Montessori in Sweden; Today and Yesterday

A contribution from Lena Degerman who works as a teacher in Sweden. She is also a member of the Executive Committee of Montessori Europe.

When Maria Montessori held her first teacher training course in London 1919, a Swedish lady, Anna Pallin, was one of her students. Anna returned to Sweden in 1920 with her Montessori Diploma and from this year the Montessori Method of education has been present in Sweden.

The first Montessori class was started in Stockholm in 1920 by Mabel Holm, and the first Montessori preschool was started in 1923 by Anna Pallin. In 1936 a Montessori preschool started in Gothenburg. In time it became a Montessori Primary school and today it is a Montessori inspired school with 1500 students from 1-18 years of age.

In 1950 Maria Montessori visited Sweden and gave speeches in both Stockholm and Gothenburg.
In 1968 there was a Montessori conference in Gothenburg with Mario Montessori as a speaker.
The Swedish Montessori society was founded in 1960. It is not a special society for teachers, instead it is an association for people interested in Montessori method. It has 10,000 members and issues a paper called “Montessori Tidningen” (The Montessori Paper).

The aim for the society is to promote the spreading of Montessori Philosophy in Sweden and to help teachers and parents start new schools and local Montessori societies. Another aim is to accredit Montessori schools and preschools, and even to accredit Montessori Teacher Training. For 10 years they have had a special exam called NAMEX, this examination guarantees the training is of good quality and has a high value.

In Sweden today there are approximately 500 Montessori schools and preschools for children aged from 1 year to 16 years. They are often private schools, but there are also Montessori state schools and preschools. The teacher training possibilities are not so well spread and are private and not so many of them are financed by the state.
There is just one University in Stockholm, that gives Montessori Teacher training. All teachers of all categories must now, according to the new curriculum, have the basic teacher training, provided by the Universities, and the Montessori teacher training must be above that.

The new curriculum introduced in 2011 is not so “Montessorian” as the one before, it contains more tests and dictates certain subjects that have to be given to the students but these can be mapped to the subjects in the Montessori curriculum.

Another thing with the new curriculum is that you have to grade the students result from the beginning, and the teachers needs a special certification to be allowed to set marks. That means that you need to have University points in the subjects that you teach. That is a problem in smaller schools, and especially in Montessori schools, where teachers only have a Montessori diploma and not university points.

So, the big issue in Sweden, is to compare the new curriculum to the Montessori curriculum, and to get the Montessori Teacher Training courses into the universities.

Lena Degerman