

Remembering Muriel Dwyer a Montessori “force”

In the mid to late 50's Muriel Dwyer took a Montessori course offered by Mario Montessori, and it was this encounter that was to influence the course of her life and bring this enlightened form of education to countless numbers of adults and as a consequence through the work they did as Montessori teachers, to countless numbers of children on all continents.

In 1961, Muriel helped found with Mario Montessori the Maria Montessori Training Organisation, London, to provide a single permanent presence in the UK for AMI; she would become its first official Director of Training and School.

Muriel became a family friend of the Montessori's, spending time with Mario and his family in The Netherlands, travelling with Mario in Europe, teaching in the UK and France, exploring and developing Montessori pedagogy and philosophy and becoming part of a loyal group of gifted Montessori teachers who became gifted Montessori Teacher Trainers who worked with Mario to establish a structure for the international association that would enable the continuation of the work that his mother, Maria Montessori, had begun.

As Maria Montessori's initial discoveries were made with Italian children there was a need to revisit the system of teaching reading and writing in English that had evolved in the 50's and 60's. Muriel, along with Mario Montessori, set about creating what has been widely recognised as an approach of sheer genius in both its simplicity and effectiveness and is now widely adopted around the world by Montessorians and others.

Muriel was brave, and spoke her mind, showing humour, kindness and compassion to all those who were prepared to work hard at developing their understanding of what Montessori education really was and supported those who wanted to use it as a force to improve the lives of children, seeing it as a force for social good. It was this attitude and commitment that made her such an important member on many of AMI's committees: she joined the Pedagogical Committee on its creation in 1974 and donated her time and expertise for twenty years; she served on the AMI board from 1982-1996, and was a trustee of the MM75 Fund (1984-1999).

An outstanding achievement was her work in Africa. She devised a way of delivering Montessori teacher training to people whose material resources were limited as had been their own opportunities for educational advancement. She did this almost single-handedly and managed to achieve results that were similar to those that Maria Montessori herself achieved in her first schools which were founded in the poorest districts in Rome. It was at this point in the late 1960's and early 1970's that her collaborator, Hilla Patell, held the fort in the UK and enabled Muriel to travel to Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Botswana, South Africa, Nigeria and as part of a UNICEF delegation in the 1980's to China. AMI took up this work and continues it to this day.

(based on the text prepared by Lynne Lawrence for the commemorative service for Muriel Dwyer)