

Rhode Island College

Digital Commons @ RIC

Faculty Publications

Faculty Scholarship

2017

The Montessori Experiment in Rhode Island (1913–1940): Tracing Theory to Implementation Over 25 Years

Susan Zoll

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/facultypublications>

Digital Commons
Part of the Early Childhood Education Commons

Network

Logo



The Montessori Experiment in Rhode Island (1913–1940): Tracing Theory to Implementation Over 25 Years

Susan Zoll

Rhode Island College

Keywords: *Clara Craig, Montessori Method, Rhode Island Normal School, first-wave Montessori, first international Montessori training course*

Acknowledgments

A special thank you to Marlene Lopes, Special Collections Librarian, Adams Library at Rhode Island College, for her guidance in accessing primary source documents related to the Rhode Island Normal School and Clara Craig.

Abstract. This article highlights archived documents pertaining to a 25-year experimental classroom implemented by Clara Craig, then supervisor of training at the Rhode Island Normal School. Craig is notable as she was the only participant in the first International Montessori Training Course in Rome, Italy, in 1913, to gain approval from the Rhode Island Board of Education to study the Montessori Method. Her administrative position at the Rhode Island Normal School provided her with a rare opportunity to influence both teacher preparation and classroom curriculum upon her return. The article traces implementation of the Montessori Method and its Americanized revision, serving as one of the earliest longitudinal examples (1913–1940) of a state-sanctioned Montessori classroom, well beyond the acknowledged first-wave era (1911–1917). Craig’s experience provides a historical perspective that can inform current Montessori initiatives working within complex education and policy contexts.

In the current policy landscape, Montessori programs across the country are working toward recognition from state departments of education (American Montessori Society, 2008; Montessori Public Policy Initiative [MPPI], 2015). This is not a recent trend, but one with deep historical roots, beginning with Maria Montessori’s first International Training Course in 1913. Clara Craig, one of 67 Americans enrolled in the inaugural training, served as the only official representative charged by the Rhode Island Board of Education with investigating the Montessori Method. Over the next 25 years, Craig’s experimental classrooms situated within the observation school at the Rhode Island Normal School (1913–1940) existed well beyond the historical first-wave period of Montessori growth in America.

The National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (2014) charts four distinct periods of growth in Montessori education in the United States over the last century. The first surge occurred between 1911 and 1917 with Dr. Montessori’s first International Training Course and the subsequent development of more than 100 Montessori schools across the country. The second wave occurred between 1960 and 1975, with a Montessori revival generated by Nancy Rambusch in an era of alternative education, President Johnson’s War on Poverty, and the creation of the federal Head Start movement to promote equity in education. The third wave (1975–1989) continued to focus on education as a tool to mitigate the effects of

poverty and the development of Montessori magnet schools. The fourth wave, (1990–present) has prompted a Montessori renaissance as the philosophy expands into public schools (Whitescarver, 2017), charter initiatives (Ayer, 2017), and new Montessori delivery and research models, such as Wildflower Schools. And there remains the ever-expanding growth of private nonprofit and for-profit Montessori programs established across the nation.

Implementation challenges occurred with each resurgence of the philosophy in the United States. Researchers cite shifts in education policy, failed professional relationships, politics, and funding issues as challenges influencing Montessori education's lack of acceptance in mainstream education (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008; Debs, 2016; Gutek & Gutek, 2016). Given today's growing diversity in Montessori delivery models, along with increased access to private foundation and public funding sources, and emerging intersections with state and federal educational policy, it will be imperative that educators and administrators remain vigilant about implementation practices to sustain alignment with Dr. Montessori's principles (Lillard, 2012; Lillard & Heise, 2016). As Whitescarver and Cossentino (2008) stated, "If the current trend of growth and diffusion into the public sector continues, Montessorians may find remaining pure to their tradition becoming much more difficult" (p. 2594).

To demonstrate how changes can occur between knowledge of educational theory and actual classroom implementation, this article provides a historical overview of research into the Montessori Method in Rhode Island immediately after Dr. Montessori's first International Training Course in Rome. Using primary source documents to map the pedagogy's evolution over 25 years, I examined training notes from the 1913 Montessori training, annual reports to the Rhode Island Board of Education, newspaper accounts, journal articles, and research reports between 1913 and 1940. The materials provide rare insight regarding revisions made as a result of the Rhode Island experiment, with a particular focus on language and literacy practices. Understanding how Craig created and institutionalized state-level reform, and learning more about the trajectory of her own research of the Montessori Method, has vital significance to understanding why the pedagogy died out by the early 1920s in America and why it may still struggle in the public sector today.

The purpose of this article is to expand our historical perspective related to first-wave Montessori implementation. It also raises questions related to fidelity of implementation and evaluation outcomes introduced by Lillard and Heise (2016), framing how we measure what works in Montessori education, in what contexts, and with what results.

The Rhode Island Normal School, the Board of Education, and Clara Craig

Teacher preparation in the early 1900s depended on trainings offered by high schools and school districts. Individuals willing to relocate to Rhode Island, Vermont, Connecticut, or Massachusetts could complete their studies through certificate-granting institutions identified as normal schools, a term derived from the French phrase *école normale*, representing teacher preparation schools that standardized teaching methods and curriculum (Christiansen, 2016).

As a tribute to the Rhode Island Normal School's 40th anniversary, Thomas Bicknell (1911) provided one of the most thorough historical accounts of the institution. He traced the inception of the normal school idea to a 1789 reference in *Massachusetts Magazine*, which cited a need to prepare teachers for their work in classrooms. Massachusetts was an education pioneer, creating its state board of education in 1837 and opening the first publicly funded state normal school in Lexington in 1839 (Bicknell, 1911).

Rhode Island opened its first private teacher training school in 1852 and, after an initial failed attempt, opened the Rhode Island Normal School in 1871. Students were required to pass an entrance exam, tuition was free for Rhode Island residents, and travel stipends were offered to students who traveled more than 5 miles to school. By 1911, there were approximately 260 normal schools in the United States, graduating over 15,000 newly trained teachers annually (Bicknell, 1911). The Rhode Island Normal School gained national attention for the quality of its programming (Christiansen, 2016) and attracted recognized

educators such as John Dewey, Alice Freeman Palmer (then the president of Wellesley College), Julia Ward Howe, and Dr. Montessori (Marzacco, 1994).

Four departments coordinated teacher preparation at the Rhode Island Normal School, now known as Rhode Island College: (a) the Normal Department, where students studied educational theory and subject matter taught in public elementary schools; (b) the Observation Department, which provided opportunities for students to observe experienced teachers and practice teaching in classrooms under teacher supervision; (c) the Training Department, where students deepened their instructional experience by teaching in classrooms under the guidance of college supervisors; and (d) the Extension Department, which provided the teacher workforce with relevant professional development, through weekend classes, to improve teaching practice and school conditions (Rhode Island Normal School, 1914).

In addition to the four departments of teacher preparation, the Rhode Island Normal School also housed a public school, the Henry Barnard School, with some 400 students assigned to classrooms in the basement and first floor of the building (Carbone, 1971; Rhode Island College, 1921). These classrooms worked in tandem with instructors in the Observation and Training Departments to create a model of teacher preparation embedded in classroom practice. The combination of theory and practice allowed student teachers authentic opportunities to observe teachers' instruction, work directly with children, and receive valuable feedback from faculty as part of their development as educators.

Oversight of educational programming throughout the state was the responsibility of the Rhode Island Board of Education. Reports from school districts were submitted to the board of education each year cataloging rich descriptions of school events, including the opening of new school buildings, lists of teachers and school administrators by town, professional development offered to teachers during the previous year, instructional curricula, and projected fiscal needs. The 1911 annual report of the Rhode Island Board of Education addressed the importance of education:

Educational development is a related part of American history, a vital element in American civilization. The American school system is of the people, a product of social and economic life.... We have cause to look upon our vast system of public education as one of the great American achievements. We regard it as the truest product of American democracy.... (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1911, p. 13)

The same report also addressed the importance of education being responsive to community needs and open to exploring new models of teaching, stating "new ideas in education are to be welcomed, improvements in means and methods are to be sought; but *all radical proposals must be tested* [emphasis added] by the governing purpose of public education" (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1911, p. 13). The following year, the Rhode Island Board of Education granted Craig permission to travel to Rome to learn about the highly popular Montessori Method directly from Dr. Montessori.

Craig served as supervisor of teacher training at the Rhode Island Normal School, working directly with teacher candidates on classroom instructional practices. Craig was a deeply respected educator and administrator, committed to the mission of the Rhode Island Normal School to prepare highly qualified teachers for Rhode Island's children (Rhode Island Normal School, 1914). Craig's greatest legacies are her role as a teacher educator and her influence on teaching practice through the Rhode Island Normal School's Montessori experiment. Over the course of her 47-year career, Craig served in multiple positions related to teacher preparation: principal of the Henry Barnard School, director of teacher training, professor of practice, and dean at the Rhode Island College of Education (Lopes, 2007; Warburton, 2012; Carbone, 1971). The following section provides some insight into Craig's experience during Montessori's first International Training Course.

Report of the 1913 International Montessori Training Course

It is noteworthy how Montessori's work with children in small, disadvantaged communities in Italy became a global sensation. Many in the United States first learned about the new pedagogy through a series of articles published in the then-popular *McClure Magazine* (Gutek & Gutek, 2016). These articles, along

with accounts from a handful of early adopters of the pedagogy, generated an interest in individuals from diverse educational experiences, including faculty members from higher education and teacher preparation programs, as well as educators and administrators from schools for the deaf and schools for girls (Kramer, 1976). All had an interest in learning more about the child-centered philosophy and its possible influence on educational practices.

Upon her return to Rhode Island, Craig provided the board of education with a thorough account of her training, followed by a series of recommendations (Craig, 1913). Details of the course from January 15 through May 15, 1913, included lectures and lessons from Dr. Montessori and her associates as well as opportunities for observations and practice work in Montessori classrooms (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1914). Craig's (1913) report included a list of the weekly theoretical lecture topics and technical lessons, which are listed in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Craig warned the Rhode Island Board of Education about "so-called Montessori teachers [who] attempt direction of a Montessori class without careful study as to the integrity of Montessori doctrine and clear comprehension of Montessori purposes," comparing it to a "criminal act toward children who may be victimized" (Craig, 1913, p. 8). Recognizing a need to understand the pedagogy in practice, Craig offered to study the Montessori Method further by implementing it, under her supervision, in an experimental classroom in the Rhode Island Normal School. She predicted Montessori autoeducation would radically alter the role of the teacher and transform the classroom into a laboratory in which to study and meet the learning and development needs of children ("Inventor of child training system and R.I. woman who studied it," 1916).

After reviewing Craig's report, the Rhode Island Board of Education agreed there was more to learn about Dr. Montessori's method and approved Craig's request to implement it in a classroom in the Henry Barnard School, housed in the Rhode Island Normal School, for the purpose of evaluating the viability of the Montessori pedagogy in Rhode Island classrooms (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1914).

During Dr. Montessori's first trip to America at the end of 1913, she made a quick stop to Providence between speaking engagements in New York and Boston ("Dr. Montessori visits this city," 1913). A reception was held in her honor at the Rhode Island Normal School and more than 100 guests attended, including the governor, members of the Rhode Island Board of Education, and faculty of the Rhode Island Normal School (see Figure 1). The *Providence Daily Journal* reported Dr. Montessori would return to Rhode Island the following summer to deliver training at the state normal school ("Dr. Montessori visits this city," 1913). Dr. Montessori was grateful to Craig for representing the state to which Craig had brought the Montessori pedagogy, saying she was "a woman with a great mind and a fine spirit [and] I have come to appreciate her dearly. If she had not been a representative of Rhode Island I should still have been drawn to her by her exceptionally fine character" ("Dr. Montessori visits this city," 1913, p. 4).

Outcomes of the Montessori Experiment in Rhode Island

Two years after receiving approval from the Rhode Island Board of Education to develop a Montessori classroom, Craig shared outcomes of the experiment:

Observations of the work of this group of children are a source of professional joy.... Some really remarkable results have been attained. It is a tribute to the pedagogical foresight of the Normal School authorities that this class of children ranging from three to six years of age should exemplify, as it does, the wholesomeness and feasibility of certain Montessori practices hitherto doubtfully regarded. It has been the care of those directing the Montessori experiment to maintain as practicable and as democratic a school as possible, the equipment being simple and the membership limited only by lack of space. It is an apparently justifiable anticipation that from this modest little classroom will issue an inspirational help both to the school with which it is incorporated and to Rhode Island schools at large. (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1916, p. d3)



Figure 1. Photograph taken at a reception in honor of Maria Montessori on December 13, 1913, at the Rhode Island Normal School. From left to right, Theresa Barone (Henry Barnard teacher), Rhode Island Governor Aram J. Pothier, Dr. Montessori, and Clara Craig. From the Special Collections Department of the James P. Adams Library, Rhode Island College. Reprinted with permission.

The children's progress was notable, and the Montessori experiment in Rhode Island successfully replicated many of the same child outcomes Craig had observed during her training in Rome. Word of this success attracted increasingly larger numbers of observers interested in witnessing the classroom application of the Montessori principles. In fact, interest in the program was so great that observers needed to schedule appointments, both to limit the number of observations from those curious about the philosophy and to protect the students' uninterrupted work time, a key Montessori principle (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1916).

The following year's annual report to the Rhode Island Board of Education (1917) continued to highlight the children's continued progress in the Montessori program. Requests were made to the board of education for additional classrooms and a new school building to enroll more children and expand the methodology into the elementary grades, where Craig could make a "more careful determination of the

adaptability of the methods to be used in the public schools in general” (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1917, p. a22). In this report, Craig offered her support of the expansion of the Montessori pedagogy.

Several children, having been trained in this school and having attained the age of six years, are now candidates for the primary department. These children, even now, excel, by far, the prescribed attainment of children who have progressed beyond regular first grade work. They are attracting the curious interest of expert educators. (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1917, p. a23)

The general public’s sustained interest in the Montessori Method led Craig to conduct lectures and special methods courses, across Rhode Island and New England, for teachers interested in learning more about classroom application of the Montessori pedagogy (Christiansen, 2016). Craig also wrote books and a manual about Montessori language materials (Craig, 1919). A review of Craig’s manual is discussed in the next section, providing the reader with variations in the Montessori Method developed by Craig in her experimental classroom.

From the Montessori Method to the Rhode Island Normal School Method to the Henry Barnard Method of Reading and Writing

During the early years of Montessori pedagogy in Rhode Island, Craig was already developing her own innovations and adaptations to Dr. Montessori’s curriculum, eventually creating a method that combined core Montessori ideas with a different set of materials. In *The Beginnings of Reading and Writing*, Craig (1919) revealed that her experiment had grown beyond a single classroom of 3- to 6-year-olds, approved in 1913, to include an additional first- and second-grade classroom in 1919, with a plan to create a third-grade Montessori classroom the following school year (Craig, 1919). Craig articulated her adherence to the Montessori philosophy, but her observations eventually led her to Americanize the Montessori Method.

The experiment was inaugurated on a strictly Montessori basis, in thorough accordance with Montessori theory, and with true respect for equipment, apparatus, and program so far as these factors had been personally observed and studied by the writer in the schools of Italy. Gradually, however, although adhering to the many essentials of Dr. Montessori’s theory of free education, the practices of the school have been modified and adapted to meet the obviously different reactions of American children.... Some of the Montessori materials, which in the observation of the writer had made potent appeal to Italian children, failed to arouse and hold the spontaneous attention of American children. (Craig, 1919, p. 6)

Craig (1919) described how her sequence supported children’s writing, including a shift from Montessori Metal Insets to the Rhode Island Normal School wooden models. Every month, different wooden shapes were offered to the children, reflecting seasonal holidays and depicting relevant areas of study (e.g., birds, homes, dogs). Over time, as children traced around the wooden shapes, Craig (1919) noted that children developed a *graphic vocabulary* that allowed them to draw the shape without the use of the model, using solely muscular memory (see Figure 2).

Next, students were introduced to emery cloth letters, a Craig-developed adaptation of the Sandpaper Letters. (Craig, 1919). She quickly moved children from lessons in isolated letter sounds to constructing words and sentences using a unique Movable Alphabet table that she had also designed tracing emery word cards (e.g., baby, dog), which Craig identified as the *Rhode Island Normal School Alphabet Table* and *Rhode Island Normal School Cards* (Craig, 1919), respectively. The alphabet table replaced the Movable Alphabet. It was designed on a 6-foot-long, child-sized table covered with green felt. Letters were arranged alphabetically on the felt, and a piece of glass rested on the table to protect the materials. The table version of the Movable Alphabet allowed children to move while they retrieved the letters placed on top of the glass that were aligned to the corresponding letter on the green felt underneath (Craig, 1919).

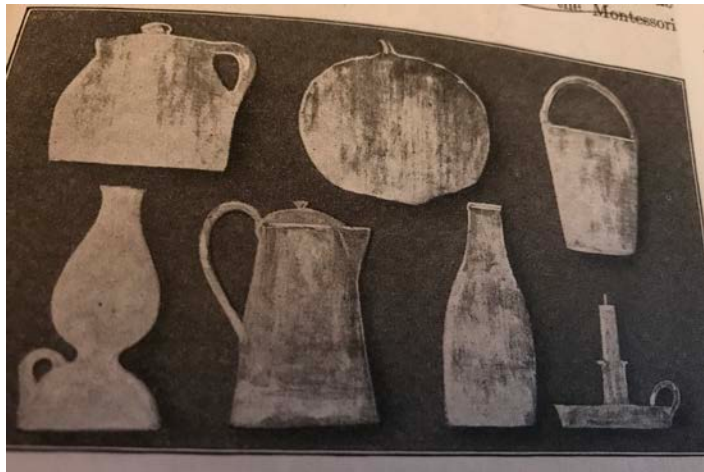


Figure 2. Wooden shapes developed by Clara Craig for children to trace. From the Special Collections Department of the James P. Adams Library, Rhode Island College. Reprinted with permission.

Craig (1919) described how teachers supported children's early writing attempts through individualized learning opportunities that included phonetic dictation of words children were interested in writing, a strategy used in many preschool classrooms today. By 1919, the curriculum was referred to as the Rhode Island Normal School's method of teaching reading and writing (Craig, 1919).

In 1920, the Rhode Island Normal School became the Rhode Island College of Education (RICE). In the college's catalog the following year, Craig was listed as the instructor for a summer session course, *The Teaching of Reading and Writing by a Socialized Method*. A brief description of the experimental classroom within the Children's School is provided.

The Children's School is the result of several years of first-hand educational experimentation with children from three to six years of age. It is, moreover, an educational experiment in process. The group concerned, at present, represents primarily the amalgamation of the Kindergarten and Americanized Montessori groups of last year, but no estimable contribution from any worthy educational source or system is excluded. The school purposes real education from the sincere study of young children. It is coming to be recognized more and more that children under the usual school age have intellectual needs that are greatly and generally overlooked. The children's school is really a laboratory where it is possible to observe pedagogy in the making. (Rhode Island College, 1920, p. 23)

The 1921 Rhode Island College Bulletin described the popularity of the experimental classrooms in the Henry Barnard School at RICE, which noted that close to 1,000 visitors representing educational administrators and educators had conducted observations at the school, with nearly 600 of the visitors traveling from outside of Rhode Island. (Rhode Island College, 1921, p. 19).

Long-Term Impact of Craig's Montessori Experiment

Although contemporary research identifies Rhode Island as having formally adopted the Montessori curriculum, no Rhode Island Normal School or Department of Education primary source documents corroborate this statement. Rather, all documents reviewed for this paper referred to the Montessori classrooms as "experimental," even two decades after Craig's training in Rome. Three additional publications provide longitudinal evidence of the Montessori philosophy continuing under Craig's research until her retirement from RICE in 1941 (Bird, 1930; O'Neil, 1937; and Browne, 1939).

Grace Bird, a teacher in the experimental classroom, published “A Successful Experiment in Child Education” in 1930. A decade after Craig’s 1919 report, Bird’s description of classroom materials mirrors Craig’s adaptations of Dr. Montessori’s materials, including “emery cloth letters” (Craig, 1919, p. 12) now referred to in Bird’s 1930 article as “carborundum letters” (p. 539). Bird’s description of the development and use of carborundum letters sounds very similar to today’s Montessori Sandpaper Letters.

Pupils may enter the kindergarten of the Henry Barnard School at the age of three, four, or five. They find the schoolrooms equipped with many attractive incentives to work. Among these are large script letter and word forms made by the teachers by dusting carborundum powder on melted glue applied to cardboard with a brush. These forms and other materials are conspicuously placed within the children’s reach to invite the children to use them spontaneously.... The children are then taught how to move the first two fingers lightly over the carborundum letters and words. By this means, they gain a tactual-kinaesthetic-visual-auditory impression of the symbols. They are taught to look intently, trace precisely, and at the same time say the sound distinctly. The one-letter stage is a simple and brief entrance into a procedure which begins almost immediately to deal with larger units. The progressive sounding, seeing, and tracing of word forms carry over to the construction of words and sentences with a large movable alphabet, even before the pupils have learned all the individual sounds. (Bird, 1930, pp. 539–540)

Bird’s insight highlights teachers’ ingenuity in replicating sandpaper letters conceptually, but developing materials different from Montessori’s design with adherence to the philosophy of learning through kinesthetic development. Bird also described the use of the wooden shapes Craig had designed in 1919—which mimicked the purpose of Metal Insets—still in use in the classroom in 1930.

To gain the necessary motor control for writing, the children trace around patterns in the form of flat models of such common and interesting objects as birds, animals, and candlesticks or other household articles. Then, with colored pencils, they fill in the spaces with orderly strokes. Their own outlines furnish the limits beyond which they must not go. The tracing models are large in size, appropriate in form, and graded in difficulty. They lead the children to the easy, fluent, sidewise movement across the page characteristic of legible handwriting. The random use of the pencil—in other words, the scribbling tendency—is directed and controlled. (Bird, 1930, p. 540)

Bird (1930) referenced individualized learning as a strength of the classrooms, where students advanced in their learning as they were ready, and not according to their age or grade. And when children transferred to new schools, they were often “placed in grades higher than those they left” (Bird, 1930, p. 544).

What is missing from Bird’s (1930) article is any reference to Dr. Montessori as the originator of many of the materials and philosophical approach to instruction used to establish these outcomes. The experiment, I believe, referred to the school’s process of studying and reflecting on its own teaching practices as a way to refine its instructional methods

Two additional documents—Father John O’Neil’s master’s thesis, *C.E. Craig’s Adaptation of the Montessori Method in the Rhode Island College of Education* (1937), and Rose Butler Browne’s doctoral dissertation, *A Critical Evaluation of Experimental Studies of Remedial Reading* (1939)—provide evidence of Craig’s work more than two decades after the experimental classroom began.

O’Neil was a Catholic priest at St. Sebastian’s Parish in Providence. Interestingly, this is the same parish to which Craig’s brother, Fr. James Aloysius Craig, was also assigned. While O’Neil was completing his studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, O’Neil met Craig through a family member, which likely afforded him the opportunity to work closely with her and provide a careful account of her work. Much of O’Neil’s thesis reviewed previously shared highlights of Craig’s work, but his introduction suggested Craig’s experiment was not without challenges.

In this search for a more natural approach to education, there have been many to criticize and condemn the work of the experimenters as an aimless quest for entertaining novelties, and to denounce the departures of progressive educators from the venerable practices of the past, in order to adopt what is fallaciously described as an inconsequential series of worthless fads. (O'Neil, 1937, p. 1)

Criticism of the pedagogy was as much a part of the early Montessori experience as was its celebrity. Prior to Dr. Montessori's arrival in New York in December 1913, at least a dozen articles had been published in both professional journals and popular periodicals that minimized and even attacked the Montessori Method of education (Wilcott, 1968). William Kilpatrick of Teachers College, Columbia University, was one of the strongest critics of the Montessori pedagogy (Wilcott, 1968). When he spoke to the Connecticut Valley Kindergarten Association in 1912, Kilpatrick compared Dr. Montessori's work to educational theory from the 1880s, saying it trailed 30 years behind the then-acceptable views of education (Wilcott, 1968). Elizabeth Ross Shaw, presenting at the prestigious National Educational Association 1913 Annual Meeting, stated that the Montessori Method would "produce a generation of tea-tasters, piano-tuners, perfumers, dry-good experts and other sensory specialists" (Wilcott, 1968, p. 149). In this context, O'Neil's (1937) statement suggests that Craig endured similar criticism, despite her successful work over the previous 25 years that had been fully endorsed by the Rhode Island Board of Education.

Despite these criticisms, Craig's influence on the young teachers she trained is undeniable and most visible in the work of Rose Butler Browne, a particularly accomplished student of Craig's. Browne completed the Rhode Island Normal School program in 1919 and became the first African-American woman to obtain a doctorate in education from Harvard University (Browne & English, 1969).

Browne's dissertation included remedial reading strategies focused on kinesthetic surfaces (e.g., emery cloth letters) as a way to dramatically increase reading proficiency (Browne, 1939; Tsering, 2010). In her autobiography, Browne referred to the ingenious Montessori tools she learned about as a student at the Rhode Island Normal School. She believed they introduced children living in poverty to materials that supported their development and encouraged their curiosity, characteristics that are foundational to later reading success (Lopes, 2003). Browne's experience with Montessori materials influenced her own research, as well as her work over the course of her 47-year teaching career in historically black colleges (Lopes, 2003).

O'Neil's (1937) and Browne's (1939) theses were published near the end of Craig's career at RICE, 25 years after Craig began the Montessori experimental classroom. Both documents offered similar analyses of the materials and teaching methods Craig herself had documented in her earlier reports. These respected external publications probably confirmed to Craig her own professional success. At a minimum, they offered longitudinal evidence of Dr. Montessori's enduring influence on one participant in her inaugural 1913 training institute—a participant approved by the Rhode Island Board of Education who administered a teacher preparation program, in turn influencing countless other educators over the course of her career.

Limitations

Reliance on existing archival documents leaves many unanswered questions. Though there is some evidence of how Craig revised Montessori materials, it is not clear to what extent the pedagogy itself was modified. Neither do the documents provide a clear rationale for why Craig felt compelled to Americanize the curriculum, beyond her statement that American children did not appear as interested in some of the materials as Italian children did (Craig, 1919).

Craig's work began in an era before women had the right to vote, when history was "deeply gendered" (Wagner-Martin, 1994, p. 175) and, unlike today, when women were largely absent from state-level educational documents. So it is of particular note that Craig held the respect of state educational leadership, offering her financial and administrative support. Craig, in return, provided annual updates highlighting outcomes of the classroom experiment. Though these archived documents do not tell the entire

story, they do provide rare insight from a woman who planned, implemented, and evaluated an educational initiative early in the 20th century.

Conclusions

Building on previous research, I provide three suppositions about why Craig and the Rhode Island Board of Education might have wanted to Americanize the Montessori Method: (a) lack of access to approved Montessori materials, (b) fear of the possible consequences of unauthorized claims to Montessori training, and (c) a shift in educational goals toward nationalism during World War I.

Lack of Access to Approved Montessori Materials

One logical reason for the revisions Craig implemented could be simply a lack of access to approved materials. Photographs in the Rhode Island Normal School Catalog (1916) show that the classroom had some basic Montessori materials, such as Number Rods, the Brown Stairs, and the Pink Tower; perhaps Craig brought these materials back from her training in Rome. It was difficult to import materials from England or Italy, but by 1929, Dr. Montessori had collaborated with Albert Nienhuis to offer her classroom materials worldwide (Nienhuis Montessori, 2017).

It is reasonable to assume that, without proper resources, Craig and her colleagues were compelled to develop their own Montessori materials (e.g., emery cloth letters), using supplies readily available to them.

Fear of the Possible Consequences of Unauthorized Claims to Montessori Training

Kramer (1976), Standing (1998), and Coleman (2011) reported on Dr. Montessori's August 1913 letter to the editor of *The New York Times*. The purpose of the letter was to tell the public who had been officially trained during the 1913 International Training Course. Dr. Montessori stated that, because the training lasted only 4 months and she believed her method was not yet fully developed, she did not grant her approval for any training courses "not under my direct supervision, so that for the present no training courses for the preparation of teachers, except those held here in Rome, will be authorized by me" (Montessori, 1913, p. 10).

Since Craig was the administrator of a teacher preparation institution, she would have been in direct conflict with Dr. Montessori's edict prohibiting newly trained individuals from developing training courses without her direct approval. This alone seems a compelling reason for Craig to refer to her work as an "experiment" and not a Montessori training program. The desire to comply with Dr. Montessori's request may also explain Craig's revisions to materials and the name change from the *Montessori Method* to the *Craig Method* and eventually to the *Henry Barnard Method of Reading and Writing*.

Shift Toward Nationalism in Educational Goals During World War I

Both Kramer (1976) and Standing (1998) suggested the impact of World War I as a possible reason for the demise of the first-wave Montessori Method in the United States. It is also possible that World War I radically shifted the country's educational goals toward a nationalist curriculum.

Unlike earlier annual reports to the Rhode Island Board of Education that focused on the number of teachers employed in schools and the requests for funding to expand classrooms, the opening paragraph of the 1917 Rhode Island Board of Education report notable shifts in language and tone:

In reviewing a state system of public schools when the nation is at war, it is hardly possible to ignore the relation of public education to civic devotion and sacrifice, and the civic obligations of the public school in the great national endeavor that engages all. Public education in the past has been national preparation for the crisis of the present...it also shows the true function of the school in a democracy and teaches the imperative duty of

the school not only to train its pupils in loyal citizenship but also to participate actively in our national life. (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1917, p. 3)

The following year's board of education report pointed to a concern that certain school curricula were politically subversive: "to a limited extent our schools and school books had been used for purposes of disseminating anti-American and undemocratic propaganda...but no public school teacher was found guilty of teaching doctrines opposed to Americanism" (Rhode Island Board of Education, 1918, p. 5).

According to the Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS), World War I prompted a statewide American citizenship campaign. Through the efforts of local community organizations, such as the Providence Chamber of Commerce and the Providence YMCA, almost 20,000 new citizens were naturalized in Rhode Island between January 1917 and July 1918 (RIHS, 1991).

This historical context may provide a rationale for Craig's Americanization of the Montessori curriculum. Craig's focus was to "testify as to what has lived and developed out of the experiment that may be of new service to the American school, the American teacher, and the American child" (Craig, 1919, p. 8).

Within this timeframe, the first-wave Montessori movement began to die out. The language and tone of the annual Rhode Island Board of Education reports from 1917 through 1919 provide some insight into the degree to which nationalism and xenophobia affected educational goals in Rhode Island. Whatever momentum first-wave Montessori programs experienced prior to the outbreak of World War I, it is reasonable to imagine the focus on war efforts far outweighed the needs of an experimental classroom for young children in a teacher preparation program. Despite these policy and political barriers, aspects of the Montessori philosophy continued under Craig's supervision.

Contemporary Policy Implications

Gaining a greater understanding of an American educator who implemented the Montessori philosophy early in the 20th century leads to the question: What relationship, if any, exists between a first-wave Montessori initiative and contemporary education policy issues? I close by linking Craig's century-old experiences to policy implications currently facing a rapidly diversifying Montessori field. By broadening the topics to include access to materials, organizational growth, and educational policy, it becomes clear that the issues are as relevant today as they were for Clara Craig in 1913.

First, as Lillard and Heise (2016) reminded us, Montessori materials are an integral component of the pedagogy. Their data suggested that child outcomes were stronger when children had access to Montessori materials versus supplementary or non-Montessori materials. As new models of Montessori education evolve, funding must be allocated to equip classrooms with a full complement of Montessori materials. Similarly, it is crucial to heed Craig's recommendation to train teachers well so that they possess a deep understanding of the Montessori pedagogy and its materials (Craig, 1913).

Second, the range of available funding sources in traditional education both expands and diversifies programming, but it also creates unintended consequences. Across educational settings, federally funded Head Start programs, state-funded public schools, and community and faith-based programs all respond to mandates set by their funding sources, creating a specific culture of curricula, instruction, and assessment requirements. The variety tends to highlight differences in approaches, rather than build unity or create a shared language about work with children and families.

The current organizational growth in Montessori programs mirrors some of the same issues affecting traditional education (Ayer, 2017; MPPI, 2015). As Whitescarver and Cossentino (2008) warned, with the current growth of Montessori delivery systems, Montessorians may find it difficult to remain true to the philosophy. To avoid this outcome, national and international Montessori organizations must continue to build partnerships that unite the expanding Montessori community. For example, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recently announced its Power to the Profession initiative to unify the highly diverse field of early childhood education through a shared framework of

career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards, and compensation (NAEYC, n.d.).

Third, as state and national educational policies continue to mandate requirements (e.g., assessments, quality-rating systems, curricula, standards), the Montessori community should develop its own understanding of how Montessori education fits within the greater education context. By evaluating our programs and using assessment tools and language common to the greater education community—without surrendering core beliefs and practices—we can build a more global understanding of the impact of Dr. Montessori’s philosophy on children’s learning and development. Craig adapted to the education policy of her era while maintaining core Montessori beliefs, such as children’s need for freedom in learning. Children’s freedom to select topics of interest and remain engaged in activities for extended periods of time remained embedded in Craig’s experimental classrooms and must remain foundational to all Montessori classrooms today.

The research offered in this paper highlights events from the past as a means of informing contemporary issues. The American Historical Association suggested that “only through studying history can we grasp how things change; only through history can we begin to comprehend the factors that cause change; and only through history can we understand what elements of an institution...persist despite change” (Stearns, 1998).

Historically, each Montessori wave was affected by outside influences (e.g., policy, politics, funding), which in turn created variations in program delivery. As new Montessori initiatives increase across the United States, Craig’s sense of experimentation encourages us to evaluate how programs implement the Montessori Method, as well as to identify (a) the essential components of the pedagogy and (b) the depth, dosage, and duration required to ensure children’s learning and development. If our collective goal is to preserve Montessori pedagogy, we should know and reflect on previous experiences and outcomes related to implementing the Montessori Method.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Susan Zoll is an assistant professor in Elementary Education and the director of the Institute of Early Childhood Teaching and Learning at Rhode Island College. She can be reached at szoll@ric.edu.

References

- American Montessori Society. (2008). *AMS issue paper: Montessori and state-funded pre-kindergarten*. Available from American Montessori Society: <https://amshq.org/-/media/Files/Publications-and-Research/Research-Library/Position-and-White-Papers/Position-Papers/Issue-Paper-Montessori-State-Funded-Pre-K.ashx?la=en>
- Ayer, D. (2017). It’s all about choices: A history. *Montessori Public*, 1(2), 3–4.
- Bicknell, T. W. (1911). *A history of the Rhode Island Normal School: 1852–1865...1871–1911*. Providence, RI: T. W. Bicknell. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/pst.000021769931>
- Bird, G. E. (1930). A successful experiment in child education. *The Elementary School Journal*, 30(7), 539–546. <https://doi.org/10.1086/456450>
- Browne, R. B. (1939). *A critical evaluation of experimental studies of remedial reading* (Master’s thesis). Graduate School of Education of Harvard University, Boston, MA.
- Browne, R. B., & English, J. W. (1969). *Love my children: An autobiography*. New York, NY: Meredith Press.
- Carbone, H. R. (1971). *The history of the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction and the Rhode Island Normal School as agencies and institutions of teacher education, 1845–1920* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Connecticut, Storrs.
- Christiansen, E. (2016). *Rhode Island College: Meeting the state’s needs through time*. Providence: Rhode Island College.

- Coleman, K. (2011). *The Montessori Method in America: Montessori schools in New York and Rhode Island from 1910–1940* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss_6mos/2
- Craig, C. E. (1913). *The Montessori system of child culture: A report by Miss Clara E. Craig presented to the state board of education*. Providence, RI: Department of Education.
- Craig, C. E. (1919). *The beginnings of reading and writing in the Rhode Island Normal School*. Providence: Rhode Island Normal School.
- Debs, M. (2016). *Diverse parents, desirable schools: Public Montessori, fit and conflict in the era of school choice* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Yale University, New Haven, CT.
- Dr. Montessori visits this city. (1913, December 14). *The Providence Daily Journal*, p. 4.
- Gutek, G. L., & Gutek, P. A. (2016). *Bringing Montessori to America: S.S. McClure, Maria Montessori, and the campaign to publicize Montessori education*. Birmingham: University of Alabama Press.
- Inventor of child training system and R.I. woman who studied it. (1916, November 6). *Providence Journal Evening Bulletin*, pp. 3–4.
- Kramer, R. (1976). *Maria Montessori: A biography*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lillard, A. S. (2012). Preschool children’s development in classic Montessori, supplemented Montessori, and conventional programs. *Journal of School Psychology, 50*, 379–401.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2012.01.001>
- Lillard, A. S., & Heise, M. J. (2016). Removing supplementary materials from Montessori classrooms changed child outcomes. *Journal of Montessori Research, 2*(1), 16–26.
- Lopes, M. (2003, August 18). Phenomenal females: The women of RIC. *What’s News at Rhode Island College*, pp. 26–27.
- Lopes, M. (2007). This wonderful institution: Teaching and learning at Rhode Island College, 1854–1958. *Issues in Teaching and Learning, 5*. Available from Rhode Island College:
<http://www.ric.edu/itl/pages/lopes.aspx>
- Marzacco, P. (1994) *Feminism without fanfare: Women of the Rhode Island State Normal School 1854–1920* (Master’s thesis). Rhode Island College, Providence.
- Montessori, M. (1913, August 10). Montessori schools [Letter to the editor]. *The New York Times*, p. 10.
- Montessori Public Policy Initiative. (2015). *Montessori essentials*. Retrieved from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6e8b98_d567dc867e114111a9b448464fdceac5.pdf
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (n.d.). *Power to the profession*. Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/profession/overview>
- National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector. (2014). *Growth of public Montessori in the United States: 1975–2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.public-montessori.org/white-papers/growth-of-public-montessori-in-the-united-states-1975-2014/>
- Nienhuis Montessori. (2017). *Nienhuis Montessori history: Then and now*. Retrieved from <http://www.nienhuis.com/about-nienhuis-montessori/nienhuis-now-and-then/>
- O’Neil, J. F. (1937). *C.E. Craig’s adaptation of the Montessori Methods at the Rhode College of Education* (Master’s thesis). Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC.
- Rhode Island Board of Education. (1911). *Forty-first annual report of the state board of education together with the sixty-sixth annual report of the commissioner of public schools of Rhode Island*. Providence, RI: E. L. Freeman Co.
- Rhode Island Board of Education. (1914). *Forty-fourth annual report of the state board of education together with the sixty-ninth annual report of the commissioner of public schools of Rhode Island*. Providence, RI: E. L. Freeman Co.
- Rhode Island Board of Education. (1916). *Forty-sixth annual report of the state board of education together with the seventy-first annual report of the commissioner of public schools of Rhode Island*. Providence, RI: E. L. Freeman Co.

- Rhode Island Board of Education. (1917). *Forty-seventh annual report of the state board of education together with the seventy-second annual report of the commissioner of public schools of Rhode Island*. Albany, NY: Hamilton Press. Available from <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924101114795>
- Rhode Island Board of Education. (1918). *Forty-eighth annual report of the state board of education together with the seventy-third annual report of the commissioner of public schools of Rhode Island*. Albany, NY: Hamilton Press. Available from <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924101114738>
- Rhode Island College. (1920). *Rhode Island College of Education Bulletin, 1920*. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/ca1920s/1>
- Rhode Island College. (1921). *Rhode Island College of Education Bulletin, 1921*. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/ca1920s/2>
- Rhode Island Historical Society. (1991). *American Citizenship Campaign Committee records, 1917–1919* (Manuscripts division, catalog no. MSS 257). Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.
- Rhode Island Normal School. (1914, May). *Rhode Island Normal School Bulletin*. Available from https://issuu.com/digitalinitiatives/docs/1914_fullsize
- Standing, E. M. (1998). *Maria Montessori: Her life and work*. New York, NY: Plume.
- Stearns, P. N. (1998). *Why study history?* Retrieved from American Historical Association: [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-\(1998\)](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-(1998))
- Tsering, T. (2010). Profile of Rose Butler Brown. In A. Rutherford (Ed.), *Psychology's Feminist Voices Multimedia Internet Archive*. Retrieved from <http://www.feministvoices.com/rose-butler-browne/>
- Wagner-Martin, L. (1994). *Telling women's lives: The new biography*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Warburton, E. (2012). *A history of named places and architectural development: Rhode Island College, 1958–2012*. Providence: Rhode Island College. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/college_architecture/1
- Whitescarver, K. (2017). Public Montessori and the charter debate. *Montessori Public, 1*(2), 6. Retrieved from <http://www.montessoripublic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MP-V1N2%E2%80%9393Apr11-FINAL-150.pdf>
- Whitescarver, K., & Cossentino, J. (2008). Montessori and the mainstream: A century of reform on the margins. *Teachers College Record, 110*, 2571–2600.
- Wilcott, P. (1968). The initial American reception of the Montessori Method. *The School Review, 76*(2), 147–165.

Appendix A

Theoretical Lectures from Dr. Montessori's 1913 International Training Course

Provided are the dates and topics of Dr. Montessori's theoretical lectures between January and April 1913 during the first International Montessori Training Course, as recorded by Clara Craig.

Date	Topic
January 23	The social conditions of the child
January 30	The biological concept of liberty
February 7	The environment, didactic materials, and the teacher
February 13	The independence of the child
February 20	Prizes and punishments
February 27	The liberty of the child in the family / Social study of the family
March 6	The method of giving a lesson and a comparison with other methods
March 13	Muscular education
March 27	Nature in education
April 3	Attention
April 12	Imagination
April 17–18	Education of the senses and intellect
April 24–25	Spoken and written language / Will
April 30	Moral education

Appendix B

Technical Lessons from Dr. Montessori's 1913 International Training Course

Provided are the dates and topics of Dr. Montessori's technical lessons between January and April 1913 during the first International Montessori Training Course, as recorded by Clara Craig.

Date	Topic
January 28	The biographical chart and anthropological observation
January 31	Stature and weight
February 6	Causes influencing weight and stature
February 11	The head
February 18	The analysis of the average / Theory of the average man
February 25, March 4 and 11	Presentation of the didactic materials / Practical life
April 1	Solid insets
April 8	Limits of the didactic materials
April 14	Cutaneous senses
April 15	Taste, smell, and hearing
April 22	Writing
April 23	Reading
April 28	Arithmetic
April 29	Summary of the biological chart