI diploma holder in order to attend. Registration is easy and can be done online within a few minutes.

For more information on registration, accommodation and the venue, please go to the special Congress website: <http://montessoricongress.com>

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Side entrance to the Bharata Kalakshetra Auditorium where the plenary sessions of the congress will be held.



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Programme Schedule

	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Time	6-Jan-09	7-Jan-09	8-Jan-09
7:30 AM	Breakfast, Nature Walk, Silence, Yoga		Yoga as Sādhāna Desikachar
9:00 AM	Gathering	Gathering	Gathering
9:15 AM	The Dance of Life Lynne Lawrence	Universal Concepts from Indian Philosophy for Contemporary Education Mrityunjaya Athreya	Language: The Song of Life Baiba Krumins Grazzini
10:30 AM	Break		
11:15 AM	Dr Krishna Kumar Director, National Council of Education Research & Training	"...like ships in harbour..." The Spiritual Development of the Human Being Irene Fafalios	The Adolescent and the Adult: The Embodiment of World Harmony David Kahn
12:30 PM	Announcements	Announcements	Announcements
12:45 PM	Lunch		
2:15 PM	Breakout Sessions	Breakout Sessions	Breakout Sessions
3:15 PM	Break		
4:00 PM	The Foundation of the Human Personality Judi Orion	The Thread of Life Sandra Giralto	Smt. Jaya Row Founder, Vedanta Vision Teacher of Indian Philosophy
5:15 PM	Open Time		
6:30 PM	Dance and Music		
7:30 PM	Dinner		

Schedule Breakout Sessions

	Tuesday 6-Jan-09	Wednesday 7-Jan-09	Thursday 8-Jan-09
Reflection	Montessori and the Child (0-3) Patricia Wallner	Montessori and the Child (3-6) Pamela Nunn	Montessori and the Child (6-12) Jean Miller
	Gandhi on Education Ashish Rajpal	Tagore on Education Swapan Majumdar	J. Krishnamurti on Education Radhika Herzberger
		Setting the Scene for Montessori – "Olcott, Besant & Theosophical Education" Chaganti V. K. Maithreya	Beauty in the Prepared Environment Shizuko Matsumoto
	Music as Sādhāna Gowri Ramnarayan		Dance as Sādhāna Leela Samson
	Craft Walk - Laila Tyabji		
Panel discussions	Bilingual Learning	Inclusive Education	Activity-based Learning
		Reaching out	How to be an AMI Trainer
Observation	A variety of arts and crafts from all over India - Dastkar		
Participation	Tulen (an Indonesian martial art) - Ginni Sackett		
	Kolam (a traditional Indian floor art form) - Local Experts		
	A selection of traditional games		
	Art as Sādhāna - Sukant Misra		

The Venue

Kalakshetra was established in 1936 after the extraordinary success of Rukmini Devi's first performance of Bharata Natyam at the Theosophical Society, in Adyar, a suburb of Madras, in the South of India.

The founding members, Rukmini Devi, her husband George Arundale, and their associates at the Theosophical Society, were deeply committed to Theosophy and an arts academy was an extension of this commitment. The academy was also symbolic of the struggle for India's independence; it was to culturally revive a country that was losing its identity under British rule.

The venue has two auditoria, each distinct in its size and style. The Koothambalam, is the main theatre space in Kalakshetra. Its architecture reflects Rukmini Devi's

perception when she wrote that 'dance was so closely interlinked with religion that today it is impossible to think of it divorced from this essential background.' The other auditorium on the premises is an open-air arena equipped with lighting and sound systems and measuring 70'x80', which can accommodate about 300. The space provides an idyllic setting for many kinds of programmes.



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Montessori in India: 70 Years

The Montessori story in India is a fascinating one and spans seven whole decades (1939-2008). This interesting and exciting time period has been chronicled for the first time and is to be released at the 26th International Montessori Congress to be held in Chennai between January 5-8, 2009.

Titled *Montessori in India: 70 Years*, the book commences with a crisp account of the time period leading up to Dr Montessori's arrival in India in 1939. This period was dominated by the forging of the modern Indian identity through the thoughts and ideals of stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and Dr Annie Besant. In fact, Dr Montessori met with the likes of the Mahatma and Tagore in Europe prior to her arrival in India, and her educational philosophy received their strong backing.

The book then moves on to Dr Montessori's ten-year stay in India (1939-1949), punctuated with eye-witness accounts of her arrival in Chennai. Interestingly, her flight from Mumbai to Chennai was piloted by none other than Mr. JRD Tata, India's first commercial pilot, and one of the doyens of Indian industry! First-person accounts of Dr Montessori's passion, warmth and boundless energy,

along with photographs from her long stay in India ensure that the reader has a ringside view to this fascinating period in Dr Montessori's life.

Other aspects that make this timeframe eventful are the coming together of the key ideas that were to form the bedrock for the 6-12 Elementary Programme and her forced seclusion in a mountain-top hideaway in Kodaikanal when she was an 'enemy alien' as an Italian in British India during the years 1942-44. Once again, first-person accounts detail how, through all these highs and lows, Dr Montessori maintained her rigorous training schedule which laid the foundation for the Movement in the sub-continent.

After Dr Montessori's departure from the sub-continent in 1949, it was a long period of consolidation as the Movement slowly began to take root and flower in the decades that followed. The tireless work put in by a committed few slowly began to bear fruit with the establishment of schools and permanent training centres across the sub-continent.

The Congress itself may be viewed as a culmination—and celebration—of 70 fascinating years of the establishment of the Montessori Philosophy in India.

ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING IN CHENNAI: MAINSTREAMING MONTESSORI

In the periphery of the congress there will be opportunities to visit primary schools that have adopted the Activity Based Learning approach. Montessorians will be delighted to see this approach, so obviously inspired by Montessori and practised across the board in state schools in Tamil Nadu. On January 8 the panel discussions during the breakout session will centre on Activity Based Learning.

Amukta Mahapatra

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If you walk by any primary classroom in a government school in Chennai or Tamil Nadu, the expected scene of a teacher at the head of the class with rows of children in front of her, would be hard to find. Instead, one sees children sitting any which way, working on some task or the other; some working with rapt attention; some fetching materials; some watching others; a few may be talking, one may be looking out of the window. A child may look at you for a minute and get back to his or her work. The teacher could be found, perhaps in the midst of a group of children. A hum of activity may be heard.

Doesn't all this sound familiar to the Montessori educator? Often, this is how a Montessori environment is described. And believe it or not, this is happening not in a privileged, private Montessori school, but in 37,000 schools run by the government of Tamil Nadu, involving 120,000 teachers and reaching about 5,000,000 children from classes one to four. Too many zeroes? Blink again, but the numbers are right. These are children mostly from the poorer families.

As you go into the classroom, to sit down quietly and observe with your notebook and pen, you may see some familiar and some unfamiliar situations and activities. Keep aside the quick judgments, the need to define and arrive at conclusions, for the mind to compare and conclude. Observe and you may see some universal truths unfold in front of you.



What happened to make the Activity Based Learning create such a tsunami of rethinking and manage to actualize some of the ideas that were mere rhetoric for so many years?

In the late '90s, the World Bank supported the District Primary Education Programme, taken up in seven districts in Tamil Nadu. A dramatic review of the system followed—but with one flaw: the majority of the administrators and teachers did not change, and subsequently the problem of almost 50% of children dropping out of primary school did not change. Many left school before they were ten years old.

As it often happens, some individual histories run parallel to larger events. M.P. Vijayakumar, an officer of the civil service administration, was the Additional Secretary of Education in 2000. Faced with many children leaving school to join the work force, he strongly felt that schools should be the solution rather than be the problem and felt that the change had to begin at the helm, at the level of the teacher training institutions.

In his search for trainers able to train the teacher educators, he was introduced to Amukta Mahapatra by the Centre for Montessori Training in Chennai and invited her to do a trial programme, which was done as a series of workshops, from which a core group also developed. The teachers learnt on the job, observing a multiple-age class, rehearsing and preparing their session before training teachers and in the process trained the education community. About 750 were trained from 2001 to 2002. The expanding core group went on to train all the 200,000 elementary school teachers in the state.

Meanwhile one had to crack the problem of learning materials, critical to make the child an independent learner, and move away from continuous teacher-directed activity. One difficulty with making material available to the schools, especially in such large numbers, was the cost. A means to mass-produce responsibly was found and the costs became affordable.

Meanwhile the system used by the rural schools run by Rishi Valley School had been identified as suitable: it had a transparent curriculum and continuous assessment built into it. UNICEF was promoting this method as part of its quality package to government schools. After much hard work, with unbelievably quick results the pedagogy was in place within 12 months. The subjects were Tamil, Mathematics, Environmental Studies and English. The children worked at their own pace, individually or in small groups, with the teacher in a facilitating role. There were no textbooks, only a couple of workbooks. There were low-level blackboards on which they can write or draw by themselves. Montessori mathematics materials were available. Parents were encouraged to observe the class.

In 2006 Mr M.P. Vijayakumar was State Project Director of SSA, an Education for All programme, and decided that ABL could be up-scaled to the whole state: what was successful in Chennai needed to reach all the primary school children in the state.

SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA TO THE MONTESSORI MOVEMENT

'... Looking back on the chequered life of Dr Montessori... there is a period that looms above the others for its dramatic nature and for the completion she attained in her vast vision... India could be compared to a United Europe for the diversity of peoples, language and mentality that compose the vast country... So we had the privilege of coming in prolonged contact with children in all situations... The children were our universal ambassadors to all... And in my heart the light of India steadily warms the sense of gratitude for the country which showed so great a regard for Dr Montessori, surrounded her with friendship and gave her the support and collaboration of selflessly devoted students.'

Mario Montessori in the article "The Impact of India"

26th international montessori congress

under the auspices of the association montessori internationale
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sādhana
reflective practice, spontaneous living

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This photo was taken in Adyar/Chennai, during Maria Montessori's last visit in 1948. Sixty years down the road, isn't it high time you made your first visit, and sampled some genuine Montessori air?

Take your first step by going to <http://montessoricongress.com>



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Venkatesan