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**The Historical Evolution and Contemporary Status of
Montessori Schooling in New Zealand, as an Example
of the Adaptation of an Alternative Educational Ideal
to a Particular National Context.**

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Abstract

There have been two distinct phases of the Montessori method of education in New Zealand. The first began in 1912 and continued into the 1950s. The second phase, starting in 1975, has resulted in over one hundred Montessori early childhood centres being established throughout the country. In this thesis I examined the historical evolution and contemporary status of Montessori schooling in New Zealand, as an adaptation of an alternative educational ideal to a particular national context.

To situate this study, the history of the Montessori movement was investigated, taking into consideration the particular character and personality of its founder, Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952). It is argued that the apparent contradictions of Montessori, who claimed to be both a scientific educator and a missionary, help explain the endurance of her method. The thesis further maintains that Montessori became a global educator whose philosophy and pedagogy transcends national boundaries. The middle section of this thesis examines the Montessori movement in New Zealand during the first phase and the second phase, highlighting the key role that individuals played in spreading Montessori's ideas. The major aim was to examine how Montessori education changes and adapts in different cultures and during different time frames. The thesis concentrates on New Zealand as a culturally specific example of a global phenomenon.

The final section of the thesis is a case study of a Montessori early childhood centre examining the influence of Government policy and how the development of the centre supports the ongoing implementation of Montessori's ideas. The perceptions of Montessori teachers, former parents and students regarding the nature and value of Montessori education are also considered. Finally, observations carried out as part of the case study are analysed to further demonstrate the ways in which the original ideas of Montessori have been reworked to suit a different historical and societal

context. It is concluded that Montessori is a global educator whose philosophy and pedagogy transcends national boundaries. Nonetheless, the integration of Montessori education within any country, including New Zealand, does result in a culturally specific Montessori education.

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