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THE CROW

A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST OF DR. SYLVIA LAZO: THE BIRTH OF MONTESSORI INTEGRATED SCHOOL

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Finally, after three long years, the campus is again crowded with students and teachers as they breathe life into the once-frozen space. Vibrant blue-shirted students hustle in and out of the classrooms, carrying big bulky bags packed with homemade lunch and white paper leaves. Their lively chatter and laughter filled the air, which the teachers had been missing to hear. The infectious energy of youth has returned, bringing with it the promise of a bright academic year ahead. Once more, the school brims with knowledge and learning. It was the start of a new beginning. However, before celebrating this notable event, the students must rewind the clock and delve into the school's roots to learn the *first* beginning that started it all.

At a much younger age, Dr. Sylvia Lazo stayed with her father in Germany, who was in the diplomatic service. She had asthma then, yet the foreign German air helped relieve her discomfort, almost making it vanish. Undoubtedly, upon their return to the Philippines following her father's limited stay, her asthma resurfaced. It was her doctor's best advice that she settle in

Germany. With the help of her father's diplomatic ties within the German embassy, she sought a grant at the ambassador's recommendation. Incidentally, she taught Grades 2 and 4 at Ateneo de Manila. Thus, the grant aimed to enable her to visit elementary schools and study the visual aids they utilized.

She received an assignment at a Catholic public school, where she quickly became acquainted with the Montessori approach to education. Reflecting on this experience, she recalled the recommendation of her headteacher from Ateneo, who had praised the Montessori method as having a "*very nice approach*" to education. Thankfully, a teacher at the public school informed her of a nearby school that implemented the Montessori approach.

In her visit to the Montessori school, Frau Katharina Fischer, the school headmistress, accommodated her. She found it remarkable to witness the children's joy and peaceful learning atmosphere, which contrasted with her experience at Ateneo. Impressed by this distinctive educational environment, she sought a transfer to the Montessori school, and her sponsor granted her request.

During her time at the school, they offered a Montessori course which couldn't be afforded. She had a conversation with the directress — Professor Helmey — who was a renowned professor globally. After their discussion, Professor Helmey provided a substantial discount, almost making her education free. However, her government-sponsored two-year grant was set to expire, and this meant she might not complete the course. To address this challenge, she returned to the directress for guidance, and together, they devised a solution. It was agreed that she would attend the Montessori course in two different locations and be allowed to take her exams ahead of schedule. With unwavering determination, she dedicated herself to extensive review, studying day and night. Professor Helmey and another sister provided invaluable assistance, including extra lessons. Her relentless efforts culminated in her taking the exams in Amsterdam, and to her surprise, **Dr. Sylvia Lazo proudly became the first Filipino holder of an international Montessori diploma.**



Following her return to the Philippines, she reinitiated her teaching journey with just three children, setting up her teaching space in her parents' house on Imus Street. After a few months of educating these students, she had to take a break as she was about to welcome her first child, Dr. Monica Lazo-Moreno, who, from the beginning, was nurtured in the Montessori method.

Upon her return to teaching, her sister generously offered her place, complete with a garage under the house. Yet, Dr. Lazo desired an environment where she could maintain constant proximity to her baby. Therefore, she decided to lease the ground-floor living room of a house, which she transformed into her classroom. Although she initially bargained with the house owner as she didn't have the financial means, she quickly earned a stellar reputation and, with the financial support of her parents, subsequently established a school on Panay Avenue.

In the 1960s, one of the school's board members had a child, who happened to have Down syndrome. She proposed for the child to be enrolled in the school which the school board member initially declined, fearing that the child might be a source of trouble. Dr. Lazo responded firmly, *"That's my concern, not yours. Please send her our way."*

At the start, the child remained nonverbal and often sat on the floor, drooling. One day, Dr. Lazo celebrated as the child shed tears because someone took her toy. It was a sign of progress, for it indicated the child was now expressing emotions. It was at this moment that she recognized the limitations of her knowledge. She realized that she needed to deepen her understanding, particularly in dealing with special needs children.

As a result, she decided to pursue higher education at the University of the Philippines (UP), where she pursued a Master's degree in Special Education. While she hadn't initially set out to follow in the footsteps of Maria Montessori by working with individuals with special needs, it was a path that found her, and she wholeheartedly embraced it. Since then, Montessori Integrated School has been the home its students now know today.

Ultimately, Dr. Lazo remains a person of humility and gratitude, expressing deep appreciation for the blessings she has received and the people who have supported her. She acknowledges her good fortune in encountering individuals who assisted with her journey. Moreover, she considers herself fortunate to have been one of the few foreign individuals in Germany during her era who had the privilege of studying Montessori Learning.

As the founder of Montessori Integrated School of Antipolo, Dr. Lazo holds strong hopes for her students. She wishes for them to approach their education with sincerity, driven by an intrinsic motivation for personal growth and fulfillment. Furthermore, she envisions them as individuals capable of confronting life's significant challenges. Dr. Lazo emphasizes that being a graduate of their school means not only excelling academically but also possessing the resilience to navigate both favorable and adverse circumstances.

Dr. Sylvia G. Lazo is truly a remarkable woman, but at the end of the day, she would only like to be remembered as someone simple but hardworking.



*“The legacy that when the students see the school when they pass by, they’ll remember,
‘Oh, that’s where I had my wonderful days in the school.’”*

– Dr. Sylvia G. Lazo –