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The photos on this page; the cover; pages 23, 29, 27, 39, 82; A Long Letter to Montessorians in America (pp. 50-51); and the letter from Mario Montessori to Nancy Rambusch (p. 104) have been drawn from the American Montessori Society Records, Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries, and are published with permission.
Freedom and Montessori

By Kathy Carey

In The Montessori Method, Montessori devotes two chapters to discussions of discipline. She begins with the statement that “liberty is activity” and that this liberty is the foundation of discipline (1988, p. 86). Logically we may conclude that discipline arises through activity. Montessori emphasizes that the disciplined individual is one who is in charge of his behavior.

With the focus on activity, Montessori is highlighting an important difference between her approach and traditional educational practices: The child is to be free to move about and to freely choose activities of interest to him to prepare himself for life.

Montessori does not limit herself to the boundaries of the school or the Children’s House but rather sees into the child’s future as an adult and his need to pursue work within the context of the community. She says, “The discipline to which the child habituates himself here is, in its character, not limited to the school environment but extends to society” (Montessori, 1988, p. 87). And here, in community life, the child bums up against limits.

“... discipline the child should have as its limits the collective interest . . . .” (Montessori, 1988, p. 87) What are these limits? According to Montessori, “What we universally call good breeding” (1988, p. 87). In an effort to develop within the child these habits of good breeding, we must “check . . . whatever offends or annoys others, or whatever tends toward rough or ill-bred acts” (Montessori, 1988, p. 87). Through observation (scientific pedagogy), the teacher learns which behaviors to suppress and which to encourage.

A necessary prerequisite to individual discipline and liberty is the acquisition of independence. According to Montessori, a person cannot be free unless she is independent. Recall her words about the rich man who is no less enslaved than his servant but instead of chains, his bonds are convention and appearances. In this context, Montessori is developing a rationale for her Children’s Houses and is speaking of children from 3 to 6, the first plane of development. Her notion of independence is a direct physical one. It has to do with all those “practical life” endeavors. The individual who knows how to feed herself, to wash and dress, to move through rooms of furniture and active people, to ask for help, to give and receive assistance, and to navigate the sea of practical life offerings by learning to choose what is of interest to her, will have achieved an independence appropriate for her age, developed a sense of order, lengthened her attention span, deepened her ability to concentrate, and improved her physical coordination.

Within the context of discipline, Montessori develops her theory of obedience. She characterizes the common notion of obedience as “forced voluntary action”—a child is given an order that, if not met with immediate compliance, is followed by those familiar impediments to development: bribery, punishment, nagging, and sometimes violence. According to Montessori, obedience “occurs later, as a natural tendency in older children, and then as an instinct in the adult . . . .” and is the foundation of society and civilization (1988, p. 362). She labels obedience “one of the strongest instincts of humanity” (Montessori, 1988, p. 363).

Continued on page 7
At the AMS 2007 Annual Conference in New York City, we will be celebrating the work of Montessori teachers over the past 100 years. Our Saturday morning event will begin with a tribute to the 2007 Living Legacy, Dottie Sweet Feldman. In a unique twist on tradition, Dottie is sharing the Living Legacy honor with All Montessori Teachers. The tribute to her will be followed by a multimedia presentation recognizing the entire body of these laudable individuals.

The American Montessori Society Living Legacy is an award created by the AMS Scholarship Committee to recognize individuals whose achievements have had significant impact within the Montessori community. At the conference you will learn more about Feldman’s distinguished career, from her first service as a Montessori elementary teacher to her many other positions, including teacher educator, lecturer, author, businesswoman, and initiator of the AMS Teacher Education Scholarship Fund.

When I travel to Montessori schools or take part in regional professional development events, I especially enjoy my interactions with Montessori teachers and student teachers. I come away from each visit in awe of their dedication and commitment, on a daily basis, to children and youth. Dottie Feldman is an exemplar of this tradition. We can thank these teachers, and recognize them in this centennial year, by acknowledging the varieties of service and the deep commitment of Feldman.

In addition, I urge you to find ways in your schools, teacher education programs, and communities to pause, thank, and recognize each teacher with whom you connect in your Montessori work. Without their efforts, there would be no Montessori education.

I recently read that the CEO of a major corporation in my home state of Connecticut earns in one day what the average Connecticut teacher earns in an entire year. We all know that compensation is not a measure of one’s worth, but I am struck by how our society often places monetary value on what it considers important. We not only need to find ways to improve the salary structure for all teachers (not just Montessori teachers), but also need to be certain they receive the public recognition they so deserve for the impact they have on our young people—the future of our global society.

I salute each and every past, present, and future Montessori teacher: Thank you for your vital work in the Montessori movement worldwide!

RICHARD A. UNGERER is executive director of AMS. He welcomes your comments, questions, and ideas. Contact him at richard@amshq.org.
It was 1906 in Rome, and the young Dr. Maria Montessori’s star was rising. She frequently published and lectured. However, as E.M. Standing points out in *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Works*, had her life ended then, we might never have heard of her.

Something tremendously providential happened late in 1906. Montessori was approached by a group of wealthy Roman businessmen with a proposal. They had recently built housing in the San Lorenzo district of Rome, an area known for its slumlike conditions. The main tenants of the buildings were working poor with children. The businessmen worried that the children would damage their property. Some space had been allocated for the children, but they needed someone to organize and manage that space. Montessori accepted the challenge, and the remarkable history of Montessori education was born. That first Casa dei Bambini, or Children’s House, opened on January 6, 1907.

The wealthy businessmen who organized this project probably had no conception of what they were inaugurating. They may well have simply believed, as Professor Harold Hill told the River City rubes in *The Music Man*, “Gotta figure out a way to keep the young ones moral after school.” It is likely that they simply envisaged nothing more than some kind of custodial, caretaking program.

Maria Montessori went far beyond that.

What she established was something entirely new, something for children that was marvelously forward-thinking and avant-garde. This first Children’s House was the foundation of the worldwide Montessori movement, a movement for all children everywhere. There is a reason that 100 years later, in a new century, Montessori’s discoveries continue to have resounding relevance. In that first Children’s House, Montessori’s work was based on a simple idea: making children the center of the entire process.

Until that time, schools had been adult-centered. They had been based on keeping children in their places and, not infrequently, employing corporal punishment. Children learned that they should be seen and not heard.

Maria Montessori showed us a better way.

Three critical principles emerged from that first Casa dei Bambini. Sometimes called the “three freedoms,” they offer children:

- Freedom to repeat
- Freedom of movement
- Freedom of choice

These three freedoms stood in absolute contrast to the prevailing educational and child-rearing practices of the day. Children were not allowed to have a choice in their actions; it was not considered proper. Children certainly were not allowed to have freedom of movement in a classroom. Far from it: they were expected to stay seated at all times. And the prevailing wisdom dictated that there was no need for a freedom to repeat, since it was believed that children had low powers of concentration.

Maria Montessori showed us a better way.

Fifty years after that first Children’s House, when I attended elementary school in northern Minnesota, our desks were carefully arranged in rows and screwed to the floor. No movement from those emphatically static desks was allowed. Speaking out of turn or being too clever was punished with a stick. The only thing that was intentionally repeated was sitting. Not a lot of progress since 1907!

Today, 100 years after Montessori began her epic journey toward uncovering the “Secret of Childhood,” there are still schools mired in the backwaters of educational practice, stuck in outmoded routines and rituals and wondering what went wrong.

There are still schools in which being “seen and not heard” is the order of the day. There are still schools in which sitting in a desk is considered good discipline and in which the freedom of movement has yet to be granted. Schools still exist that force children to use a material only once and then give it up, under the guise of “sharing.”

There is even worse news. Not long ago, I visited a state in which corporal punishment is still legal. I listened with dismay to an educator speak in favor of using the paddle on elementary school children. This, in the 21st century!

Maria Montessori showed us a better way.

Montessori helped us to see children as an oppressed group. They are a group whose rights are still emerging. It can still be publicly suggested that they be seen and not heard, that they keep to their place, and, in at least some areas, that they be punished with a paddle. What other minority groups still suffer this oppression? One hundred years into the Montessori era is too long for this to continue.

Maria Montessori showed us a better way.
It is time for all of us to speak for the child. Children everywhere represent our future. They are the future of our civilization and of every culture. We cannot afford to continue to miss the ever-new opportunity to “get it right,” and we must offer assistance to those who can aid in the achievement of their potentials.

We are not only at the beginning of the 21st century; we are also at the start of Montessori’s second century. As we enter this new era of Montessori, I want to call upon all of you to make this the Century of the Child. We, as Montessorians, must look beyond our own schools and local colleagues to all the families, parents, organizations, and other educators to share Montessori’s message of freedom and empowering human development.

We need to engage with government as an energetic and influential part of developing positive public policy. We need to engage with public schools, which educate the majority of our children. We must encourage research of all kinds. These efforts need to happen everywhere, nationally and in every neighborhood, borough, county, and school district. Let us all be part of an effort to remove barriers and create real opportunities for all children.

Maria Montessori showed us a better way. Let us be active in bringing her Method to every child.

MICHAEL DORER is AMS president. He is the director of the Center for Contemporary Montessori Programs at the College of St. Catherine in Minneapolis, MN. He can be reached at president@amshq.org.

Continued from page 4

But she views obedience as much abused by human institutions and organizations, her example being the code of obedience under which criminal organizations operate (Montessori, 1988).

Montessori’s philosophy begins with a view of the child that contrasts with the prevailing notions of her time. Rather than describing young children as willful, Montessori says they have no will; the will is not yet formed. The child emerging from infancy enters the period of the formation of the will. Obedience is not possible without this formation. Thus, the 3-year-old, who displays rudimentary muscle control and a basic ability to express his thoughts and feelings verbally (in a concrete and immediate way), is developing his will through coordinated actions (in a prepared environment, of course). At this stage the emphasis is on activity. The child is capable of obedience, but his sense of order is rising from his subconscious and so he lacks consistency.

Prior to this stage, Montessori describes the child following a vital life instinct; obedience is not only not possible, it is not an issue. For example, the physical organism must be ready to walk before walking can occur. Ordering a 12-month-old to walk and reacting if she fails to do so is or should be unthinkable.

The 3-year-old, however, can learn to choose and, in so doing, learns to inhibit other behaviors. For Montessori, obedience is sacrifice. With a gain there is always a loss. At the highest level, when the will is formed and the child is functioning at a conscious level, he obeys quickly and with enthusiasm and is able to put the brakes on conflicting impulses. Typically this occurs around 5 or 6 years of age, but varies from child to child.

Finally, Montessori sees the problem of freedom for adults as the attempt to minimize duties and obligations, if only briefly. But for her, true freedom is freedom for rather than freedom from. Freedom makes possible “… self-development and self-realization compatible with service to society” (Montessori, 1988, p. 132). She says, “… true freedom has as its objective service to society and to mankind consistent with the progress and happiness of the individual. . . . The emphasis on freedom is for the development of individuality. The emphasis on discipline is for the benefit of the individual and of the society” (Montessori, 1988, p. 134).

Montessori’s philosophy then speaks to the post-modern world as well as to the post-World War II world. The individual must develop within himself his full potential; his uniqueness must be celebrated; his right to exist must be defended—but the staging of this development and its celebration always takes place within the community. We are called by our shared humanity to consider others in all our actions and leave the places we inhabit ready for those who come after us.

Reference


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LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

As a Montessori child I remember being reminded that when we draw comparisons between different cultures either historically or anthropologically, we need to be fair: you don’t compare one’s best with another’s worst. In reading the article, “An American Montessori Teacher’s Experience in Sri Lanka” [Volume 18, Issue 3], this academic ideal was clearly lacking. In several instances in the article, we are given quick glimpses of the tragedy of war that is rampant in Sri Lanka, only to be told how awful it was that the writer is “a person from a country where some mothers kill their children.” The fact is that most American mothers love their children, and are no less noble in their work of raising children than mothers in Sri Lanka. I don’t suspect that the “young women” that were “particularly concerned” about this were likewise humbled by the fact that some of their young people are compelled to be suicide bombers (which most likely kill many children). At least in our country, most of us are horrified when mothers take the lives of their own. . . . We don’t decorate streets with streamers and flags for them. No doubt we are a country with flaws, but we must be careful as educators not to shame our American students into believing that their country is any less commendable than any other. When we point out thewrongs in our own culture we must be clear that all nations struggle with imperfection. That is what makes us part of the human community. What makes what we do as Montessorians so vital is the opportunity to make a difference through our curriculum with its emphasis on respect for the child, and ultimately for each other. Sri Lanka has a rich and dynamic cultural heritage, and there are many aspects of that nation that are worth admiring. But it isn’t more gracious or caring than the United States because there are more beggars in San Francisco and because we have problems with discrimination. Don’t they have a caste system over there? It’s okay to be from the United States and visit other countries without feeling like we have to wear a hair shirt all the time while visiting. Until we accept our own humanity with all its imperfections, how can we truly accept others?

Melissa Fleck-Aller
Charleston, SC

Irene Baker responds:

Perhaps the following excerpt from a poem by Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh can express better than I what I would like to convey about the interconnectedness of all beings: that all of us contain within us that which humanity experiences, including fear, hatred, confusion, and ignorance as well as great compassion, generosity, and love—in short, all of the joys and the sorrows of being human.

Call Me By My True Names

Please call me by my true names Don’t say that I will depart tomorrow—even today I am still arriving.

Look deeply: every second I am arriving to be a bud on a Spring branch, to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings, learning to sing in my new nest, to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower, to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry, to fear and to hope. The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death of all that is alive.

I am a mayfly metamorphosing on the surface of the river. And I am the bird that swoops down to swallow the mayfly . . .

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones, my legs as thin as bamboo sticks. And I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda.

I am the twelve-year-old girl, refugee on a small boat, who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate. And I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving . . .

My joy is like Spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom all over the Earth. My pain is like a river of tears, so vast it fills the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names, so I can hear all my cries and laughter at once, so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names, so I can wake up and the door of my heart could be left open, the door of compassion.

—Thich Nhat Hanh
A Personal Perspective on Montessori Education

By Penny HildeBrandt Cichucki

"We hope you can join us for an evening of sharing ideas about educating young children." This is the text I remember from a flyer circulated 30 years ago by a group of Montessori educators. At the time, I was teaching (in a non-Montessori school) in Aiea, HI. The invitation sounded friendly, and I was curious about what Montessori education was, so I decided to attend. Susan Siebert was the president of the group, and she was exceptionally open and welcoming to all who attended. I was impressed by the attitude of the entire group of Montessorians. They were enthusiastic and willing to share insights about children, and they listened respectfully to thoughts of others.

I immediately tried to implement some of the ideas I heard that night in my own teaching, but soon realized that taking the training and working with the carefully and beautifully designed Montessori materials would make all the difference. I began to read Maria Montessori’s *Discovery of the Child*, and found myself unable to put it down. Her words profoundly moved me. She had such sincere respect for children and their capabilities, and I was inspired by her thoughts and her belief that through children we could change the world.

Thus began my involvement in Montessori education. Over the past 30 years, as I have engaged in various levels of teacher education, as a student and a teacher, my respect for this method of education has only deepened. As a parent, I watched my daughter move through the various planes of development and benefit from being in a Montessori community from 20 months through early adolescence. Each time I show prospective parents around our school, or visit with prospective Montessori teachers, I feel inspired again by this powerful philosophy of education. Each time I step into a classroom and work with a child, or observe a child filled with a sense of wonder and excitement over a new discovery, I am once again filled with awe.

Each spring, I am deeply touched as I listen to the graduation speeches of our young adolescents: They talk about what their years of Montessori education have meant to them, and they express their appreciation to their parents, teachers, and friends. They are well prepared academically, and even more importantly, they have mastered many valuable life skills. They have a high level of confidence, a love of learning, and the knowledge of how to learn. They have strong communication skills, a sense of responsibility, and an awareness of human rights and social justice. They possess deep respect and concern for others and for the environment. They understand and appreciate the contributions made by different cultures and realize the importance of striving for peace in our world.

As head of school for 25 years, I have had the privilege of working with many students. When these students return to visit the school, and share what they are doing with their lives, I am always so impressed that many of them have chosen to go into fields that directly contribute to improving our world. These young adults have such global vision; they look at life and their role in the world from a much broader and more benevolent perspective than most of their peers.

Another facet of the Montessori experience for which I’m grateful is the privilege of working with so many wonderful colleagues. Professionals drawn to Montessori come from such varied backgrounds. I have encountered Montessori teachers with original degrees not only in education, but also in art, business, engineering, microbiology, Russian history, music, theater, architecture, political science, French literature, law, nursing, medicine, sociology, psychology, speech therapy, and video production, to name a few. The wealth of experience that such varied backgrounds brings to the Montessori community is invaluable. It is always interesting to hear stories of how Montessori teachers have found their way to this philosophy of education. I am constantly amazed by the dedication of Montessori educators, from young interns full of energy and excitement, to experienced teachers with great skill and confidence, to retired heads of schools and retired teachers who continue to contribute to their profession as consultants, workshop presenters, and teacher educators. The friendships I have been privileged to share with Montessori colleagues have been among the richest aspects of my life. I am thankful for the 30 years I have personally benefited from my association with Montessori education.

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It is an honor to help celebrate the 100 years children have been benefiting from the genius of Maria Montessori and her philosophy of education. Current research confirms her observations on the nature of children, the way they learn, and the value of this method. Not only have children benefited from Montessori, I believe our world has also benefited. It's an incredible legacy that we as Montessorians are fortunate to share, and one we are committed to passing along to future generations.

PENNY HILDEBRANDT CICHIKCI is chair of the AMS Heads Section and head of Crystal Lake Montessori in Woodstock, IL. She can be reached at pjk13@mc.net or 815-338-0013.
I hope you are anticipating the upcoming New York Centennial Celebration as much as I am! Networking with my peers, the keynote address by Maya Angelou, and the sights and sounds of New York City are only a few of the reasons this will be a most memorable conference!

As I look forward to this hallmark event, I think back to how my journey to becoming a Montessorian began. In the late 1980s, I had been teaching in a parochial school for 9 years. My son was a sophomore in college and my daughter was a sophomore in high school. I had become bored with how I was teaching—in fact, I had been bored for several years. I had a classroom of 30 different children with 30 different needs and desks all lined up in rows. I taught math, and during each class period, the students and I would all be on the same page at the same time. I was frustrated because I knew most of the children were fine with the material we covered during that time. Some of the children were bored, though, and needed more challenge; and others didn’t have a clue about what we were discussing and needed some extra reinforcement. I didn’t know how to provide either. I tried to individualize as much as possible, but I knew it wasn’t enough.

This need for professional renewal led me to switch to a job in the public school system. I found that I had many of the same issues as I’d had at the parochial school, but the change was good. I was dealing with some very needy children as well and felt good about the fact that I just might be the only bright spot in their day. I felt I was making a difference, even if it was in a most traditional way.

However, spring in the public schools often means the dreaded “pink slip,” and since I was the low man on the totem pole, I learned I would be out of a job the next year. But in every dark night, there are bright stars, and lo and behold, a posting came out that a new magnet school was being developed and would open the next year. It would be a hands-on, developmentally appropriate, and individualized program, and it would follow the Montessori philosophy. To me, that sounded like just what the doctor ordered!

I interviewed and was offered a job. After the initial meeting, at which I received an outline of my training schedule, I seriously considered backing out. How in the world would I handle all this and my family too? But I decided I needed this for me, and my family backed me completely.

That was 16 years ago, and I have never looked back! The Montessori method proved to be just what I needed, and the joys and challenges it has presented have kept me professionally strong.

I would like to leave you with one of my favorite stories.

Guests at a dinner party were sitting around the table discussing life. One man, a CEO, decided to explain what he thought to be the problem with education. He argued, “What’s a kid going to learn from someone who decided his best and only option in life was to become a teacher?” He reminded the other dinner guests of one of his favorite adages: “Those who can, do, and those who can’t, teach.”

To stress his point even more, he spoke directly to another guest. “You are a teacher, Susan. Be honest. What do you really make?” Susan had a reputation for honesty and frankness, and she replied, “You want to know what I make?

I make children work harder than they ever thought they could.

I make an average student feel like the winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor.

I make children question.

I make children wonder.

I make children complete their work on time.

I make children respect and accept differences.

I make children write.

I make them read, read, and read.

I make them understand that if you have any brains and follow your heart, you can do anything, and if someone ever tries to judge you by what you make, you must pay no attention to them because they just didn’t learn a thing.”

Susan paused and then continued. “You want to know what I make? I make a difference! Now, what do you make?”

See you all in the Big Apple!

DONNA KAISER is chair of the AMS Teachers Section. A 6–9 teacher at Bunche Elementary in Fort Wayne, IN, she can be reached at dmgkaiser@comcast.net.
One Hundred Years, Transforming One Person at a Time

By Alyssa Morishima Moore

As I pondered what to write for this commemorative edition of Montessori Life, I thought about how much Montessori education and AMS has transformed life and the lives of my children.

Finding a wonderful Montessori school for my daughter, Mariko, was one of those amazing discoveries that affected her life in wonderful ways. With the help of her teachers and her classmates, she has grown from a headstrong, easily frustrated, and self-centered toddler, to a thoughtful, determined, socially responsible 8-year-old. All the characteristics that I so admire in her are flourishing, and all the behaviors that are less than desirable are evolving in more positive directions, as Mariko grows in self-awareness and develops an understanding of herself as part of a larger community.

Any parent can teach her child how to properly greet someone, behave in a restaurant, or be polite. The more challenging thing is to step back and observe as a child matures and internalizes his or her own philosophy of grace and responsibility. What I have seen is the tremendous influence that Montessori education has on the development of these attributes. Even the nicest little girls can form exclusionary cliques at school, and my little girl is no exception. One day, Mariko told me how one of her friends felt left out of a group of girls who were creating a play during recess. Mariko discussed the situation with the other girls. Some said that the excluded girl had said that she didn’t want to be part of the play, while others realized that the girl was only saying this because her feelings were hurt that she hadn’t been included in the first place. After some creative discussion, the girls took it upon themselves to approach the other girl and tell her that they really needed her to join the group because there was one role that “only she could play.”

My son’s life has also changed dramatically by the experience of being in a Montessori school. As the “baby of the family,” he has tended to milk that role for as much as it is worth! For a long time, he was also the youngest in his day care. Now, at the age of 4, he is the oldest child at his Children’s House. At first I was concerned that he would not be sufficiently challenged or engaged without other children his age around; furthermore, I wasn’t sure how he’d fit into the role of older child, since he’d been “youngest” all his life. When I picked him up one day, however, all my concerns disappeared. I observed him working with some Legos next to a much younger child. The younger child kept taking Takashi’s pieces away and trying to break up his work. I cringed in fear of what Takashi was going to do (typically at home, he would start yelling at his big sister!). Takashi very calmly and quietly moved toward the child, looked at him directly in the eye, and very softly said, “Please do not disturb my work. This is my work and I don’t want it messed up.” The boy continued to interfere with Takashi’s work, but amazingly enough, Takashi remained composed and repeated his requests four more times! I realized then the incredible lessons that this multi-age setting was providing for my young son; I was so pleased to see in him this very Montessori grace and courtesy.

When I was asked to join the AMS board, I knew nothing about the organization, only about the effect Montessori was having on my children and family. However, one of my goals was to be on a Board of Directors for an organization that had deep meaning to me. So after doing research and considering the potential time commitment, I agreed to become the parent representative—and a year after that, the treasurer, too. As I serve as the parent representative, I often ask myself, “What is the right thing for the children? How can we better serve our constituency so that they can serve our children better?” As treasurer, I leverage my business background to ask, “Are we positioning our organization for sustainable future growth based on sound business and economic value, while upholding the mission and goals of AMS?” The responsibilities I accepted have allowed me great opportunities to grow and to challenge myself both professionally and personally in ways I never imagined.

While I may only have a few years of exposure to Montessori education, it has been a remarkable ride so far, and I expect even more exciting years to come as we embark on the next century of Montessori education, transforming one person at a time.

ALYSSA MORISHIMA MOORE is the treasurer of and parent representative to the AMS Board, and an associate director of project management at Genentech, Inc. Contact her at alyssa@gene.com.
I picked up *The Montessori Method* the other day, just for the fun of it. In rereading chapter 2, “History of Methods,” I was struck by how many levels of experience Montessori had before she began her work in the Casa dei Bambini. She was clearly a woman of dedicated interests, all of which propelled her on a journey of inquiry, study, work, observation, experimentation, and practice.

At a pivotal point in her career, Montessori became acutely aware that she wanted nothing more than to work with children in a pedagogical setting. “It was almost as if I prepared myself for an unknown mission,” she said (Montessori, 1964, p. 33).

Each step of Montessori’s journey was predicated on the knowledge and experience she gained from the previous step, until she finally found the work of her heart. Even then, she strove to perfect every aspect of that work. Isn’t it amazing how the steps of a child’s Montessori experience mimic Montessori’s life—discovery, exploration, and then mastery?

Everything in Montessori’s life led to one ultimate truth: It is every person’s birthright to recognize his or her unique value and to discover the gifts with which she or he is endowed. In doing so each person may come to know how to contribute those gifts to his or her life, and to the world.

When faced with the question of Montessori’s message to us, we need to think about how (or if) Montessori’s method and her tenets and ideals fit into our own experience. Yes, the Montessori method is ingenious and the materials are magical. But in and of themselves, the methods and materials bring no peace; they exude no passion. They are merely tangible expressions of Montessori’s belief in the dignity of human beings and the possibilities each person holds within, possibilities just waiting for the opportunity to be brought to life.

Real Montessori practice finds its truth in the practitioner’s purpose. Unless a true understanding of Montessori’s great belief in and for all human beings is alive in those who work for the good of the child, the children will be hampered in becoming the people they are meant to be. Until we are clear about the message we want to send about Montessori, the person and the philosophy, we will be working in a manner Montessori referred to as “mechanical skill,” rather than with the “spirit” of an educator (Montessori, 1964, p. 9).

To achieve authenticity in our Montessori work, we have to find authenticity in ourselves. Who am I? What is my purpose? What brought me to Montessori? What do I hope to create for myself, for the children, for the people and parents with whom and for whom I work? What can I do to make life in the classroom, the school, and the community better? How can I help the children recognize the wonder of themselves? (And they aren’t wonderful because they learn to read at 3. They are wonderful because they are who they are.)

We are all wonderful because we are who we are! What a gift that discovery is. In this life, we have the opportunity to explore all the reasons we are wonderful. We can get to know ourselves, the real person, the truth of our spirits, the work of our hearts. We can revel in the goodness and accept the glory that is the self, and feel the peace of wholeness wash over us. It is the acknowledgement of the self we are and the self we have to offer that brings us peace.

World peace is a collaborative creation, and until each of us finds peace in our own spirits, there can be no peace in the world. Peace will remain elusive until we put it into practice. And we cannot experience true peace until we can experience our true self, the authentic person that each of us is.

Certainly, Montessori experienced her true self. In the late years of her life, she carried the flag of peace throughout the world through her writings, her talks, and her work. Hers was an indefatigable passion, a passion that has inspired peacemakers working more than 50 years after her death.

However, the pursuit of peace was not Montessori’s primary focus throughout her life. She grew into it. Her perseverance in the face of criticism, doubts, threats, betrayal, war, and forced escape shaped her spirit and illuminated her purpose until her spirit and purpose were one. Given her lifelong belief in the dignity of mankind and her own life experiences, especially during World War II, her passionate campaign for peace was the natural next step for her life. It was the most honest, authentic, courageous step she could take—she was living her beliefs.

Peace comes through knowing, understanding, and appreciating the self we are and accepting, using, and offering the gifts we have been given with joy and generosity. It is all about fulfilling our destiny—feeling like we are exactly where we are supposed to be, doing exactly what we are supposed to be doing.
But peace is not a laissez-faire state of being. Peace is dynamic. Peace is passionate. Peace seeks a higher purpose. Peace finds its truth in our deeply held values and our most heartfelt experiences. It reaches beyond our own lives and works with caring in the world. That burning yet gentle inner peace draws us out of ourselves and stirs us to wake the people around us. Our spirit and purpose are one.

Our peace will find its strength in the vision we create for ourselves and our place in the world. That vision will become our personal mission, the foundation from which we act. An almost imperceptible but very present sense of calm and clarity will guide us through the tough times—the doubts and confusions, the diminishing budgets, the particularly troubled child. And as we act, peace will be shared.

I can almost hear Montessori saying, “Expect great things of yourself. Honor the possibilities within. Be ready for the unimaginable.”

If we adhere to the integrity of our visions, peace will prevail.

Reference


NANCY READ SMITH has worked in Montessori education for over 35 years and currently serves on the faculty of the Montessori Institute of Teacher Education in Wilmington, DE, and as a school consultant. Contact her at nancyreadsmit@mac.com.

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AMS in the News

In the summer of 2006, the American Montessori Society archives were moved from Columbia University to the Thomas J. Dodd Center at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, CT. The AMS Archives Committee was instrumental in making the move happen: Its members are Marie M. Dugan, Chair; M. Carolyn Dodd; Douglas M. Gravel; Phyllis Povell; Marcy B. Raphael; Richard A. Ungerer; and Bretta Weiss Wolff.

For information on visiting the Dodd Center, please go to www.amshq.org/archives.htm. If you have items relating to the history of AMS and/or the Montessori movement which you are interested in donating to the archives, please contact Marcy Krever at marcy@amshq.org.

On October 30, 2006, the University of Connecticut Advance ran an article about the AMS archives. Below is an excerpt from that article.

Montessori Society records given to Dodd Center archives
By Richard Veilleux

The American Montessori Society (AMS) has chosen the Thomas J. Dodd Center as the repository for its archival material.

The AMS records, documenting the history of the country’s most well-known alternative educational organization, consist of printed, typescript, and handwritten materials; sound recordings; films; and photographs and slides.

They reflect the professional and administrative activities of AMS, and provide historical information about the Montessori system of education.

They also include information on Montessori teaching methods and materials, and the records of some local schools.

Founded in Greenwich in 1960 and now headquartered in New York City, AMS is the largest Montessori organization in the world.

“Joining forces with the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, one of the nation’s most important archive facilities, is a great thing for the American Montessori Society,” says Richard Ungerer, executive director of AMS.

“Not only do we add our rich history and educational resources to the Dodd collection, but their commitment to discovery and the human condition, such as by housing one of the largest collections of children’s literature in the world and the Human Rights Institute, is right in line with all that is Montessori.”

The donation also includes some financial support, says Thomas Wilsted, director of the Dodd Center, and includes a provision for the AMS to add to the collection every five years.

The Society was founded by educator Nancy McCormick Rambusch 46 years ago, to develop and expand the use of Montessori teaching in public and private schools across the United States.

AMS’s efforts to promote the philosophy and practices of Maria Montessori have since expanded to an international level.

Montessori, one of Italy’s first female physicians, became interested in education while caring for children in a psychiatric clinic in Rome.

There she combined sensory-rich environments and hands-on experiential techniques in the hopes of reaching children previously labeled “deficient and insane.”

Within two years, the children were able to pass Italy’s standardized public school tests. More importantly, Montessori’s innovative practices had elicited positive learning behaviors from children previously left behind by society.

In 1907, Montessori continued shaping her learning model by opening “A Children’s House” for preschool children living in the slums of San Lorenzo.

With her scientific background to guide her, she observed how young people learned best when engaged in purposeful activity rather than simply being fed information. She drew upon her clinical understanding of children’s cognitive growth and development in constructing an educational framework that would respect individuality and fulfill the needs of the “whole child.”

“The collection means a lot to us,” says Wilsted.

“There is the Connecticut connection, with the society’s founding in Greenwich; the education connection to our children’s literature collection; and the connection to the Neag School of Education, one of the top education schools in the nation.”

The collection was welcomed to the University during a reception on Oct. 28.
Happy Anniversary!

Congratulations to the following AMS-member schools on achieving significant anniversary milestones! We wish them continued success in the future.

30th Anniversary
The Village School for Children
Waldwick, NJ
Marilyn Larkin, Founder/Director

25th Anniversary
Abintra Montessori School
Nashville, TN
Sherry Knott, Executive Director

Montessori Community School
Charlottesville, VA
Wendy Fisher, Head of School

20th Anniversary
Brickton Montessori School
Chicago, IL
Debbie Kelley, Principal/Executive Director

Montessori Tides School
Jacksonville Beach, FL
Kathy Graham, Head of School

10th Anniversary
Good Shepherd Montessori School
McKinney, TX
Laurann Sutton, Head of School

Monterosso School of Fairfax
Fairfax, VA
Sedi Amiri, Director

If your AMS-member school or AMS-affiliated teacher education program will soon be celebrating a decade or quarter-century anniversary, we want to know about it! Contact Carey Jones at carey_ink@yahoo.com.

Please include your school name, city and state, and head of school, and put “School Anniversary” in the subject line of your e-mail.

In Memoriam

Once a year in Montessori Life, we remember dedicated Montessorians who have died over the past year. Please send information to Carey Jones at carey_ink@yahoo.com.

SR. AGNES MARIE ASHTON, O.P.
Sister Agnes Marie Ashton, O.P., died on January 27, 2006. She held AMS credentials and was a school founder, principal, and administrato. She entered the Novitiate of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs in Columbus in 1938 and made her Profession of Vows in 1940. She served as principal at St. James the Less School, Columbus, OH (1951–54); at St. Augustine School, Ossining, NY (1955–61); St. Gabriel School, Columbus, OH (1961–63); and St. Mark School, Brooklyn, NY (1964–67). She began the Dominican Preschool at St. Mary of the Springs in 1963 and was administrator of the Montessori programs at St. Mary of the Springs, Columbus, OH (1970–74, 1975–81), and at Mary Immaculate School, Ossining, NY (1974–75).

BESSIE BOODMAN
Bessie Perlmutter Boodman, of Jenkintown, PA, an early-education specialist, died April 30, 2006. After raising two children in Huntingdon Valley, PA, Mrs. Boodman was applying for positions as a nursery-school teacher when her husband suggested she open a nursery school of her own. Boodman opened Meadowlane School in Jenkintown in 1961, and she later opened schools in Wyndmoor and Lafayette Hill, PA. In 1967, Mrs. Boodman earned her Montessori certificate. Boodman and her husband established the American Education & Recreation Corporation and operated 10 Montessori schools in 5 states. Boodman was past president of the Philadelphia Chapter of ORT (Organization for Educational Resources and Technological Training).

WILLIAM HANNA HOPPLE, JR.
William Hopple, Jr. died September 3, 2006. He spent more than 75 years at Cincinnati Country Day School (CCDS) as a student, teacher, coach, administrator, director of development, and trustee of the CCDS Foundation. In 1962, he started Cincinnati’s first Montessori preschool (at CCDS) and was active in the first Cincinnati Montessori Society. As administrator of the Lower School, he admitted the first girls to CCDS in 1953, worked to bring racial diversity by instituting a tuition aid program, and hired the school’s first African American faculty member in 1968. He cofounded the Fund for Independent Schools of Cincinnati, a scholarship program for African American high school students. He also cofounded SummerBridge Cincinnati, a program to attract high school and college students to teaching and to prepare disadvantaged middle-schoolers for rigorous high-school programs. Memorial donations may be made to William H. Hopple Jr. Scholarship Fund, Cincinnati Country Day School, 6905 Given Road, Cincinnati, OH 45243.

IRENE PETERSON
Irene D. (Stenslie) Peterson died August 12, 2006, after a bout with cancer. A gifted Montessori teacher, Irene devoted her life to the early education of children. She leaves a legacy of more than 500 children whom she helped begin their life’s journey during her 34 years of teaching. She was also known for her work as a teacher’s teacher, helping many young men and women get started as Montessorians. Irene taught at Whitby School in Greenwich, CT, from 1976 to 1984 and headed Newtown Montessori School in Newtown, CT, in the 1980s. The family asks that any memorial contributions be made to your public library.
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We look forward to helping usher in the next century of Maria Montessori’s exceptional and timeless philosophy.

Lesley Nan Haberman
and the faculty of
The Family School and Family School West
New York City
My life has been spent in the research of truth. Through study of children I have scrutinised human nature at its origin both in the East and the West and although it is forty years now since I began my work, childhood still seems to me an inexhaustible source of revelations and—let me say—of hope.

Childhood has shown me that all humanity is one. All children talk, no matter what their race or their circumstances or their family, more or less at the same age; they walk, change their teeth, etc. at certain fixed periods of their life. In other aspects also, especially in the psychical field, they are just as similar, just as susceptible.

Children are the constructors of men whom they build, taking from the environment language, religion, customs, and the peculiarities not only of the race, not only of the nation, but even of a special district in which they develop.

Childhood constructs with what it finds. If the material is poor, the construction is also poor. As far as civilisation is concerned the child is at the level of the food-gatherers.

In order to build himself, he has to take by chance whatever he finds in the environment.

The child is the forgotten citizen, and yet, if statesmen and educationists once came to realise the terrific force that is in childhood for good or for evil, I feel they would give it priority above everything else.

All problems of humanity depend on man himself; if man is disregarded in his construction, the problems will never be solved.

No child is a Bolshevik or a Fascist or a Democrat; they all become what circumstances or the environment make them.

In our days when, in spite of the terrible lessons of two world wars, the times ahead loom as dark as ever before, I feel strongly that another field has to be explored, besides those of economics and ideology. It is the study of MAN—not of adult man on whom every appeal is wasted. He, economically insecure, remains bewildered in the maelstrom of conflicting ideas and throws himself now on this side, now on that. Man must be cultivated from the beginning of life when the great powers of nature are at work. It is then that one can hope to plan for a better international understanding.

—Maria Montessori
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By Phyllis Povell

[Editors’ note: This article is an excerpt from a book in progress by Dr. Povell.]

This year there are celebrations around the world honoring the 100th anniversary of the opening of the first Casa dei Bambini in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. The Montessori movement has come a long way since that time. In the United States, the seeds of early childhood education that Montessori planted at the beginning of the 20th century would really blossom 45 years later, nurtured by Nancy McCormick Rambusch.

In order to understand how this movement was conceived and what brought it to fruition, it is necessary to examine the background of its founder. The innovations in education that Montessori introduced would be enough to reserve a place for her in the history books, but Montessori was ahead of her time in many other aspects of her life. The decisions that she made that enabled her to overcome the numerous restrictions put on a woman born in Italy in 1870 are a reminder of the unlimited possibilities available to women who choose to write their own scripts.

Early childhood anecdotes seem to follow most people throughout their lives, and Montessori was no exception. Childhood stories related about her portray her as a determined and competent young girl.1 In one story, a young Maria, standing on a chair, joined the hands of her parents to reunite them when they had differences of opinion. Another story recounts young Maria’s knitting for the poor. These responsibilities helped Montessori develop a sense of mastery and leadership and prepared her to make decisions later that would enable her to become a capable woman. Her mother, Renilde Stoppani Montessori, appears to have seen her daughter as the means to break the mold and did not hesitate to encourage her to follow her desires—even if it meant going against traditional roles for women.

Montessori believed that social progress depended on women’s emancipation. This conviction was bolstered by her personal educational struggles and successes. Early in her life, Montessori challenged the social conventions of her day by deciding to apply her interest in mathematics to the study of engineering.

The Casati legislation in 1863 in Italy made it possible for young women to enter high schools and technical institutes. Maria Montessori was one of these young women. At 13 years old, Montessori began at a technical school, and there she found herself in the company of men, except for one other young woman. To shield them from the torments of the men, the two young women were put into a special room during recess. This experience does not appear to have discouraged Montessori but rather to have given her greater inner strength: Her next step was to register in the Leonardo da Vinci Technical Institute for high school. She graduated in 1890.

There are varied accounts of the trials and tribulations of her next life choice—admission into medical school. Legend tells of interviews with Professor Guido Baccelli (who turned down her application) and Montessori’s retort upon leaving him: “I know I will become a doctor.” Other stories include the intervention of the Pope on her behalf for entrance into medical school. Simply put, however, Montessori did not have the prerequisites for entrance to the University of Rome Medical School. One of her main deficiencies was her lack of knowledge of classical

Maria Montessori: PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG WOMAN
same year that Montessori did. These facts do not detract from the remark-
morer women graduated as doctors the heretofore only for men. 2
one can be really sure, although in 1893 there is a mention in the Italian
press of her being the only woman present at the cremation and wake of
one of her professors, Professor Molischott. This seems indicative of a
young woman who wanted to represent to the public a role that was heretofore
for men. 2
Almost all biographies, histories, and tales of Maria Montessori portray her as the first
woman to graduate from medical school in Italy, or as the first woman to graduate from the
University of Rome Medical School. However, in 1877, it was Ernestine Paper of Florence who was the first
woman to become a physician in Italy, followed by four other women. 3 Two more women graduated as doctors the same year that Montessori did. These facts do not detract from the remark-
able talent or perseverance Montessori demonstrated in entering and completing medical school. For a woman in that time it was no simple feat.
Defying the odds made a remarkable impression on Montessori. Another great impact on her seems to have come from her professors in the faculty of
medicine. Many of them were extremely liberal and were interested in the new sciences, particularly the pathology of “degenerate” children. As a young
student, Montessori found herself in these enlightened surroundings as she began to form her professional ideas. Her 4 years of medical school were
filled with motivating, appealing, innovative, and sometimes radical beliefs. After graduation, Montessori continued working in the pediatric
ambulatory clinic and in other hospitals, sustaining her relationship with the women of the Roman aristocracy who supported these efforts and her
beginning work with children.
Montessori also worked at the university’s psychiatric clinic, gathering
materials for her dissertation on antagonistic hallucinations. Her decision to
work in the field of psychiatry (rather than pediatrics or gynecology) and to attend these hospitals, which were usually housed in the same places as
mental asylums, was not only highly unusual, but also dangerous. This choice appears to be based on her passion for scientific research and
empirical psychology evoked by her professors who were lecturing on the social implications of psychological research. After the completion of her
dissertation, which she defended on July 10, 1896, Maria Montessori graduated from medical school. 4
Even before graduation, Montessori’s energies were shifting in other
directions. In March of 1896, a women’s association was founded in Rome. Montessori was chosen vice secretary and Virginia Nathan, the wife of the future mayor of Rome, treasurer. Montessori was beginning to be recognized as a champion for women’s rights.
Shortly after Montessori’s graduation from medical school, the International Congress for Women’s Achievements and Women’s Efforts
was held in Berlin from September 19–26, 1896. Montessori was selected as Italy’s delegate to this conference. She was only 26 years old.
Her participation at the congress gave her close contact with the culture and politics of European women, while press attention led her to a
greater awareness of the power of the media. For one week, Montessori brought the principles of social feminism to life. Her eloquent language on behalf of women set the tone for social equality and personal liberty and laid the groundwork for the pivotal decision she would make a few years later—to leave medicine and devote herself to the child and education.
The decade within which Montessori was in medical school was an exciting one in the growth of ideas: Childhood education took on a greater
importance and prominence in Europe and America. Education was seen as a method of strengthening the mind and the body of tomorrow’s child. Later, Montessori would characterize this excitement as “the discovery of childhood.” Montessori was aware of the
cmp of science could play in society and in the struggle against degeneration and its causes. In 1898, the first Italian pedagogical congress was held in Turin. 3000 educators participated in this congress, and Montessori was one of the speakers.
During this frenetic period after her graduation from medical school,
Montessori worked at the hospital, carried on her practice, and took a position as lecturer in Hygiene and Anthropology at a teacher training institute in Rome. She continued to lecture on special needs children and to attend and speak at women’s conferences. Returning to the university in 1900 to study the psychology of the normal child was the first step of what would become a 50-year journey, literally around the world, transmitting her view of the child.

Montessori’s faith in the unlimited possibilities of the child never faltered. She was convinced of the need for schools for young children and was consistent in her advocacy for the establishment of such institutions and the need for educating parents about starting their children in school as early as possible. This faith led her to accept the offer of Eduardo Talamo, director general of the Beni Stabili (the Roman Good Building Institute), to open a school for young children in a tenement in Rome. This same faith brought her to the United States in December of 1913, almost 100 years ago. America’s early belief in Montessori’s ideas, followed years later by the efforts of Nancy McCormick Rambusch, has kept her philosophy alive.

PHYLLIS POVELL is professor emerita at Long Island University. Contact her at wwwprof@optonline.net.

1 These legends about Montessori can be found throughout the extant literature. They are repeated from book to book and author to author.


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American public education is being forced to deal decisively with many issues relating to the desegregation of its urban schools. The complexity of the issues does not derive only from what many believe to be the unintended and unanticipated consequences of the Brown v. The Board of Education Supreme Court decision of 1954. There is emerging evidence that the urban schools may never have met the needs of many of their children. Colin Greer, a revisionist historian of American public education, maintains that . . . at least since the 19th Century, urban, black schoolchildren have always been treated separately from and more unequally than poor whites . . . this treatment has changed little over the decades although it is perhaps more humanitarian in intent if not in outcome.

The career of innovation in public education has been a checkered one. Innovation means change, and like all self-perpetuating bureaucracies, public education is resistant to change. For every change proposed from the outside, the bureaucracy tends to exert equivalent counterpressure from the inside to keep things as they are, applying what Donald Schon calls the “law of dynamic conservatism,” or “fighting like hell to keep things the same.” The preferred innovations are not organic changes, which would lead to a revamping of the bureaucratic structure from within, but are cosmetic. Cosmetic innovations are externally applied changes that placate protesting parents and citizens. They do not require, according to John Pincus, complex changes in management structure or organizational relations. Such innovations help to satisfy staff and client demands for change without requiring from the organization the difficult task of self-renewal . . .

The magnitude of the public schools’ resistance to change has been matched by the magnitude of its energies expended in attempts at change. In Matters of Choice: A Ford Foundation Report on Alternative Schools, the following verdict is rendered:

. . . large-scale efforts in the 60s failed to produce large-scale changes, partly because it is so difficult to make a dent in the public school system. It bends, absorbs, and springs back to its original form.

Innovations directed at whole school systems have not worked. Those directed at organic units within a given school system may work. The public alternative school appears to many school officials to provide the best organic intrasystem unit, if it can interface effectively with the bureaucratic structure. Situating alternative schools in their historical context, the Ford Report maintains that alternative schools have risen from the ashes of past attempts at school reform.

The International Consortium on Options in Public Education (ICOPE), a voluntary association devoted to public alternative schools, argues that Alternative public schools provide a new strategy. The development of an array of options within every community gives every family a voice in the decision-making process. Proponents of this strategy feel that the development of options within public education has more potential for changing education in this decade than any other strategy proposed to date.

As educational innovation tends to relate to political expediency, impending Court suits have led school systems to consider and implement public alternative schools as the current innovation of choice.

Schools are the battleground. And school officials, convinced that by continuing along the same path their problems will only get worse, argue that now is the time to try something new. In Cincinnati, that something new is ‘alternative schools.’

Within the alternative school network in Cincinnati is one established Montessori (K–3) school and one (K–6) school being readied for opening in

By Nancy McCormick Rambusch

[Editors’ note: This article originally appeared in Volume 3, Issue 1 of The Constructive Triangle, Spring 1976.]
September 1976. These two Montessori public schools represent the only such schools in the country. In order to fully understand Montessori in the context of American public elementary education, it is necessary to see Montessori in its American formulation.

Although a Montessori presence in American public education was one of the goals of the American Montessori Society from its beginning, most of the energies of its members were directed toward the establishment of private preschools for white middle-class children. As parents constituted the majority membership of the American Montessori movement, the educational options they sought were for their own children, not the world’s or the nation’s. Parents establishing Montessori preschools were concerned with finding suitable premises, obtaining didactic apparatus, and locating students and Montessori-trained teachers, or directresses as they are called in Montessori parlance. Since most of the directresses were trained in such a way that they believed literally in Montessori’s notion of the “supranational” child, they saw no need for any cultural accommodation of Montessori’s insights into America. John J. McDermott, a professor of philosophy at Queens College, City University of New York, and an explicator of James and Dewey to the AMS, as well as one of its founders, saw things differently:

The contentions of the traditional Montessorians about the universal similarity of children for purposes of education displays a basic naïveté about the extraordinarily powerful and irreducible interrelationships between a culture and the child’s development of a modality of consciousness.

Parents sending their children to the first Montessori preschools took their cues largely from the directresses and felt no need for cultural accommodation. The issues were not joined.

By 1963, it was clear to McDermott that the future of the American Montessori movement was at risk if Montessori adherents did not reflect seriously on their personal biases. He argued that any thinker had to be updated and made relevant to the time and place in which he was read.

Is it so strange that Montessori is in need of updating when no philosopher of education has ever developed more than a handful of practical suggestions that were instituted beyond his own historical period? Plato, Rousseau, James, Dewey, and Montessori have made contributions to the basic vantage points from which a Paideia can be structured. To look at them as specific scriptures is to misread both their intentions and abilities. The genuine question here is whether a thinker’s basic insights deserve to be reformulated. . . . The reply with regard to Montessori is clearly affirmative.

McDermott was concerned that the American Montessori movement make a conscious decision about the intention and scope of its efforts. He reminded his audience in an Address to the National Montessori Seminar in “Montessori and American Children” (Chicago, June, 1963) that the movement was but one among thousands of social movements in America. American culture was not inhospitable to peripheral movements as long as they stayed peripheral and made no bid to move to the center of the culture. The question that American culture asked of movements was, “Is this movement to be of service to itself and to its adherents or to the community overall?”

This, he explained, was the principle of evaluation and acceptance. If the American Montessori movement was interested only in the children of its parent supporters, then it would be a movement with only a private history. If, on the other hand, the American Montessori movement was interested in a communal orientation, then it might hope to make a permanent or residual contribution to American culture. Further, if the decision was made in favor of a residual contribution, then the very least required of those attempting this was the effort to attain an operational insight into the ways in which growth and change occur in America. An insight of this kind would involve a grasp of the primary value acceptances in the society and the nature of their historical origins. Of particular significance for the American scene is the tradition of public education and the needs of an egalitarian-oriented society.
Most of those gathered in Chicago were absorbed in the development of their own private schools. They were not focusing on the “other America” of which Michael Harrington had recently spoken, or in its children, but their own. Yet, McDermott felt a critical need to expand both their horizons and their intentions.

Whatever the merits of these (parent) goals, and they are mixed at best, one looks in vain for a statement that does not take the private good as indicative of the significance of the movement overall. . . . When Dewey states that “what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children,” he sees the wisdom of the parent as precisely continuous with the needs of the community. While it is understandable that individual parents seek specific goals for their children, it is not apparent why such goals should be embraced by the community unless they respond to deeply felt and genuinely collective needs.

Two years after the Chicago meeting, McDermott appeared in print, again on the side of communal relevance for Montessori’s ideas. He assigned the revival of American interest in Montessori to two factors:

- a willingness to read her afresh in the light of new developmental contributions to learning theory, and to the urgent need for guidance, new or old, in facing the crushing problems of school systems that are not fulfilling their function of educating all the children.

- the growth of the Montessori movement in the decade following McDermott’s [speech] occurred almost exclusively in the private school sector. Internal disputes concerning the perils of cultural accommodation and the legitimacy of various sorts of Montessori teacher training held the center of the stage.

Where public schools were failing was a place where Montessori education might make a difference, in the education of the urban black child.

What in Montessori’s philosophy might appear as an apt response to the problems of public education? Montessori’s educational philosophy can be explained through the use of her major metaphor, “the prepared environment.” The “prepared environment” was an amalgam of social and material circumstances conducive to children’s sense of well-being and personal worth, which offers them, in terms of their own culture, salvific possibilities. McDermott describes it as simply the creation of a world that holds out optimum experiential possibilities for human growth within what should be a liberally controlled setting . . . (Prepared environments) are small communities that have as their emphasis the creation of a carefully structured world in which the children, primarily as a free response, come to reflective self-consciousness.

Montessori contends that children make themselves known in truly human circumstances as they live and interact with other children in ways uniquely suited to their developmental needs. What children who have a chance to act on the world learn is rooted in their neurophysiological structures, upon which they draw for all later learning. One aspect for Montessori education within the “prepared environment,” which would recommend itself to urban children, would be “hands-on” orientation of children’s patterned interaction with physical models. Those wishing to bring Montessori to public education needed to come armed with “original and creative rethinking . . . in the light of new and relevant data.”

The opportunity for a Montessori presence within public elementary education came about finally, not for ideological, but for political reasons. The development of a network of alternative public schools within the Cincinnati school system, under Court suit, provided the arena. Children’s House, Mount Adams, a Montessori alternative public school for children from kindergarten to third grade, opened in September 1975 after a year of planning. Instrumental in its organization was Dr. Robert J. Crossett, East Area Director, Cincinnati Public Schools. I was instrumental in its physical and social design and instructional strategies.

The extrapolation of the American Montessori experience from the private preschool to the public elementary school is a perilous undertaking. There are dramatic differences to be dealt with, in regard to the scale, structure, and strategy of each.

The most striking difference between the private and the public Montessori school is a matter of scale,
the difference between two teachers and twenty, twenty children and two hundred. One cannot upscale a small enterprise by simply enlarging it. Every scale has its own integrity. As enterprises become larger, they necessarily become more complex. Using as a polar pair the single private Montessori preschool class and the Montessori public school, the contrasts and operational differences introduced by the enlarged and complexified scale may become more apparent.

The “prepared environment” can be divided operationally into physical environment, social system, and instructional strategies. The single preschool class functions typically as a self-contained environment with almost everything needed for the child’s living and learning within it; in a public school, the whole building can become the self-contained classroom. At Children’s House, a three-floor Victorian monument, the whole building belongs to the children. Not one of the seven “homebases,” as classes are called, has a full “set” of all apparatus or learning materials. Many of these are shared in two large, carpeted central halls on two of the three floors, to which the children on those floors come freely. The location of the children’s bathrooms on the ground floor further insures children’s mobility.

The single preschool functions on an independent timetable while the public school functions on an interdependent one. Because of scale, the bus arrivals and departures, lunch and play periods, time in the Studio and Movement Rooms, and rotation of the “homebases” for an afternoon period to each other of the “homebases” on a seven day cycle must be centrally organized.

The social system of the two “prepared environments” can be seen as exponentially more complex with upscaling. The social system of any school consists of the various interrelationships between and among those acting as administrators, teachers, parents, and children.

In a single preschool class, the parents may be both among the organizers of the class and those to whom the teachers owe their financial accountability; in the Montessori public school, the public school system is the initiator of the school and a complex bureaucratic chain links the teacher to the Board of Education through the principal.

In the single preschool class, the direction of the enterprise is typically managed by a Montessori-trained teacher. In a Montessori public school, the administrator is trained as a public school principal. At Children’s House, the selection of the principal happened to occur after that of the teachers. Staff members as well as parents were part of the decision-making process that went into the hiring of the principal (standard operating procedure in Cincinnati public schools).

In a single Montessori preschool class, the instructional leadership function is held uniquely by the Montessori teacher. In a Montessori public school, that role belongs legally to the principal. At Children’s House, this role was shared by the Principal, Ron Staggs, and the writer as the resident Montessori consultant. Decisions tended to be filtered through both public school and Montessori “sieves.”
The teacher (directress) in a Montessori preschool class has Montessori training and usually, if an American, a college degree. In a Montessori public school, all of the staff has State certification at the level at which they are teaching and, in addition, a Montessori credential. At Children’s House, many staff members are experienced public and parochial school teachers. In a typical single preschool class, a teacher may be as self-contained as her environment, being responsible for “her” space, “her” materials, and “her” children. If there are several such classes in one school, such teachers act as independent contractors. In a Montessori public school, the teachers work as a team and regroup for the provision of various kinds of instruction with children, not their “own.” At Children’s House, nine teachers and eight associate teachers plan and teach in three “megabase” groups, numbering four or six persons each.

In a Montessori preschool class, teacher and children constitute the social system. In a Montessori public school, all the staff with all the children constitute the social system. Through a pattern of “homebase” rotation, all of the children at Children’s House this year interfaced with all twenty staff members every seven days.

In a single Montessori preschool class, Montessori training is often presumed to be sufficient to meet all of the individual teacher’s operational needs; in a Montessori public school, the staff needs training in functioning as a team in order to provide the children with coherent and consistent models of adult behavior. At Children’s House, the staff spent five weeks together in a seminar before school started in which they drafted a Behavioral Charter to guide the conduct of the whole school. As an example of the implications of such team planning, corporal punishment, permissible in Ohio public schools, was “outlawed” by the staff as incompatible with Montessori principles.

In a single Montessori preschool class, the ground rules devised by the teacher form the boundaries of the children’s behavior within the class. In a Montessori public school, the ground rules are far more complex than those of a single class and involve everyone in the school as well as all of the designated behaviors for every place in the school.

In a single Montessori preschool class, at its beginnings, a commitment to Montessori philosophy by parents is seen as essential and a moderate to high degree of parental involvement virtually assured; in a Montessori public school, operating as an alternative, a commitment to Montessori philosophy is not essential for parents, nor is there any guaranteed parental involvement. There are many reasons other than for Montessori philosophy that parents have for sending their children. Children’s House has an all-day kindergarten; it provides a second chance for older children whose initial school experience was disappointing. The degree of parental involvement is dependent on parents themselves, not the school, since parental involvement is not in any way related to a child’s acceptance in the school.

In a Montessori preschool class, there might be twenty children; in a Montessori public school there would be at least 200. At Children’s House on September 3, 1975, the first day of school, seven buses and one taxi deposited all but the neighborhood children who walked to school. There were close to 200 children.

In a Montessori preschool class, the children may be recruited from a narrow socioeconomic spectrum and selected competitively; in a Montessori public school, the children come from a very broad socioeconomic spectrum and are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. At Children’s House, the children were found through regular alternative school network channels and by word of mouth.

In a Montessori preschool class, there need not be a focus on racial balance; in a Montessori public school, racial balance is the first concern. At Children’s House, from the pool of children applying, the children were chosen on a Chinese menu basis (one from Column A; one from Column B). In every one of the “homebases,” the children are intentionally grouped for balance in race, sex, and age so that each “homebase” offers its children a comparable social mix.

In a Montessori preschool class, the children enter around age 3; in a Montessori public school, children enter at age 5. Public education begins at age 5. The Children’s House planners considered it unrealistic to focus on recruiting preschool children (were it possible) when so many fives were waiting. Results of the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts, administered in a pre-test/post-test format to Children’s House kindergarteners, indicate a group move (of 107 children) from the 53rd percentile to the 73rd percentile.

The most striking difference between the private and the public Montessori school is a matter of scale.
in the course of the year. Clearly, the issue of when to begin children in a Montessori program is an open question.

The Montessori preschool class builds from the bottom, even in its first year; the Montessori public school builds all at once in its first year. Five, six, seven, and eight year olds all arrive together.

The Montessori preschool class controls its numbers so that at no time will the inclusion of children with no previous Montessori experience over-balance the numbers that do. The Montessori public school gives no special consideration to children with previous Montessori experience. It is incompatible with its definition as a public school for a Montessori alternative to use experience as a “means” test. Children’s House has about 35 out of 200 children who have had previous Montessori experience. Since the forty-some pre-Montessori school programs are primarily for white children, giving preference to these children (were such a strategy compatible with the egalitarian orientation of public education, which it is not) would violate the principal canon of the alternative school, which is racial balance.

The Montessori preschool class attempts to maintain a balance of ages within it; the Montessori public school seeks a racial balance. Children’s House this year was predictably “bottom-heavy” with 107 of the children aged 5. Children’s House West will probably repeat the pattern.

Instructional strategies are a critical aspect of the “prepared environment.” In a Montessori preschool class, these are not considered as separate from the social organization of the class.

The basis of the Montessori preschool curriculum is social and sensorial education leading to the acquisition of language, math, and cultural subject materials must be seen as a point on a continuum to be reached after children’s dropped developmental stitches are picked up.

In a Montessori preschool class, accountability to parents is couched in terms of process. In a Montessori public school, accountability is couched both in terms of process and of product. The children in all of the Cincinnati alternative programs take standardized tests. Teachers at Children’s House keep extensive records of children’s progress.

The elements that constitute the “prepared environment” in a Montessori public school are related in ways different from usual Montessori practice.

When Montessori principles and practices meet public school reality, how do they fare? Public education is the larger category into which, somehow, Montessori notions need to fit. These are the risks facing those who are responsible for creating the interface. Each element of the “prepared environment” needs to work so that the whole interface works. No single decision on translation of Montessori in a public school setting is unimportant, because all decisions, however small, affect the total enterprise. Cooperation between the principal of the Montessori school and the Montessori “interfacer” is essential. The person managing the interface must move the principles of Montessori forward into the reality of the public school, carrying the principles along, not losing or altering them, but translating them into viable practice.

The task of the interfacer is recreative. Montessori, the author, has created the text. Like an actor, the interfacer must recreate the text in the reality of the present moment. Such a task requires flexibility, imagination, and humor, particularly in the first year of the school’s operation. It requires the skills of anyone brokering change and a sensitivity to the needs of the client, in this case, public education.

Montessori is a guest in the home of public education, but not yet a member of the family.

NANCY MCCORMICK RAMBUSCH founded the American Montessori Society. Through grants to Xavier University, her work with Children’s House was supported in the planning year by the Andrew Jergens Foundation and, in the school’s first year of operation, by the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation and the Cincinnati Board of Education.
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The History of the Nursery School and the Kindergarten

Early childhood education in America can be traced back to the mid 1800s when adherents of Froebel’s kindergarten methods immigrated to the United States from Germany. But the kindergarten’s roots extend back even further, to the nursery school movement in Europe. Robert Owen, a socialist cotton-mill owner in New Lanark, Scotland, sought to create an idyllic setting for the children of his workers, believing that environment molds the person. By 1813, Owen had created an environment where children from birth through 6 years old played, sang, and ate regularly. Soon after, numerous philanthropic organizations in England and Europe organized along the lines of New Lanark. Infant schools spread to Germany, coinciding with the development of Froebel’s kindergarten, a separate movement, similar but unconnected to New Lanark. By the 1830s in Germany, Kleinkinder-bewahranstalten (public institutions for the care of the poor) were established for young children, focusing specifically on the physical aspects of their well being (Forest, 1935).

In the United States, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the nursery school movement (generally considered to include children 4 years old and younger) represented a variety of formulating interests: the research-
center nursery school, the cooperative nursery school, the private-school nursery school, the philanthropic nursery school, and the teacher-training nursery school (Forest, 1935, pp. 43–61).

Research-center nursery schools arose as an integral part of university research programs inquiring into the concept of normal development. Theorists became convinced that abnormalities in adolescence and adulthood originated in childhood. Psychologists, such as Yale University’s Dr. Arnold Gesell, sought to observe children in natural settings to determine normal social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Researchers, who originally set up child observations on a casual basis, quickly realized that trained adults could facilitate the children’s groups. By the turn of the 20th century, the universities of Yale and Columbia sponsored just two of the many elaborately funded and equipped university nursery schools in America.

Cooperative nursery schools arose out of the need of young mothers to provide care for their children as the mothers sought work outside the home during World War I. Nurse-maids were too expensive and mothers taking turns caring for the children often proved complicated. Again, trained care providers solved the problem and soon the little cooperative nursery school had evolved into the private nursery school movement, sanctioned by pediatricians as adequate for the needs of young children.

Philanthropic nursery schools were an integral part of settlement houses and churches in which the needs of poor children were served within their own communities. Generally, in all-day facilities, children were tended to by caregivers who lived in the same community as the children. These inner-city sites provided meals, hygiene, and a sanctuary for the children who might otherwise be on the street.

Teacher-training nursery schools filled a need created by the increased demand for trained care-providers. These nursery schools were on-site at teacher training colleges and sought to bring about standards of care consistent with new theories of child development and teacher practices.

As an adjunct to, and growing simultaneously with the nursery school movement in America, the kindergarten movement (usually serving children between the ages of 4 3/4 and 6 years old) spread across the United States in fits and starts during the second half of the 19th century (Vanderwalker, 1971). German immigrants, fleeing the European revolution of 1848, settled in American cities such as New York City, Hoboken, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Louisville, and brought with them the need for bilingual schools. These schools included kindergartens. Coinciding with the establishment of German schools in America, the doctrines of Froebel were presented in lectures in England and America by his disciples. By the 1850s, articles began to appear in professional journals such as the American Journal of Education and the Christian Examiner and other national magazines, bringing the kindergarten movement to the attention of educators. One of the earliest proponents of kindergarten in America was Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, who studied Froebel and opened her kindergarten in the 1860s in New England. The sister-in-law of educational pioneer Horace Mann, Peabody promoted kindergarten among leaders of the educational movement at large. Froebel’s idealistic philosophy that the universe is spiritual and that nature and mankind are but expressions of God appealed to the New England Transcendentalists, Peabody among them. She wrote articles such as “The Moral Culture of Infancy” and “What is Kindergarten?” for the Atlantic Monthly in 1862 and later published a monthly magazine, The Kindergarten Messenger, which included theoretical articles along with informational content. The Messenger later became part of The New England Journal of Education (Vanderwalker, 1908, pp. 28–35).

Although Froebel’s kindergartens appeared in America as early as the 1850s, the widespread acceptance of education for young children depended upon Americans embracing the concept that the child develops continuously over time, and develops earlier than previously recognized. In the second half of the 19th century, educational theorists began to acknowledge that learning begins much earlier than age 7, the legal age set as the time for admission to school. Even though education for the young child began to be accepted in theory, the curriculum was not clearly defined. Should a child’s kindergarten experience be just a watered-down version of what is presented at the elementary grades? Child development experts said no. Based on the psychological work of William James and G. Stanley Hall, the proponents of the kindergarten model asserted that young children learn differently from older children, therefore unique environments must be set up to meet those needs.

G. Stanley Hall, a widely influential American psychologist and educationalist schooled in German science, felt that the school should fit the child, not the other way around. Hall’s work brought about the enormous pedagogical shift away from the teaching of ideas and toward child-focused teaching in which the teacher adapts to the individual needs of the child. Hall’s ideas created a torrent of pedagogical studies, including those by Freud, whom Hall brought to America in 1909, and Arnold Gesell, both of whose theories proceeded from the Hegelian ideal that education can and should be a vehicle for providing a better world (Gutke, 1986). One of the
major proponents of progressive education, the psychologist and philosopher William James, rejected absolute truth and values in favor of changing values and hypotheses: The litmus test of any idea was its utility. For James success could be measured if the ideas were workable “for satisfying human needs and resolving human problems” (Gutek, 1986, pp. 205–206). Most reformers emphasized the role that science and systems management should play in education. To produce the necessary research, academic experts poured into the schools to study the myriad social problems found there and proposed solutions couched in the vocabulary of systems theory.

An understanding of a psychological framework for education emerged in the early 1860s in Oswego, NY. There, Dr. E. A. Sheldon began training teachers on the Pestalozzian principles of child development. The Oswego Normal School held that teachers should teach young children objectively and concentrate on self-expression rather than the language arts, which was the focus for the education of older children. Oswego Normal School was the first institution teaching that education for young children was just as valid as, yet different in its formulation from, education for older children. This early childhood education concept spread rapidly, and teachers who trained at Oswego were eagerly sought after (Vanderwalker, 1971, p. 5).

Another thrust in the theory and practice of education of young children emerged in teacher colleges, at the elementary level: art education and work with the hands. Ironically, these practices were already a part of kindergarten programs. The inclusion of art education at the elementary level originated in Europe as demonstrated at the 1851 London Exhibition and the Paris Exhibition of 1867. The art advocates made their case in America at the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876. Education authorities in this country blessed the addition of art education as seen at the Philadelphia Exposition, declaring an art renaissance in the States. As arts and crafts courses were integrated into the curriculum at the elementary level, the kindergartner’s earlier promulgation of the idea was recognized. Use of hands-on materials was validated because those at the elementary level now applauded the practice (Vanderwalker, 1971, p. 188).

As the stature of the kindergarten rose in the 1870s and 1880s, private schools readily incorporated it into their curriculum, but public schools moved more slowly. By the turn of the century, kindergartens could be found in public elementary schools on a regional basis, but many localities were not convinced the additional cost was warranted. Materials such as paper, glue, scissors, and songbooks cost more per pupil than did materials for older children. Also, kindergartens required more teachers per pupil than did older grades. Further, the individual states mandated the age at which children could begin school. In many states, as authorized by state law, it was indeed 5 years of age, the upper range of desirability for entering kindergarten. Other states designated 6 years as the minimum age requirement. And in Alabama, it was 7 years, in Texas, 8 years (Vanderwalker, 1971, p. 188). Educational change followed the slow pace of legislation change.

By 1912, 9% of American children of kindergarten age were in public school kindergarten, up from 5% in 1900 (U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1914). The increase was also due in part to the formation of the National Kindergarten Association, created specifically to garner national financial support for kindergartens in public schools (Gutek, 1986). Kindergarten educators also formed their own association, the International Kindergarten Union, which focused on curriculum issues.

But just as the public was accepting the idea of kindergarten, Froebel’s kindergarten was coming under intense scrutiny by educational theorists. New discoveries in biological sciences and child development theories, especially at the university-based kindergartens, brought about schisms in the previously homogenous kindergarten movement. Philanthropic kindergartens, which were not a part of research and academic discourse, retained their allegiance to Froebel, whereas university and progressive schools began to question the rigid structure and top-down approach of Froebel. Revisionists attacked the Froebel gifts and occupations for their inadequate size for the young child’s hand, art instructors complained that the occupations were unsatisfactory as a basis for art work, and the physical education instructors did not approve of Froebel’s games for children. All those who disagreed, especially the kindergarten theorists at Columbia, used the new psychology of child development as their reason for dissent.

The revisionists (opposed to the now traditionalist followers of Froebel) were led by the Teachers College at Columbia University, which was now considered the epicenter of educational thought in America (Gutek, 1986, pp. 224–225). The progressives at Teachers College, led by Patty Smith Hill, John Dewey, and William Heard Kilpatrick, favored emerging trends in psychology and child study such as evolutionary intelligence, and so clashed with conservative Froebellian theories of static intelligence and limited capacities of children younger than 6 years old (Vanderwalker, 1971, p. 188). Regardless of their specific philosophy, they all fretted that the internal dialog among themselves would spill out into public discourse and threaten their hard-fought gains over the past half-century. Montessori’s radical proposals came to light right in the
middle of this educational upheaval (Snyder, 1972).

**The Rise of the American Progressive Movement**

The development of American progressive education reflected the social changes that took place from 1870 to the early 20th century as a response to larger transformations taking place in the society, namely industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. In his 1986 work, *Education in the United States: An Historical Perspective*, historian Gerald L. Gutek places these changes in the broad contexts of culture, politics, and economics.

By 1870, agricultural productivity was on the rise due to farm mechanization, but the nation itself was experiencing wholesale transformation from a rural agricultural base to an urban industrialized one. Between 1880 and 1910, the urban population grew from 15 million to 45 million. By 1920, more people lived in cities than in rural areas (Gutek, 1986).

The profound impact of industrialization on education cannot be overstated. The surge of population into the cities created chronically understaffed schools overcrowded with non-English-speaking children. Further, governing districts hired teachers and administrators based on political, not academic, criteria. Social Darwinism, which preached that competition among individuals would lead to more efficient, industrious workers, was introduced into the schools as an educational ethic. School administration became centralized and curricula focused on preparing children to become members of the new industrialized workforce. The traditional teaching method, which utilized memorization and recitation and expected high morals to be gleaned from the *McGuffey Readers* (traditional first readers of the era) had been modeled on an earlier rural American child and was now considered hopelessly out of date. The revised view was that the classics should be de-emphasized in favor of more utilitarian subjects such as applied science and economics.

Schools would teach that punctuality, hard work, and diligence would be rewarded by economic improvement while laziness would be punished by unemployment. Truancy laws compelled school attendance and children were organized into classes by ages.

In the economic realm, progressives decried the shift from small, individual businesses to large corporations and they urged the breakup of trusts and monopolies. Yet they patterned the administration of their schools after the corporate model of central control over decision-making. Local schools lost their autonomy and were forced to cede control of curriculum, hiring, student discipline, and parent relations to the school district.

In the social realm, the theories of Jacob Riis and John Dewey, and the establishment of settlement houses, developed as a counter to the fragmentation of communities by industrialization. In particular, Jane Addams supported settlement houses, urging

*Montessori elementary students at work*
teachers were usually immigrants from the same countries. Thus, immigrant children were being educated but were not assimilating into the American mainstream. A leading educational historian and administrator of the time, Ellwood P. Cubberly, wrote in Changing Conceptions of Education that these new immigrants were “illiterate, docile and lacking in self-reliance and initiative and not possessing the Anglo-Teutonic conceptions of law, order and government” (Gutek, 1986, p. 180). If the dominant culture was to be preserved from dilution, then these children must be assimilated, and Cubberly proposed that the agent for change should be the school. The mandated curriculum would include courses in English, American History, and Civics.

The plight of the immigrant raised the question that reformers of the time, seeking to Americanize the immigrants, were struggling with. Just what was “Americanization”? Reformers settled on a vague mission of uplifting the immigrant’s life through social education. Regardless of the varied progressive impulses, the one thing the reformers all had in common was the assertion that education would be at the heart of their mission.

In 1892, a previously scattershot approach to reform coalesced into a united effort when a muckraking pediatr...
losophy into a methodology for instruction. Progressive education shifted from child-centered, experimental private schools into a wide-ranging doctrine of progressivism in the teacher training schools. A student of Dewey’s, Kilpatrick went to Teachers College at Columbia University, the preeminent teachers college in the country, where he received his doctorate and stayed on to teach philosophy and education. During his long tenure here, Kilpatrick influenced thousands of teachers with his progressive doctrine. His project-method approach rejected traditional teaching methods of book learning, which he said were indirect and secondhand, and instead embraced an experiential approach to problem-solving, which he said would foster a “democratic sense of community” (Gutek, 1986, p. 223).

Meanwhile in the classroom, self-expression was king. Harold O. Rigg, an influential educational progressive, wrote in his 1928 work, The Child Centered Classroom, that children are born with the power to create, so they should be immersed in an environment that fosters that creativity. The teacher was left to interpret this mandate and the result was progressivism run wild. Critics had a field day characterizing the free-roaming child wreaking havoc in the classroom. Even Dewey weighed in as a critic of the child-centered education, attacking it for its lack of adult guidance. Indeed, he called for progressive educators to refocus on education and to give less credence to the “isms” of the divisive movement (Gutek, 1986, p. 237).

In sum, Progressivism was a reaction to a rapidly changing America, one now mostly urban and industrial. Although the progressive education movement sprang from a humanist impulse, it was too vague, general, and all encompassing. Progressives clearly outlined what they opposed but could not articulate and implement specifics for change. Lawrence Cremin recapitulated the achievements of the progressive movement in education: a more focused attention on the child, the acknowledgment of the importance of the interest of the learner, the need for the child’s free movement in his activities, a new perception of education’s role in character development, and a championing of the rights of the child (Cremin, 1961).

**Emergent Montessori**

Montessori’s radical philosophy shifted away from traditional practices that equated an immobile child with a good child. However, in her proposals to make schools more child-centered, she differentiated herself from other progressives. She held that while an understanding of the needs of the child is the basis for the educational approach, such an understanding is the starting point only, for it is always the teacher who decides what the options are and are not available to the child. In no way did she advocate a free-for-all in which children could follow any whim. The child was free “to do the right thing” (Kramer, 1976, p. 118). The adult, in Montessori’s view, immediately intervenes if the child is doing harm. Montessori also expected parents to follow the same guidelines at home. Kramer (1976) writes that Montessori compared the relationship of the teacher and the student to the doctor and the patient; while it is the child who does the learning and the patient who does the healing, it is the professional, whether it be the doctor or the teacher, who is trained to know what options are available and which are most appropriate. The trained adult in education knows best what the developing child needs.

Montessori theorized that if children were permitted to move about at their discretion, choosing what interested them, they would manifest self-discipline because of their deep interest in the work. She made it very clear, however, that there was a world of difference between freedom and anarchy. Children were free to do what was appropriate under the authority of the adult. Essentially, Montessori was a social revolutionary who believed that
Reports of Montessori’s work first reached America in 1909.

The individual’s transformation originates in an appropriate environment, and societal transformations originate with the individual.

Reports of Montessori’s work first reached America in 1909 in the form of an article in the educational journal The Kindergarten Primary Magazine by Dr. Jenny B. Merrill, an editor at the magazine and a kindergarten supervisor (Kramer, 1976, p. 150). The article detailed how teachers needed to take a new, more passive, role in relation to the child. Traditional teachers did not like this idea; they did not approve of early writing or reading, nor did they like the descriptions of Montessori’s practical life exercises, such as sweeping and scrubbing. The teachers equated these activities with preparing children to become butlers and waiters and they thought that these tasks promoted child labor. Further, they criticized Montessori’s use of self-correcting materials, complaining that they seemed too much like training and would hinder the child’s free expression.

However, Montessori’s ideas did attract followers. Numerous American educational and psychological professionals visited Montessori in Rome, including Arnold and Beatrice Gesell, William Heard Kilpatrick, G. Stanley Hall, and S.S. McClure of McClure’s Magazine. Harvard University expressed interest in undertaking the English translation of her book. The first American Montessori school opened in Tarrytown, NY in 1911, and another soon followed in Boston. Montessori was persuaded to conduct training for English speaking teachers from America and England after an avalanche of requests from school officials as well as teachers (Kramer, 1976, p. 155).

The Montessori Message Spreads to America

The general American public first encountered the work of Maria Montessori just prior to the outbreak of World War I. The zeitgeist of the prewar era was generally optimistic, prosperous, and reform-minded. Wilbur Wright flew an airplane at Kitty Hawk, the Ford Motor Company produced millions of Model “T” automobiles, Frank Lloyd Wright built prairie-style homes, and Woodrow Wilson, a progressive educator, was in the White House.

The growth of the Montessori movement coincided with the proliferation of print media in America. By 1912, Montessori’s work was reported in educational journals such as American Education, Journal of Educational Psychology, The Kindergarten Review, Pedagogical Seminary, and The American Primary Teacher. Articles appeared in popular magazines such as Ladies’ Home Journal, Dial, Scientific American, the Delineator, and Contemporary Review (Kramer, 1976, p. 158). But it was McClure’s Magazine that made Montessori a household name.

S. S. McClure had made his reputation and magazine with his uncanny ability to understand the American mood and to sense what Americans wanted to read. Montessori was perfect for McClure’s Magazine. When the first articles on Montessori were published in 1911, the response was so overwhelming that McClure immediately commissioned additional articles. Readers wanted to know when her book would be translated into English, wanted to obtain the didactic materials to use with their own children, and wanted to know where they could take the training.

By 1912, interest in Montessori exploded across the country and Americans of influence began to involve themselves in the Montessori movement. Additionally, the didactic materials became available for sale to the public, with a warning that they were not toys and were to be sold only as a set, not individually. The English translation of The Montessori Method was soon published under the auspices of Harvard University. The introduction, written by Henry W. Holmes, professor of Education at Harvard, urged American schools to adopt the Montessori approach. The first edition of 5,000 copies sold out in 4 days, and 6 months later the sixth edition of the book was released. The Montessori Method became the second-largest-selling nonfiction book in the United States in 1912 (Chattin-McNichols, 1981).

The U.S. Bureau of Education published numerous booklets on educational subjects and in 1912, after the publication of The Montessori Method, it published an analysis of the book and the method. Assuming that certain changes could be made to the Montessori method because of different social conditions in America, and that more time could be allowed for American children to acquire the ability to read because of the English language’s more difficult phonetics, the Bureau concluded that the Montessori approach “could be readily integrated into American schools” (U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1912, p. 489). Teacher colleges in several states gave lectures on the Montessori approach, and the number of articles on Montessori mushroomed. Parents grabbed Montessori’s book off the shelves and clamored for more.

The New York Times was not so impressed. An August 1913 article disparaged the popular appeal of Montessori:

(The methods of Maria Montessori have been threatened with complete suffocation at the hands of the dilettante enthusiasts, whose destructive power is as that of the tribes.)
from the North and who are responsible for the word “fad” being in the dictionaries at all. (The New York Times Review of Books, 1913, p. 425)

More books appeared on the subject, including A Montessori Mother by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, in which the basic Montessori principles were explained in simple terms that encouraged mothers to use Montessori methods in the home. Fisher compared the Montessori approach favorably with the kindergarten: “In the kindergarten the emphasis is laid, consciously or unconsciously, but very practically always, on the fact that the teacher teaches. In the Casa Dei Bambini, the emphasis is all on the fact that the child learns” (Fisher, 1965, p.180).

Fisher wrote another book shortly after the first one, entitled The Montessori Manual for Teachers and Mothers. And in 1912, the Montessori American Committee was organized to promote Montessori education in America.

Maria Montessori was furious with both the creation of American organizations and books written about her method. She insisted that any organization or publication with her name on it must meet with her prior approval and be under her direction. Nevertheless, Montessori societies sprang up all over the world and the need for teachers reached critical proportions.

In January 1913, Montessori conducted an international training course in Rome. It was presented in Italian and translated into English. Students came from all over the world. Montessori, self-possessed on the podium and dressed all in black, spoke of the need for a new kind of teacher, one whose primary concerns were the careful preparation of the environment and the keen observation of the children as they worked. She mesmerized her students, many of whom, as Dorothy Canfield Fisher observed, became devoted followers, like “nuns about an adored Mother Superior” (Kramer, 1976, p. 180). Two Americans who would figure large in Montessori’s life attended this international training: Helen Parkhurst, who would later split from Montessori and create a school called the Dalton Plan, and Adelia McAlpine Pyle, an American heiress who would later translate many Montessori lectures and courses into English.

Montessori received no income from a university; her only source of revenue remained the trainings and lecture fees. Though she tightly controlled the rapidly growing Montessori movement, she did welcome funding from those outside the system who supported her ideas.

Among the contributors were members of the Alexander Graham Bell family who, in 1913, created the Montessori Education Association as an outgrowth of the Montessori American Committee. Mabel Hubbard Bell, wife of Alexander Graham Bell, was the president and board members included Dorothy Canfield Fisher, S .S. McClure, Margaret Woodrow Wilson (the President’s daughter), and the U.S. Commissioner of Education, Philander P. Claxton (Kramer, 1976, p. 180). The purpose of this organization was to promote Montessori in America and to train teachers. Once again, however, Montessori balked at the idea that anyone other than herself could conduct teacher trainings, to the point of stating her objections publicly and in print. In a letter to the editor in the New York Times in August 1913, Montessori wrote:

I feel it would be premature to establish training schools which were 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. (The New York Times, 1913, p. 6)

Critics increased as Montessori’s popularity rose. The American education establishment frowned on her proprietary stance, accusing her of cultivating a church, not education (Kramer, 1976). They charged that allowing children free choice would create egomaniacs. Her defenders answered the criticisms by explaining the difference between anarchy and freedom. All this debate heightened public interest to the point that Montessori’s defenders urged her to come to America. No doubt, S. S. McClure also saw a visit by Montessori to America as a great potential source of revenue. In November 1913, Montessori and McClure set sail for America.

Montessori Visits America

By the time Montessori and McClure landed in New York on December 3, 1913, McClure had done his job; the press was there in force to greet her. Reporters mobbed her hotel suite, where Montessori calmly answered all their questions, often using Anne George as her interpreter. She told them that she was in favor of the vote for women and supported a woman working outside the home. Her patience, forthrightness, and charm won the press over. The New York Tribune quoted her as saying, “Americans are the most intelligent people in the world” (New York Tribune, 1913). All the major New York papers reported on her arrival in posi-

The Montessori Method became the second-largest-selling non-fiction book in the United States in 1912.
And another said that within a few years her system would “modify all existing educational systems and theories and . . . take their place” (Kramer, 1976, p. 192).

Next, Montessori traveled to Washington, D.C., met the Alexander Graham Bell family, and visited the school they had established in the nation’s capital. Margaret Wilson also greeted her with apologies from her father, the President, who excused himself because of the flu. On December 6th, Montessori gave her first lecture in America at the Masonic Temple in Washington, D.C., during which she also showed films of the children working at the Casa Dei Bambini. After the lecture, she was feted at a lavish reception at the Bell home where she was greeted by leaders of Washington society and politics. The receiving line, in addition to Dr. Montessori and her interpreter, included Mrs. Bell, Margaret Wilson, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, and the wife of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior (Beinn Bhreagh Recorder, 1914). The Journal of Education weighed in that week with its perspective:

Whatever may be thought of the Montessori method of dealing with children and of Mr. McClure’s method of dealing with the public there can be no question as to the general effect of any group of personalities that can make any educa-
tional event such a fad—we use the term appreciatively—as to fill a large auditorium with persons, most of whom pay two dollars each in order to demonstrate their interest in education. (Journal of Education, 1913, p. 605)

On the following Monday, Montessori returned to New York, where she spoke at Carnegie Hall to one of the largest audiences ever gathered there. Thousands were turned away at the door. John Dewey, who was by now famous at Columbia University and was also the president of the National Kindergarten Association, appeared on the dais with her, and many notable American educators were also in attendance. S. S. McClure introduced her as the “greatest woman educator in history” (Kramer, 1976, p. 194). Montessori spoke for over 2 hours and showed her movies of the children at the Casa. Again the response was overwhelming; press reports the next day reflected admiration and approval.

On Tuesday, Montessori traveled to Philadelphia to meet with Helen Keller. News reports of the meeting flashed all over the world headlining “the four it took for the two to have a conversation” (their talk had to be translated from Italian to English and then spelled into Keller’s hand by Anne Sullivan Macy) (The New York Times, 1913). Their complicated yet engaging discussion revealed that they had a similar goal: the liberation of the oppressed, wherever they may be (Freedom for the Child, 1914).

Montessori filled every day in America with lectures, meetings and interviews. She returned to New York, where she again met with people of influence at the highest levels including the president of Columbia University. Next, she went to Boston to meet with the faculty of Harvard University, and on to New Jersey where she visited Thomas Edison and took a tour of his laboratory. Returning to New York, she gave a final speech at Carnegie Hall to another wildly enthusiastic audience. She then traveled to the Midwest, visiting Pittsburgh and Chicago, where she met with Jane Addams of Hull House, and continued on to J. H. Kellogg’s sanitarium retreat at Battle Creek, MI. She returned to New York for one last reception, then sailed to Europe aboard the Lusitania on Christmas Eve, 1913. To the reporters who were there to see her off, she made one last statement about America:

Your wonderful country is one of the hopes of the civilized world. The feel of youth is in the air and soil. You will rear here the greatest race the world has ever known. It is in your blood. The mixing of the peoples of the earth will produce a great posterity. No country has the heritage to leave to its children like the heritage of the American people. America is glorious. Glorious because of its achievement, of course, but more than that, glorious because of the thought it has taken for its children. And I must bow with humility to the American mother. She is one of the wonders of your growing men. (Kramer, 1976, p. 202)

After a 3-week visit she was gone. This trip would mark the high point of her popularity in America; the subsequent actions of John Dewey and William Kilpatrick would irreparably affect the way Americans looked at Montessori.

Montessori, Dewey, and Kilpatrick
Montessori’s most ardent critic was William Heard Kilpatrick, the most famous education teacher in America, ensconced in the most prestigious teaching university in America at the time, Columbia University’s
Kilpatrick, a Southerner educated in the strict tradition of recitation, repression, and religion, traveled to Baltimore in 1891 for his graduate work at Johns Hopkins. There, in the more electric atmosphere of intellectual inquiry and high academic standards, he encountered the intellectual ferment he found lacking in the South. The cooperative atmosphere, in which professors worked with their students instead of just lecturing at them, inspired Kilpatrick to seek a teaching degree. He studied the educational theorists Page, Spencer, Froebel, and Pestalozzi and concluded that cooperation between adult and student rather than an adversarial relationship was essential to successful education.

Kilpatrick developed the “Project Method” of education, wherein students would learn even without the physical presence of the teacher (Beineke, 1998, p. 22). In his own teaching, he allowed students to move about the room, eliminated corporal punishment, added field trips, and abolished commencement, claiming it was too competitive. He used concrete learning tools in teaching geometry, and he eliminated report cards. He believed that the goal of education was to create an internal locus of control in the child, enabling him to become an independent learner. Further, he believed if children were given relevant material and treated with respect, they would behave and respond appropriately. Kilpatrick was personally charming and all his students loved him; he in turn could remember students’ names 60 years later. He believed that teachers should “deny the self and selfish inclinations” and devote themselves to the service of the institution where they taught (Beineke, 1998, p. 28).

Kilpatrick became interested in the field of educational studies that focused on Herbert Spencer and William James, particularly the subject of the relationship between the student’s interest and his level of success. He sat in on a course taught by John Dewey, which also focused on student interest. This course proved to be a turning point in Kilpatrick’s life and was pivotal to his influence in the evolution of American education in the 20th century. Dewey theorized that to be effective, school curriculum should begin with what the student is interested in, rather than with prescribed subject matter (Beineke, 1998, p. 33). In a talk given in 1904, Dewey argued that the future of education would no longer focus on memorization, but rather emotions and feelings would be most important. He was emerging as a staunch proponent of the socialization theory of education (society before individualism):

Some people seem to think—and many more seem to act—as if the individual need consider only himself and his own interest, or only himself and his family and his immediate group (Kilpatrick, 1951, p. 33). Dewey also said, “[E]ducation must be a social process, on the procedural side; and it must aim to bring high quality social living into effect.” (Kilpatrick, 1951, p. 43)

In 1907, Kilpatrick enrolled in Teachers College at Columbia University to earn his PhD, and specifically to work with Dewey, who taught in both the Philosophy Department at Columbia and at Teachers College. The two men connected immediately. Dewey considered Kilpatrick “the best student I ever had” (Beineke, 1998, p. 60). To Kilpatrick, Dewey may have been a brilliant philosopher and theorist, but he certainly was not an eloquent speaker or teacher. During class, Dewey would think out loud and would often pause mid-lecture to consider something new. Kilpatrick decided that Dewey needed an interpreter, because even the brightest students could not comprehend him; and Kilpatrick contrived to fill that role.

Two critical aspects of Dewey’s thinking that intrigued Kilpatrick were interest and effort. To Dewey, “interest” meant an attraction, a quality presented by the student, rather than instilled by the teacher, and “effort” was the student’s self-motivated pursuit of interest. One flowed naturally from the other and they were, therefore, inseparable (Beineke, 1998, p. 60). From these ideas, Dewey’s theory of “experimentalism” emerged, which emphasized “process, continuity of nature, and inductive method of science” (Beineke, 1998, p. 61).

Kilpatrick accepted all of it, calling it Deweyism. Deweyism rejected absolutes, authority, and a priori (derived from self-evident propositions) thinking as too dogmatic and artificial, and pronounced that education must correspond to the realities of the world, realities which by their very nature were constantly changing and could never be static or fixed (Beineke, 1998, p. 61). In his personal diary, Kilpatrick wrote: “(P)h,penology is forever changing, i.e., does not make a permanent deposit of truth on which it builds; this is true in a measure, but the explanation is that in an ever-changing

Montessori’s most ardent critic was William Heard Kilpatrick, the most famous education teacher in America.
Parents, students, and the general public were clamoring for anything Montessori.

Although Kilpatrick had studied Italian specifically to talk with Montessori, once face to face with her, the translations and interpretations left him dissatisfied with the actual interview. He couldn’t always tell whether Montessori did not understand or if she chose not to answer him. After visiting a few Italian schools implementing the Montessori approach, Kilpatrick noted that many of the children seemed “free, almost to the point of doing nothing” (Beineke, 1998, p. 69). He was also gratified to see children using the didactic materials in ways other than those specifically prescribed by Montessori, which seemed to suggest that her specific prescriptions for their use were too limiting. “The children use the material for all manner of construction not intended by Madam M” (Beineke, 1998, p. 70).

Kilpatrick returned from Rome, and on August 7, 1912, initiated a series of lectures on his observations and opinions of Montessori, which were well attended. Pleased with himself, Kilpatrick wrote in his diary that night, “I felt that I gripped the crowd and from the number of expressions that came to my ears, I judge that I made a good talk” (Beineke, 1998, p. 71). He was also satisfied to learn that his colleagues at Teachers College agreed with his negative evaluation of Montessori’s methods.

Kilpatrick’s assessment, entitled The Montessori System Examined, was published in 1914. It was the publication of this monograph in addition to his lectures and comments in academic journals that tipped the balance in favor of the academic rejection of Montessori. Although Kilpatrick appreciated Montessori’s concept of giving children more freedom, he dismissed her approach as being behind the times and derided her system as lacking in imaginative play. He disagreed that sense training was a necessary precursor to later learning. He dismissed her enormous popularity and concluded that she contributed nothing to educational theory.

The question of a permanent contribution turns on whether there have been presented original points of view capable of guiding fruitfully educational procedure. What novel and original ideas have we found that could at the same time bear the scrutiny of criticism? The scientific conception of education is certainly valid. Madam Montessori may, in a way, have come upon it herself; but no one could say that the world did not have a fuller conception of it prior to her. The most that can be claimed on this point is that her advocacy and example have proved stimulating. Her doctrine of education as unfolding is neither novel nor correct. In the doctrine of liberty she has made no theoretical contribution; though probably her practice will prove distinctly valuable. Our kindergartens and primary schools must take account of her achievement in this respect. Her doctrine
of auto-education will at most provoke thought; the term is good, the idea old. Her utilization of “practical life” activities, more specifically her solution of early tenement-house education, must prove distinctly suggestive. It may well turn out that the Casa Dei Bambini is after all her greatest contribution. The sense-training which to her seems most worth while, we decline to accept except in a very modified degree. The didactic apparatus we reject in like degree. Her preparation for the school arts should prove very helpful in Italy. It is possible that her technique of writing will prove useful everywhere. If so, that is a contribution. With this the list closes. We owe no large point of view to Madam Montessori. Distinguishing contribution from service, she is most a contributor in making the Casa Dei Bambini. Her greatest service lies probably in the emphasis on the scientific conception of education, and in the practical utilization of liberty. (Kilpatrick, 1914, pp. 66–67)

In his keynote address at the April 1913 meeting of the International Kindergarten Union, Kilpatrick denounced Montessori as merely derivative of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel. He criticized her methods for lacking free play and stories, and her theories for taking too narrow a view of the function of the school (Kramer, 1976). He concluded that “Montessori has then, the spirit, but not the content of modern science” (Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the International Kindergarten Union, Washington, D.C., Apr. 29–May 2, 1913, p. 118).

In an article for Kindergarten Review, Kilpatrick criticized Montessori for not knowing the doctrine of formal discipline, even though she was practicing it. Formal discipline is a “systematic refinement of a sense organ so that it may be better used whenever that sense may be desired” (Shepard, 1996, p. 268). Not only had she not heard of it, complained Kilpatrick, but she was unaware that it had been rejected by modern psychology. Kilpatrick’s opinions were convincing. In an address to the North Carolina Teachers Assembly in November 1913, he called Montessori’s didactic apparatus “a very expensive and well-nigh useless toy” (Kilpatrick, 1914, p. 70).

Kilpatrick’s attacks devastated the Montessori movement. Educators read his book and his articles, listened to his lectures, and parroted his opinions. Kilpatrick’s dim view of Montessori became the educational establishment’s view as well (Kramer, 1976). After a visit to Rome in 1914, the National Kindergarten Association reported to the U.S. Bureau of Education that Montessori’s emphasis was on the development of the individual rather than “group work” and was notable for its dearth of creative expression (Kramer, 1976, p. 229). The chorus became a litany: the materials were too restrictive in their use, inhibiting the teacher; the approach lacked free play and stifled imagination; and too much emphasis was placed on the individual at the expense of society. In 1915, the magazine Sunset published an article entitled “The Montessori Cult’s Eclipse,” claiming that Montessori education failed because it focused on the individual, who “does not need stimulation; rather he needs to be guided into interwoven patterns of social activity and social discipline” (Sunset, 1915, pp. 657–658). By 1920, the assessment of Montessori in American education read like an epitaph. In Public Education in the United States, E. P. Cubberly, echoing Kilpatrick’s words, wrote that Montessori had been rejected by most American educators because

Although Kilpatrick appreciated Montessori’s concept of giving children more freedom, he dismissed her approach as being behind the times and derided her system as lacking in imaginative play.
Montessori’s prescription for an individual-oriented education intersected with an early 20th-century American optimism fueled by technological and communication advances like the telephone and cheap means of printing. Information was the coin of the realm, and social discourse was the favorite pastime. Daily newspapers were plentiful, magazine subscriptions reached their zenith in the late 19th and early 20th century, and public lectures were a popular source of entertainment as well as education. So Montessori’s rise in popularity was swift and not at all surprising.

Montessori was the progenitor of a revolutionary approach to education. She formulated an auto-education philosophy and methodology encompassing characteristics of rational cognitive development and organic holism that would stand the test of time and endure into the 21st century.

However, Montessori’s messianic perspective prohibited collaborations, and consequently she would not sanction teachers who were not personally trained by her, nor allow any other person or group to speak for her on behalf of her ideas. Years later, Montessori blamed the failure of the American Montessori movement on America’s insistence on trained teachers:

“In America, experiments never succeeded because they looked for the best teachers, and a good teacher meant one who had studied all the things that do not help the child, and was full of ideas which were opposed to the child’s freedom.” (Montessori, 1989, p. 52)

The negative influence of Kilpatrick and Dewey was substantial and damaging in education circles, but could have been overcome by capitalizing on the groundswell of public endorsement Montessori received in 1913. But Montessori fought poorly in both arenas. She lost the professional education battle because she neither concerned herself with, nor responded to, her opponents’ position. She had long since divorced herself from the university system and thus had no base for publications of her work in scholarly journals, nor any meaningful influence in academic institutions. That Teachers College may have seen her ideas as a threat to their entrenched system did not concern Montessori at all. She neither refuted their objections nor engaged in professional dialog. In explaining why she never responded to their attacks, she said,

“If I am going up a ladder . . . and a dog begins to bite at my ankles, I can do one of two things, either turn around and kick at it, or simply go up the ladder. I prefer to go up the ladder.” (Campbell, 1970, p. 58)

Thus, the Progressives won the professional educational war with little effort and without sacrificing a casualty of their own. American popular culture initially accepted Montessori, but she needed emissaries to maintain and expand her influence. Instead, she estranged all those who supported her, including professional educators, Henry V. Holmes of Harvard University; U.S. Commissioner of Education Dr. P. P. Claxton, her media champion S. S. McClure; and her organizational champions, the Bells.

As consumers, Americans clamor for a commodity that they perceive will enhance their lives, but if it is not made available to them, they will look for a substitute. American popular opinion accepted Montessori in 1913, but she did not deliver the goods. Her attitude and recalcitrance created the shortage, and that very silence, amplified by her foes’ bellowing, eventually destroyed the first Montessori movement in America. There was nothing to buy and so her idea evaporated into the ether.

Montessori could not have conceived of what it would take to systematically transform American education. Her celebrity status and her brilliant ideas were not enough by themselves to overcome the entrenched educational model in place, nor provide the organization and people needed to meet popular demand. It would be almost a half-century later before another innovator—Nancy McCormick Rambusch—would come along and reinvigorate the Montessori model for a new generation of Americans eager for educational excellence for their children.

References


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A complex form of aid to the harmonious development of man from birth to adulthood.

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Yes, in giving the aid suitable to harmonious development by removing obstacles that may hinder it, and by giving opportunity of unfoldment to the tendencies and of fulfillment to the potentialities of children.

No, because the aspect of tendencies and of potentialities change in the different age groups as does the relative influence of the unconscious and the subconscious.

Are all the aspects of the aids which have been determined alike in each country?
The essential aspects which are related to the development are alike in all countries because all children pass through the same phases of growth and development. For instance in the age group 0–6 all normal children put their first tooth, begin to manipulate, learn to walk and to talk with individual variations but in a determined span of time.

All pass through the same sensitive periods. These concern sensorial development, acquisition and perfecting of equilibrium in deambulation, language development, interest in the exercises of practical life, in mathematics, writing and reading, etc.

So the attitude of the grown-up and the method used will be the same, but the means will vary with regard to local cultures. The exercises of practical life in England for instance will not be the same as those in India. The exercises to prepare the children to write will be the same; but the alphabets differ, the sandpaper letters and the movable alphabet in such countries as India, Ceylon, Russia, etc. will differ from one another. What must be kept in mind with regard to these similarities and differences is the fact that Dr. Montessori was among the first to realize that the child has both “to become” by acquiring his different physical and mental abilities; and to “belong” by acquiring adaptation to the culture of the group within which he grows.

Did Dr. Montessori assume that as far as education she had said the last word?
No. The last time Dr. Montessori attended a Montessori International Congress, in answer to a speech which complimented her on her method, she answered that focusing their attention on her and calling what she had done a method, people showed little understanding. What she had done was to give the possibility to children to reveal that they possessed a hidden energy with immense potentialities which, if studied and exploited, would have far more reaching consequences than electricity. . . .

“As far as the knowledge of the child is concerned, we are at the stage of Galvani”*, she said. “But ahead lays the atomic power in the spiritual field. This will be obtained only when the secret of the child, which is the atom of man, will be fully revealed and exploited.”

*Galvani (1737–1798) was an Italian physician and physicist who discovered that muscles and nerve cells produce electricity.

Why Montessori disappeared from America and other countries.
In my view Montessori disappeared from America for these reasons:

one: that the same lack of understanding that the European Montes-
Montessorians are confronted with now, confronted Dr. Montessori.

two: that Dr. Montessori hated war and therefore made her headquarters in neutralist Spain when America joined the first world war.

three: that because of events which I am about to relate, she became disgusted with America and never returned.

Dr. Montessori was confronted by all sorts of accusations. It may sound ridiculous now, but at the time it was stated by eminent people that she hypnotized the children. Because when having read her books and having deduced that the Montessori material made children angels, people bought it, left children free with it with the result that they broke each other’s heads with the long rods.

To give another example of what she had to deal with: an American professor of education was very offended when, having asked her what was her secret to induce four-and-a-half-year-old children to write, received the answer: “I give them the alphabet.” This seemed ridiculous to him, and he countered contemptuously: “Yes, of course, you want to exploit your secret.”

With regard to the Montessorians in America: those of the East fought against those of the West. The American Montessori Society, which wished to launch the Montessori in the world on a sound commercial basis and had money and the influence to do it (to mention just two names: Mr. Graham Bell was president and Miss Margaret Wilson, the daughter of the President, secretary), left indignantly the field when they encountered the “rigidity” of Dr. Montessori who refused to comply with the laws of the country which requested that no formal teaching (writing, reading, arithmetic) should be included in the pre-elementary institutions run with her method.

Lack of qualifications had nothing to do with the disappearance of Montessori in America. Nor lack of knowledge of American culture or climate. Not even stubborn rigidity of loyalism which made no research possible.

The Montessori exponents of that time were not Europeans, and certainly they had no lack of qualifications in the pedagogical field. Miss Anne George who worked in Washington, Miss Craig in Philadelphia, Miss Eva McLin and Miss Helen Watson in New York, Miss Helen Parkhurst who directed a Training College in Wisconsin, and Miss Katherine Moore in California did certainly not lack in qualifications. And they were the biggest exponents of Montessori theory and of practice in Montessori teaching.

Why Dr. Montessori met with so many difficulties.
I think you all know how she began. She had discovered a new energy. The expressions of which were spirituality and mental hunger. . . . She realized that she was describing the real nature of the child which had been hidden through circumstances deriving from prejudice, traditionalism, and lack of understanding on the part of adults. Continuing her study she experienced that if the conditions she offered were abided by, the phenomenon repeated itself with children of all races. . . .

It was not a question of giving children more freedom, more activity, more material to play with: what interested her was this spontaneous emergence of spirituality and the shedding of frivolity for the sake of work which only few took into consideration. She considered this more important for humanity than learning how to learn. With study one can arrive at the discovery of atomic energy, but without this essence of spirituality, one can use it to make atomic bombs.

—Mario Montessori

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The AMS Teacher Education Scholarship Fund

Dottie Sweet Feldman, wishing to provide financial assistance to persons interested in becoming Montessori teachers and searching for an appropriate way to honor the memory of her late father, suggested the creation of the AMS Scholarship Fund during the school year 1988–89. Under the leadership of National Director Bretta Weiss, and AMS President Carole Wolfe Korngold, the AMS Scholarship Fund was approved, giving life to Feldman’s dream. Later, to avoid confusion with scholarships for children, the fund was renamed the AMS Teacher Education Scholarship Fund, with the stated mission of assisting “aspiring Montessori teachers accepted into American Montessori Society teacher education programs.”

Feldman served as chair of the teacher education scholarship committee, established by the AMS Board of Directors, retiring in 2006. She cites the ongoing support and participation of Pam Zirko as critical to the success of the committee’s work. Over the years, the fund has disbursed $240,000 to more than 150 aspiring Montessori teachers.

The Living Legacy

In a casual, brainstorming conversation in the late 1980s, Susie Shelton Dodge, past president of AMS, suggested that the teacher education scholarship committee, with the approval of the Board of Directors, create an American Montessori Society Living Legacy “to recognize individuals whose exemplary achievements have had significant impact …” on children and families in American Montessori Society schools. The AMS Board, in conjunction with Shelton Dodge, felt the Living Legacy would serve two noteworthy goals: to honor and thank in a very public way Montessorians who have made outstanding contributions to the education of children and to the Society and to provide a focus for raising sufficient funds to support teacher education scholarships.

Selection of the Living Legacy occurs annually. The AMS Living Legacy Committee selects the honoree with the approval of the AMS Board of Directors and distributes funds to scholarship recipients in the name of the Living Legacy. Contributions are made during the honoree’s designated calendar year and for an unspecified number of years thereafter.

2006–2007 Living Legacy

The 2006–2007 Living Legacy honor reflects a departure in tradition, with the selection of Dottie Sweet Feldman as the quintessential Montessorian, representing all Montessori teachers. Feldman’s achievements, spanning a 35-year period, reflect her dedication, hard work, ingenuity, perseverance, and high ethical standards; in short, the qualities of an exemplary Montessori teacher. As such it is fitting that she be the standard-bearer for Montessori teachers in this centennial year.

Feldman is recognized as the initiator of the AMS Teacher Education Scholarship Fund. She is also the president and cofounder of, and presenter for, Educational Sounds & Images, Inc., a producer of language arts materials that are strongly influenced by current brain-based research. Her newest book is *Sequential Phonetic Skill Building Exercises for Early Childhood and Elementary I*.

Feldman also serves as a visiting instructor, independent school consultant, lecturer, workshop presenter, accreditation evaluator, and team leader. In February 2006, she was keynote speaker at the Montessori Educational Programs International (MEPI) Conference. She and Teri Canaday conducted workshops on “Brain Research and the Montessori Method of Teaching Reading” as part of the AMS 2006–2007 Touring Symposia.

Feldman started her Montessori career as an elementary teacher. She holds a master’s degree in education and AMS Early Childhood, Elementary I, and Elementary II credentials. Her extensive work in teacher education began in the 1970s in Elementary I, with Central Ohio Montessori Education for Teachers (COMET). She then cofounded the Columbus Montessori
Teacher Education Program (CMTEP), serving as codirector for 9 years and instructor for 17 years. She has taught Montessori theory and practice, classroom leadership and management, language arts, and observation and recordkeeping and has written resource books in each of these subject areas.

For 18 years, Feldman was an active member of the AMS Teacher Education Committee and chaired that committee as well as the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) Early Childhood Taskforce. From 1994 to 2000, she was director of AMS School Consultation and Accreditation services.
“Establishing lasting peace is the work of education...”
Maria Montessori

CONGRATULATIONS DOTTIE, MOM, NANA!
WE HONOR YOUR DEDICATION TO PEACE THROUGH
EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION!

All Our Love,
Bob, Joel, Liz, Leah, Andrea, Sam,
Mark, Tara, Gavi, Adina, Jodi, David, Jeremy, and Emma.

Did You Know?

MACTE: Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education

History: MACTE is the result of the merger of two previously existing accrediting bodies: AAMTE (the Accrediting Association for Montessori Teacher Education and ACCESS (the Accreditation Council for Childhood Education Specialist Schools). In 1995, MACTE was granted official recognition by the Secretary of Education.

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[Editors’ note: In October and November 2006, the editors interviewed a number of Montessorians—to learn about their personal Montessori journeys and to hear their insights on Montessori as a movement over the last 100 years and in the years to come. We would like to extend our personal thanks to all who took the time and made the effort to participate in the interview process. This will be an ongoing project; anyone wishing to participate should send an e-mail to EdMontessoriLife@aol.com to receive the questionnaire.]

THE INTERVIEWEES:

JUDI BAILERLEIN
is past president of AMS. Retired after 44 years of teaching, including high school and Montessori levels 3–6 and 6–12, she continues to work with teacher education programs around the United States.

JACK BLESSINGTON
is a former AMS Board Member, headmaster emeritus of Whitby School and Unquowa School, and a writer, lecturer, and television producer at CBS.

DR. JOHN CHATTIN-McNICHOLS
took the Bergamo AMI training in 1970–71 from Mario Montessori and received a doctorate from Stanford in Early Education and Child Development. He is a past president of AMS and teaches at Seattle University. He was the director of the AMS teacher education program in Seattle for 25 years.

DR. BETSY COE
is the founder and creative designer of the middle school and high school programs at the School of the Woods in Houston, TX, where she serves as principal and teacher. She is also executive director of the Houston Montessori Center for Teacher Education. A frequent presenter and keynote speaker at AMS traveling symposia, Betsy is an advocate for peace education. She holds AMS credentials in EC, EI-II, and SECI-II.

AMY HENDERSON
is a lifelong resident of Fort Worth, TX, and a 9–12 teacher and head of school at Montessori Children’s House in Fort Worth. She served as president of AMS and sat on the AMS Board of Directors for 8 years.

DR. MICHELE MONSON
is the head of Whitby School in Greenwich, CT. She holds the primary credential for ages 3–6 and has worked as a Montessori teacher at this level; she also holds degrees in elementary education and literacy education from Lesley University and educational administration, planning, and social policy from Harvard University.

ANNA P. PERRY, MeD
is director of Montessori Education Centers Associated (MECA) and educational director of Seton Montessori School, a lab school for the MECA Teacher Education Program, Clarendon Hills, IL.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF
is national director emerita, American Montessori Society, and past president, Council for American Private Education (CAPE).
Q How did you become involved with Montessori education?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: When I was in college, my favorite professor, Sister Mary Patricia, had met a man named Tom Laughlin who was very interested in Montessori. In 1959, she and Tom invited a speaker to visit Mount St. Mary’s and give a talk on Montessori. This talk was given by none other than Nancy McCormick Rambusch!

I was truly mesmerized. I had never before heard of any educational method that was so “sensible.” I made a vow then and there that if I ever had children, they would attend a Montessori school. Luckily I had three wonderful children, and they did indeed attend Montessori schools in Southern California.

JACK BLESSINGTON: [I was] hired by Nancy Rambusch to teach at Whitby School in 1960; I had read a little about Montessori and was taken with the possibilities.

JOHN CHATTIN-McNICHOLS: I took a part-time job with Santa Monica Montessori School in 1968 as a college student.

BETSY COE: I got involved when I was invited to a Montessori open house in 1973 in New Orleans. I came home from the open house with an assistant job and have been involved ever since.

AMY HENDERSON: My major in college was education and my early childhood instructor sent me to the premier kindergarten to observe. It was Montessori Children’s House in Fort Worth, TX. I had never heard of Montessori before but fell in love with the school immediately. I remember telling my husband (I married very young) that I had just found the school where we were going to send our children. He commented that we didn’t yet have children. I went on to teach for 7 years in the public schools and earned a master’s degree in education at the local university.

MICHÉLE MONSON: I observed at a school that was part of my university’s internship program, MECA-Seton in Clarendon Hills, IL. I enrolled in training immediately after my observation.

ANNA PERRY: I was born into it. Both my parents are Montessori educators. I attended Montessori school as a child (our home was upstairs and the school was downstairs), helped in the schools that my parents ran over all my summer breaks, and started running the summer camp program as a 19-year-old. It clicked with me.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: I became involved in Montessori education as a parent.

Q Describe your involvement in Montessori over the years. Has it evolved? Stayed the same? Declined? What is your involvement today?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: I began my Montessori journey as a parent. After teaching in high school for many years, I decided to stay home with my youngest child, Matthew. Two of the Montessori teachers had toddlers the same age as Matthew and asked if I would provide care for their children. They helped me create an environment for these three 13-month-olds. I loved the experience and decided to take the 3–6 Montessori training. After teaching at Glendale Montessori for 3 years, I was contacted about a public Montessori program starting in San Mateo, CA. I was offered the job and thus began my journey into the world of the 6–9-year-old. Eventually I took my 6–12 training at COMET (Central Ohio Montessori Education for Teachers). Before too long, I took on the roles of teacher educator, workshop presenter, consultant, and AMS Board member.

My involvement today is the result of an upward spiral that continues to grow and expand. My commitment to Montessori’s deep understanding of true education and to her vision becomes stronger and clearer as time passes and experiences accumulate.

JACK BLESSINGTON: I stayed at Whitby (took the training) for 14 years. I was head of school for 12 years (1962–73) and stayed on to help with a transition after I resigned. I was elected to the AMS Board and served there for about a dozen years, and have worked with Montessori schools ever since, even when I was running two other non-Montessori schools. With my years at the more traditional schools, I have had a chance to compare and I favor Montessori, but I am able to respect other approaches when they are done well. Today, I still lecture and consult on Montessori when asked by AMS or schools.

JOHN CHATTIN-McNICHOLS: To make it as short as possible: After jobs at Santa Monica Montessori School, including bus driver and summer school teacher, I was sent to Bergamo to take the 6–12 training (AMI) in 1970–71. I taught again in Santa Monica and then at the Montessori Elementary School of Santa Rosa in its first year. I presented my first paper on Montessori at a conference in 1974. I dropped out of teaching, got a doctorate in Child Development and Early Education at Stanford, and took a job as an assistant professor and director of the Montessori Teacher Education Program at Seattle University in 1979. When the University ended this program in 1986, I founded a corporation to continue AMS training in Seattle, the Montessori Education Institute of the Pacific Northwest (MEIPN), which I sold in 2004, after 25 years. I helped in the long process of the
creation of MACTE, beginning in 1974 at a meeting in Cleveland and ending when I, as president of MACCESS, the AMS half of the two founding organizations, asked for a motion to merge the two to create MACTE. I helped Peggy Loeffler found the Teachers’ Research Network in 1986 in scenic Norman, OK. I have done Montessori work in many states, in Canada and Mexico, in Nicaragua, Brazil, Australia, England, Ireland, and Italy. Since I sold MEIPN, I have begun work (writing and work on a national board) in other areas, but still write and present about Montessori education.

BETSY COE: I started as an early childhood teacher and, as my own children grew up, I wanted to make sure there was a program for them. Thus, I took elementary I and II and then created a Montessori middle school in 1982 for my daughters. I developed a Montessori high school 8 years ago after my daughters were grown. I have an administrator’s credential.

I have been involved as a teacher educator since 1979 and for the last 15 years have been the director of Houston Montessori Center. I have been chair of TEC (Teacher Education Committee) and now chair of TEAC (Teacher Education Action Committee). I served on the AMS Board of Directors for over 20 years and as AMS president.

I have had the opportunity to travel to many parts of the world. I have consulted with teachers and schools, shared ideas at conferences, facilitated peace retreats and touring symposia, chaired three AMS conferences, written articles for Montessori journals and books, and coordinated relief efforts for families affected by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

AMY HENDERSON: When my husband and I had our first child, I went back to the Montessori Children’s House of Fort Worth and told the directress, Joy Sheffield, that I would like to put my child on the waiting list. I told her that I visited years ago as a college student and remembered her tour. Never did I dream that she would ask me to become a part of the school, but that same year she did. First, I worked with the toddlers, then preschool, one year in the office, then a year helping with elementary.

Four years passed. Then, one day, a woman from Houston came to our school to do a parent education evening. Her name was Betsy Coe. I went to hear what she had to say about Montessori education. When I walked out, I commented to Joy, “I want to take my Montessori training from her.” I remember it as magical: Dr. Coe was coming to Fort Worth to teach a 6–9 course with the Houston Montessori Center.

About that time, the elementary teacher at Montessori Children’s House had to leave, so I was able to do my internship there. I taught at the 6–9 level for 10 years and loved it. Then, the Houston Montessori Center came to Fort Worth to run a 9–12 training for teachers. We needed at least twelve students to make the class, and I decided to take it to see what came after the 6–9 class work. When I returned to my school, all enthused about the work, Joy Sheffield and La Verne Davis (owners of MCH), remarked that I should start a 9–12 class.

We built another room on to the school. For 6 years, the three of us co-led the school: Joy and La Verne oversaw the toddler and preschool programs and I the elementary program. Meanwhile, I became involved with AMS. I taught and served on the AMS Board of Directors for 8 years, including 1 year as president. The following year, 2004, Joy and La Verne retired.

I have been leading the school alone for 3 years and it is thriv-

MICHELE MONSON: I left Montessori education for approximately 15 years and worked in progressive public education settings; my interest emerged again as a result of my consulting experience with Whitby 7 years ago.
ANNA PERRY: My involvement has definitely changed over the years, from being the child running around my parents’ school to being a camp counselor, swim instructor, outdoor coordinator, and camp director. After college, I got my master’s in school administration and my first Montessori certification and then returned to start taking over the MECA lab schools—three programs in the suburbs of Chicago that serve over 200 children, ages birth through 6, and their families—as my parents began their retirement process. . . . It’s not the typical path to school leadership, but not that uncommon when compared with other children of Montessori teachers who have become Montessorians themselves.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: In 1963, I helped start the Montessori School of Westchester in Larchmont, NY, with seven other interested parents. I started a second school with Musya Meyer in New Rochelle, NY, in 1972. I served as National Director of AMS from 1979–1992; Assistant Coordinator, Course for Montessori School Management (CMSM) of the CMTE/NY from 1992–2004; Co-coordinator with Marie Dugan of CMSM 2004–present; AMS School Accreditation Commission; MACTE and AMS TEC visitor; 2003–2004 Living Legacy; there is more but I think I should just say, “Still involved.”

Q Did your Montessori training have a significant impact on your philosophy of education? A significant impact on who you are now? Has experience in the classroom altered your philosophy or your view of yourself?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: I know that I experienced the “transformation” that Montessori discusses in her writings. Everything that I was learning, reading, and experiencing resonated deep within. I still feel that stirring of spirit when I hear people speak about Dr. Montessori, when I read her words or books written about her, when I teach, or when I observe students and teachers. When I was introduced to her concept of cosmic education and education for peace, I knew that I had come home. These concepts have been integral to my own spiritual development and sense of joy and wonder.

JACK BLESSINGTON: My work in Montessori has altered my view on schooling, learning, and family life. [Montessori’s] insights are more natural, but they require a prepared environment that allows for it, and this requires a Montessori school. In the home many ideas and approaches can be carried out without the formality of the school—so I always lecture in favor of the home. . . . But, when the choice is there, I favor the school in the home environment.

JOHN CHATTIN-McNICHOLS: Yes, Montessori has had a profound and continuous effect on me. It affected my parenting and my college teaching, among other areas, and still has a large influence today.

BETSY COE: The Montessori philosophy gave form to my beliefs in education as well as the way I view life. I believe we should educate for peace in all parts of life—learn to take care of ourselves, others, and the planet.

AMY HENDERSON: My Montessori training can only be described as transformational. I am now a faculty member of the Houston Montessori Center and also teach for the Vancouver Teacher Institute and have kept close contact with my teachers, mentors, and class members. I look at problems in different ways; have learned about framing, appreciative inquiry, multiple points of view, feelings of peace and inspiration; and experienced an almost magical circle of friends all involved in Montessori education. My early career as a teacher was as a traditional teacher, so I do see myself as different now that I have found Montessori philosophy.

MICHELE MONSON: I think my Montessori training fit with my vision of education and my role as an educator; it wasn’t so much that it impacted me as that I found a “home” in this philosophical context.

ANNA PERRY: I enjoyed the experience of going through Early Childhood certification because it was eye-opening in many ways. I came into the program very confident and immediately realized how much I really had to learn about both the reality of classrooms and the details of materials—which I was surprised to realize that I had only known on the surface really. I was pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed the classroom and how hard I had to work to make things run smoothly. . . .

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: No doubt my life was totally altered by making Montessori a philosophy of life as well as a career.

Q What do you see as the most significant accomplishment of the Montessori movement in the United States in the past 47 years?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: Certainly the introduction of Montessori into the public educational system has been one of the most significant accomplishments in the United States. This has made the Montessori way of life available to countless children who would never have had the opportunity to participate in this rich, comprehensive, and inspirational education.

JACK BLESSINGTON: Of course we who were at Whitby School see it as 48 years, and I think the most important accomplishment has been the spread of schools and training. We cannot grow beyond our supply of well-trained teachers and our capacity to grow up a pool of well-adjusted and trained administrators. Montessori is a special brand and requires much that conventional education doesn’t require.
JOHN CHATTIN-McNICHOLS: The viability of [Montessori] schools through all the changes in education theories and “new” ideas.

BETSY COE: Reaching students in a variety of settings—public, charter, independent schools.

AMY HENDERSON: Coming from a traditional educational background, I think Montessori helped the greater educational world think about using manipulative materials to introduce abstract ideas. A significant accomplishment is that the greater educational community has accepted Montessori and now we have parents who went to Montessori schools as children.

I think we have made great strides because we have demystified the Montessori approach and the approach has withstood the test of time. I believe future research will significantly affect the promotion of Montessori education. The more researchers examine the human brain, the more we can justify how and why we approach education using the teachings of Dr. Montessori.

MICHELE MONSON: A great deal of research in developmental education, cognitive development, and learning theory reinforces Dr. Montessori’s assumptions regarding the ways in which young children learn best and the ways in which we can structure educational environments to promote learning.

ANNA PERRY: Changing the lives of thousands of children and their families for the better.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: The biggest accomplishment is the continuing access for public school children.

Q The most significant failure?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: I don’t think that the word “failure” applies but I want the Montessori voice to be stronger—more vocal. We need to make a greater impact on so many of the educational practices, such as the obsession with testing. We must enter the discussion on universal preschool and ensure that quality opportunities are given to all children.

JACK BLESSINGTON: Spreading too fast in certain areas. We have too many schools using Montessori with 3–6-year-olds and then it is watered down. Some of this is because of the lack of available teachers; some comes from pressure by parents to move toward traditional approaches. We ought not to press for more schools but rather certify schools by sections. This one is certified 3–6, another 3–9, another 3–15, and on. . . . Training is key or we will water down the brand. The brand to me means the value of the differences I saw at Whitby for 16 years. Montessori provides a very different approach to the human potential and respects the timing and talent of an individual—this is very different from conventional schools, even the best of them. A second failing is we have not spread the value of Montessori’s insights to the home and the other educators, so the value of her techniques and insights can help teachers and parents and family life—since not everyone can afford the tuition of a Montessori school. The method need not be school-bound, but when it is in a school, we need standards and accreditation to protect the value.

JOHN CHATTIN-McNICHOLS: 1) Failure to get Montessori supporters to see why it matters that so few universities include Montessori in their teacher education programs—not to train Montessori teachers but to recognize her contributions as real and significant, and still playing a role for thousands of children every day.

2) Failure on the part of leaders to really sell schools and other supporters on the importance of serious and continuous research about Montessori. Look at the mileage the High Scope program gets from the one old study in Ypsilanti. . . .

AMY HENDERSON: The most significant failure is that Montessori education has not had the research to back the outcomes that it strives to achieve.

MICHELE MONSON: Montessorians fail to capitalize on the implications of the research base; Montessorians fight about things that don’t matter and are far too political for such a small organization; Montessorians are not very supportive of innovation.

ANNA PERRY: Focusing our efforts on middle class and wealthy families rather than public initiatives or programs that serve mixed-income, minority children—we could have made an even bigger difference here and served our own legitimacy in the process. Also, we have failed by not doing enough solid research to demonstrate and evaluate our work.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: The most significant failure is lack of leadership from the AMS Board of Directors through many years who never meet their responsibility of raising funds for the organization. (This is looking a little better with this 2006 Board.)

Q What is your favorite book written by Montessori?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: As a parent and grandparent, I will say Child in the Family. I love the examples she gives of adults who are attuned to young children and respect their important work of self-construction. Education and Peace reignites my passionate desire for peace and social justice. So many other of Dr. Montessori’s books come to mind for many different reasons, but I will stop here.

JACK BLESSINGTON: I have found something so enriching in several [of Montessori’s] books. But if I had to pick, I’d choose The Montessori Method, because it can lead you to the others.
JOHN CHATTIN-McNICHOLS: To Educate the Human Potential, or the “Erdkinder” pamphlet by Montessori.

BETSY COE: To Educate the Human Potential—it describes the cosmic view.

AMY HENDERSON: I have enjoyed The Absorbent Mind the most. Every time I read it, I have a different interpretation of the text. I also enjoy The Secret of Childhood. At this time in my life, [Montessori’s] books about peace speak to me the most because we are currently enduring so much unrest in the world community.

MICHELE MONSON: To Educate the Human Potential—because it challenges the soul of an educator and gives us a moral imperative to influence the world, one child at a time.

ANNA PERRY: To Educate the Human Potential. I like Montessori’s spiel on leadership and have taken it to heart.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: My favorite Montessori book is The Secret of Childhood because it has the best quotes. I use all of Montessori’s books for quotes for articles and talks.

Q What is your favorite book or resource of any type that you use or refer to often?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: There are so many, but if I have to limit myself to one, it would be The Sense of Wonder by Rachel Carson. How perfectly Ms. Carson understands the importance of connection to nature. “If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder . . . he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in” (p. 45). And for many of our students, we are that “one adult.”

JACK BLESSINGTON: In my lectures on Montessori, or on other education and family life issues, I always recommend Children the Challenge by Rudolf Dreikurs. Dreikurs is simple and direct about the effects of a child’s position in the family and is instructive about the use of consequences, rather than punishment, with children. He understands our social nature and this is important in school life. He has great experience and a variety of practical approaches and, often, a light touch.

AMY HENDERSON: I refer often to the Tao of Montessori because it makes me think about what I am doing and why. It helps me to gain the peace and serenity necessary to make observations and decisions. I think it is an excellent book with which to start the day.

MICHELE MONSON: Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4–14: A Resource for Parents and Teachers by Chip Wood. The author summarizes the work of all of the developmentists, presents a useful vision of childhood characteristics along a continuum, and indicates how to build responsive environments around these characteristics.

ANNA PERRY: Sooooo many possibilities here. NAMTA’s Whole School Montessori Handbook is the best resource for school administrators; John Chattin-McNichols’s Montessori Controversy is a nice resource on the rationale for Montessori, as is Angeline Lillard’s Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius. For general Montessori info, I love Peggy Loeffler’s Montessori in Contemporary Society. Non-Montessori educational books that I have loved and been changed by include The Power of Their Ideas by Deborah Meier, Teacher by Silvia Ashton-Warner, Edutopia by Cuban and Tyack—which changed my view of the American school reform debate, Punished by Rewards by Alfie Kohn; there are many many more—you can tell I love books!

Q What is your favorite children’s book?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: Wow! Now you are really asking a lot of me. Well, I guess that I won’t name the Patricia Polacco books that move me and I will go to Byrd Baylor, but which will it be—I’m in Charge of Celebrations or The Way to Start a Day? They both are full of joy and ecstasy.

BETSY COE: Play with Me by Mary Hall Ets—the power of observation and stillness.

AMY HENDERSON: This summer I taught The Secret Garden at the Vancouver Teacher Institute. I read that book with my own children and enjoyed all the inferences to change, hope, and determination. It touches my heart on several levels.

Another favorite book is Aline Wolf’s Our Peaceful Classroom. I read it aloud at the beginning of each school year to reaffirm to the students what we are about and what we value. This year, our upper elementary class has decided to write their own book about what we do and what we value as an extension of Wolf’s work by children. They are excited about writing it collaboratively, which is so appropriate for that age group and has served to bond us as a group. Aline is like that: She inspires with her humor and humanism.

MICHELE MONSON: Bridge to Terabithia . . . an unparalleled vision of friendship, a well-written narrative, sad and joyful at the same time, it was the first book that made me cry.

ANNA PERRY: Hug by Jez Alborough; Swimmy by Leo Lionni; The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams; and The Little Prince by Antoine de St.-Exupery.
Q Describe a favorite Montessori memory (from the classroom, training, a conference, a chance encounter, etc.).

JUDI BAUERLEIN: A favorite—impossible! How could I chose between seeing my children or my grandchildren happily working in a Montessori environment, or hearing the countless talks by people touched with fire, or observing my own students growing in their independence and joy in learning, or experiencing interns “catching” the spirit, or happening to meet people even in remote places who love the Montessori way of life? No favorites here, but a wealth of memories that sustain me and continuously give me hope.

JACK BLESSINGTON: There are too many to count from all those years. . . . But I most often speak of the time a youngster took the grammar symbols and coded a paragraph from two authors and asked us to recognize them from the mosaic of the symbols—there were no words. Only one of four teachers did; we envied the teacher’s and the student’s ability to deal with this, to us, enigma. It was a wonderful moment of a child using Montessori’s insight so creatively.

JOHN CHATTIN-McNICHOLS: Small group 9–12 class lessons in Math or Geometry, when average students derive complicated formulas as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

BETSY COE: The day both my daughters and I were the three middle school teachers at School of the Woods.

AMY HENDERSOHN: I remember at the NYC Conference in 2000 when speaker Fred Rogers asked us to remember a person who had made a significant difference in our lives—and she was sitting right next to me! The person was Betsy Coe and, surprisingly, she said the same thing about me! What a wonderful world in the Montessori “neighborhood.” What a small world and how lucky I have been. Never did I dream when I started out many years ago that this was where my road would lead.

MICHELE MONSON: Our 3–6 classrooms have a ground rule for the reading corner. There can only be a certain number of students using the reading corner, corresponding to the number of pillows in the area, which, in this case, equaled two. Jacob, age 3, frequently sits outside the corner, just waiting to get in; older children tend to monopolize and spend a great deal of time there, but he is very patient. He often waits just on the edge of the rug, but sometimes he will go to snack and come back and sometimes he will get involved in work. Most days, however, he will spend some portion of the morning waiting to get in and will even ask children to give him books to “read” while he is waiting on the outskirts. One day, we see him wheel in his little backpack; he unzips it and out comes . . . a new pillow for the reading corner that he has brought from home. He puts it down in the middle of the existing pillows, plumps them all up, and walks away. The teacher talks to him about it, “Why did you bring a pillow to the reading corner?” He says, “There needs to be more ways for kids to get in.” She responds, “But what will happen if everyone brings a pillow for the reading corner?” He says, “They don’t need to. They can use mine.” I will always have a vision of him rolling in that little backpack, taking out his pillow, and putting it in the corner; such a sense of personal empowerment. Of course, the beauty of it was that it was not done out of selfishness or for competitive reasons; he always intended it to be a contribution to the community.

ANNA PERRY: My favorite memories: As a child, catching snowflakes on a black piece of construction paper to check if they were all different. As an adult, my favorite classroom moment came when I made a deep connection with a child over some muddy boots—he’d had some significant behavior issues throughout the first month of school, and this instance changed the rest of our experience together. My favorite conference moment happened in New York City in 2000 when we organized an AMS 40 years’ celebration and had a speaker summarize the experiences of each decade of AMS’s existence. I was asked to speak for Montessori in the future—an honor that I took very seriously at 26 years of age and as a lifetime member of AMS.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: I have a thousand memories and they mostly involve the outstanding people I’ve met through all my 42 years in the American Montessori community.

Q Did you have a mentor, supervisor, teacher, or student who has significantly affected you?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: Isn’t it a marvelous commentary on the caliber, excellence, and quality of so many Montessorians that a rich tapestry of people comes to mind as I reflect on this question? Since I don’t want to make a long list, I will only mention two of my earliest Montessori connections. Sister Christina Marie Trudeau graciously accepted me into the 3–6 program at the College of Notre Dame even when the class was filled. I loved listening to her musings and reflections. Sister Christina consistently interwove philosophy into every lesson she taught. Ursula Thrush gave me great support when I began teaching the 6–9 class without the training. It was through Ursula that I became “enthused to my inmost core” by cosmic education and education for peace. It was when she began to discuss the spiritual embryo that I began to have a tiny sense of the grandeur and expanse of Dr. Montessori’s vision.

JACK BLESSINGTON: There were many who affected us, because [I came to Montessori] at the beginning of the revival: Nancy Rambusch, the experienced teachers imported from Europe.
and Ireland, and the entire faculty at Whitby and the initial teachers-in-training. Whitby was a wonderful place, full of energy and camaraderie, and we all learned from each other; the veterans and the community became our mentors.

JOHN CHATTIN-McNICHOLS: Peggy Loeffler and Joy Turner.

BETSY COE: Peggy Loeffler—she helped me remember to examine what one is doing. Actually, my adult, adolescent, and child students have had a great impact on what and how I teach and lead.

AMY HENDERSON: Mentor: I would have to say that Betsy Coe has influenced the way that I think about situations. Supervisor: Joy Sheffield, head of my school for over 20 years, had a significant effect on my style. Teacher: Sara Norton is a master of Montessori curriculum but also teaches a lot about life in general. A student who has affected me is a dyslexic student who taught me a lot about perseverance and fitting in. I believe that each person that you encounter can give you a gift if you accept it.

MICHELE MONSON: Celma Perry.

ANNA PERRY: Many. At Harvard, Deborah Meier was a true mentor to me as we worked together to start a charter school in the inner city. At NYU, Marlene Barron became my Montessori mother as she helped me to discover myself as a professional within this community that I had always considered to be my extended family. The person who has had the most distinct impact on my life, both personal and professional, is my mother, Celma Perry. We are so close, but so different, that the process of living together as mother and daughter transitioned smoothly into our solid professional relationship. She is a true partner, guide, and inspiration in my life, and I would not be who I am today without her constant and unwavering (not to mention loud) support.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: My mentor in the AMS national office was Cleo Monson, who is the one person most responsible for the continuity of the Society through the 60s and 70s. Her business expertise and ability to handle the early zealots in the Society along with her sincere devotion to and friendship with Nancy Rambusch kept AMS afloat. She was a rigorous boss and true mentor.

JACK BLESSINGTON: Yes! It was chaos, and yet fun and exciting. We, the staff, were learning every day and sat at the feet of visitors—Mario Montessori, E. M. Standing, and Helen Parkhurst, among others.

BETSY COE: The first day of Montessori teaching was amazing—it really did work.

AMY HENDERSON: I remember going over all my notes from my training class. I kept all my handwritten notes, which filled several binders. I am thankful that I had such a strong training experience. I love the Montessori approach and after about 5 years gave up carrying the manuals around with me—but I still do read them today to refresh my memory.

Q Do you have any particular memories of your first day(s) teaching?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: I will take my first day at the public Montessori school in San Mateo back in 1975. This class was one of the first public Montessori classrooms in the country. I had been hired on a Friday and school began on Tuesday. I happened to be living in Southern California with my three young children at the time and San Mateo is by San Francisco. Thanks to my wonderful family and friends, I made it to Meadow Heights School in time to begin class. Of course there were no materials or shelves. That first day when those eager and somewhat nervous 6- and 7-year-olds entered this new, empty classroom, we did a lot of singing and drawing. Once the materials started arriving, we had a grand time opening each box together and exploring the secrets of the materials. Thank goodness for committed parents and help from the Montessori staff at the College of Notre Dame.
MICHELE MONSON: From my first days teaching, I remember Fadi and Rula, two Jordanian siblings. Fadi would boss Rula around...literally snap his fingers at her if he dropped a crayon and she would run from the other side of the room to pick it up. Helping Fadi see the joy in accomplishing his own work and broadening Rula’s capacity to meet her own needs...that was good work.

ANNA PERRY: I have a great story from my first day teaching. I was the assistant director of the school, fresh from NYU’s TEP with my certificate in hand, and leading my own class of 3-6-year-olds for the first time, at 24 years old myself. I was nervous about the first day of school and when I talked with my mom about how I should organize this day, considering that the new children’s parents were invited to stay with them for the day, she suggested that we start by taking a walk through our 3-acre campus. Our walk went fine until we arrived at the animal pen. I had a special needs child who broke away from his mother and, as we arrived to visit the bunnies and the two pygmy goats, pushed his way through the throng of big and little bodies and opened up the gate to the animal pen. The goats jumped at the chance to escape.

Now, I have to mention here that in my nervousness about the first day of school, I had made a spur-of-the-moment decision that morning to wear a long skirt in honor of this special occasion. I never wear skirts, and this was a decision that I regretted immediately as I watched the parents watching the two goats running and playing with each other. I spent a few minutes (which felt like hours) tripping over myself to catch the little escapees and herded/dragged them back into their pen. As soon as the latch was closed, I took a deep breath to gather myself, turned to the parents and told them that we would be heading back to the classroom now to continue with our day. I seem to recall some applause for my “performance,” followed by some comments about the inevitable dry cleaning bill for my nice skirt that was now covered in mud.

Q What are we as Montessorians not doing now that we should be doing?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: We all need to spread the good news and vision of Dr. Montessori.

JACK BLESSINGTON: More work with the public that allows the insights and approaches of the method to influence home life and conventional classroom life.

Control accreditation so we can help the public to believe our seal means the school is staffed and facilitated with faculty and administrators trained to the level of our seal of approval. Hospitals are accredited to the level of their trained staff and their facilities; we need to do this as well. If others wish to use the method to a lesser degree and we can help them and thereby improve conventional classrooms or homes, we should do so and make it clear that there is a difference between a hospital and a First Aid station. This is NOT a knock on conventional education—rather, it is a call for high standards to protect Montessori from fading away by overextension and a failure to discipline our training and accreditation. The public needs to know what makes a Montessori school and a Montessori education.

BETSY COE: Research. Connecting more with other educational organizations.

AMY HENDerson: I hope that we are collectively feeling more secure about ourselves and reaching out to the greater education community to show them what we have to offer. For me, Montessori has been a journey filled with wonderful outcomes. I think we should continue to communicate and open our doors to encourage others to take a serious look at what we are all about.

MICHELE MONSON: I am not sure the movement is doing justice to Dr. Montessori’s legacy; the centennial is not being celebrated the way it should be. How many schools sent teachers to Rome this January?

ANNA PERRY: 1. Research, research, research. Supporting it, funding it, networking to make sure it happens not only by people within our community, but also by external professionals and academics.

2. Unification of the “brand” of Montessori—less splintering, more uniting. Better marketing—educating our population on how to do effective marketing.

3. Policy, policy. Supporting local and state groups to have a voice on their level. Establishing a national policy institute that can provide analysis and support for both Montessorians and policy-makers about what works best to support Montessori initiatives.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: Acquiring financial stability and wise spending to get our message to more parents, educators, and government sources.

Q What do you think the future holds for Montessori education?

JUDI BAUERLEIN: I think that there is an energy that is beginning to surge throughout the world. I really feel that this period in history is ripe for a Montessori groundswell. There seems to be a readiness for the kind of change and “new creation” that Dr. Montessori saw a century ago.

JACK BLESSINGTON: If it grows very slowly and does not out-grow the number of well-trained teachers and experienced administrators, the method will take its proper place as an educational
choice of value in the United States and the world. By virtue of the need for special training, Montessori cannot be as large as either public education or conventional independent school education. Training and experience are the first keys to Montessori survival, and next are the growth and proper modernizing of any insights Maria Montessori collected and developed.

JOHN CHATTIN-McNICOLS: I hope there is more attention paid to research and to continuously reexamining and changing how we do things for the better. Truth, not orthodoxy, is what makes us scientific pedagogues.

BETSY COE: If Montessorians work together, the future is bright. Unity is what will help us share our ideas with others. If we isolate ourselves, we will not be able to make an impact.

AMY HENDERSON: I think great things are in store for Montessori education especially if we can track students and demonstrate the success. Now that we have many second generation Montessori students in the United States, we should be able to capitalize on their reflections of how it made a difference in their lives, and why they chose Montessori for their own children.

MICHÈLE MONSON: I think the future is uncertain; more and more schools claim to be “inspired” or “based” in Montessori education—as opposed to being Montessori schools. We are very defensive. I wish I felt more confident that a new generation of teachers will revitalize the profession and enable schools to be both Montessori schools and good schools—by my definition, schools that are responsive to educational research and that employ innovative teaching practices consistent with the philosophy.

ANNA PERRY: I think there is a great potential for changing the lives of countless children, families, and educators for many years to come through Montessori education. However, we face some giant risks as we move forward as a movement. The further away from Maria we get, in Montessori generations, the harder we will have to work to define what it means to “do” or “be” Montessori. On one extreme, we run the risk of becoming too conservative as we try to protect the message of Maria to the extent that we will limit our participation in the larger educational dialogue and isolate ourselves into oblivion. On the other extreme, we could become so liberal with our definition of what Montessori “is” that we really lose the depth and the beauty of this incredible but hard-to-define approach.

My ideal outcome is that we will find strength in our definition and public message through evaluation and outcome research, and engage in a deeper involvement at the academic, research, and policy levels on a national level. If we can hone in on what are the essential elements of Montessori—not by consensus of what Maria may or may not have said, but through analysis through a wide variety of measures and tools—we will have set ourselves up as a true educational philosophy that can be self-sustaining into the future.

BRETTA WEISS WOLFF: The future of Montessori depends on the ability of those presently active to keep the faith.
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By John P. Blessington

The Flame
It can easily be argued that without the American Montessori Society there would not be much of a celebration of Maria Montessori, or of the Casa dei Bambini. Montessori’s first introduction in the United States makes interesting history, but it was the method’s second introduction to the U.S. that finally took hold. Few, if any, would fail to honor Nancy Rambusch as the flame that lighted the fire that became the movement we celebrate.

The Spark
Add to this chain of history the role of the Skakel family and their founding of Whitby School in 1958; they were the spark that started the flame. Ann Skakel was impressed with the Montessori method, having seen it in practice in Ireland; she wanted to start such a school in Greenwich, CT, for her grandchildren. Tragically, Skakel and her husband George, founder of The Great Lakes Carbon Corporation, died in an airplane crash while still planning the school. Their oldest child, Georgeann Terrien, decided to honor her parents’ wish and renovated a stable on her property to start Whitby.

The Catholic Attraction
The surviving members of the Skakel family promoted the idea of a Montessori school to their friends, and together they sought someone to lead the school. While interviewing candidates, they met Nancy Rambusch, who had trained in England and ran an informal Montessori preschool program in her New York City apartment. When she was selected, Rambusch turned to some of her friends for help. Together they recommended the name Whitby for the school, after a 7th-century abbey in England. They saw meaningful connections since both Montessori and Whitby had deep Catholic roots, and it was a time of Catholic advancement in America. When Montessori died in 1952, she was heralded in a number of Catholic magazines. In addition, Whitby School’s connection to the Kennedy family received attention: Ethel Skakel, Ann Skakel’s sister, was the wife of Robert F. Kennedy. John Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, was then elected President in 1960. The press loves a colorful story, and Whitby and Montessori were caught up in that bright light.

A Modest Beginning
Mario Montessori authorized the AMS to be the U.S. representative of the international organization (AMI), and Nancy Rambusch became AMS’s de facto head. A program to train teachers began in 1960, staffed by a teacher-trainer from England. AMS has moved far from its founding at Whitby to become the national organization we know today, headquartered in New York City; that history is easily traced. However, when I first encountered the Society in July 1960, it was but three milk crates, a typewriter, and one part-time secretary, who was paid by a reduction in tuition for her children. Whitby, starting its third year, was very busy with mail and visitors.

Every week, this woman would come to the school office and find a space to set up the three sturdy milk crates. She sat on one, placing the typewriter on another, and used the third to hold AMS files. As school staff, we’d squeeze by her and observe the operation of the “office.” It became apparent we had to start charging fees, since we were using the school’s paper, stamps, and, of course, the AMS furniture—those three milk crates. The initial fee for mailing information was set at two dollars, and that also made you a member of AMS. As the mail and visitors increased, it was at times chaotic. However, there was a “can-do” attitude about this important enterprise, and everyone endured the extra work and long hours.

AMS Separates From Whitby
By the spring of 1962, it was clear Nancy Rambusch needed to devote more time to AMS. While she was possessed of many talents, management was not her strong suit and directing a new school and a new Montessori organization was at least...
one task too many. The Whitby board asked Rambusch to spend her time following her passion and leading AMS (lecturing, developing a teacher training program, etc.); Whitby would remain as the site for teachers in training. The school’s trustees financially supported AMS from the beginning and continued until 1963. After that any financial support was personal, and some Whitby board members continued to serve on the AMS board. It took only a few years for several additional schools to open, and today, with so many fine Montessori schools, and so many effective training programs, it is hard to recall such a simple beginning.

AMS Faces Challenges
The third AMS training program almost closed for lack of funds and insufficient enrollment. When Doug and Maria Gravel came for their training, they had to underwrite some of the overhead costs, and encourage friends to enroll, in order to save the program. If it were not for the determination of the Gravels, and several decades of Cleo Monson’s (AMS’s first executive director) organizational strengths, we would not be here today.

First AMS Conference
The first AMS Annual Conference was held in June 1962, at the Howard Johnson Motel in Greenwich. Mario Montessori attended and gave a supportive speech. Gil Donahue spoke to the growing movement that was Montessori in America, while others, also important to AMS, spoke, read papers, and added insights. Materials were displayed, participants made new contacts, and additional board members were recruited. It was a small gathering, modest compared to today.

War and Peace
As America’s interest in Montessori grew, tensions developed. Some of the teacher-trainers from Europe thought the Americans might water down the method. Eventually this led to a political break, and the European organization (AMI) opened a separate training program in the U.S. and started to accredit schools. This was a period of strong opinions, poor communication, and, at times, bad manners. Time has helped resolve many of the issues, and professional respect has developed where differences remain. Together, these two organizations, AMS and AMI, have given America a great educational choice.

Next, But Not Last
One wish I have for AMS would be that it find the resources to capture and articulate the core of Montessori through research. Such scholarship would help a new generation of teachers to strengthen our schools. Research is needed to assure that the changes we make are beneficial and necessary. Without such discipline, we may dilute what Montessori observed as inherent in a child’s nature, unchanged by time or culture. Computers, TV, cell phones, and the like are inventions to be used; they are not part of our human physical evolution. As Montessori educators we must discuss, debate, and review our professional experiences—and then share them. AMS has been successful and now needs programs for professional development. Unfortunately AMS is bigger, not richer. To be effective, we, as members, must seek foundation support and build an endowment. As members, we should consider including AMS in our estate planning.

Montessori’s extraordinary observations and practical strategies to develop the human potential are a gift. And we must be vigilant to stave off the pressure to make our schools “just a bit more like the conventional school down the road.” While other schools may be very good, they too are a choice, as is a Montessori education. We need articulate spokespersons to help parents believe a Montessori school is an equal choice, and perhaps, a better choice.

JOHN P. BLESSINGTON was a member of the AMS board for over a decade and served as headmaster of Whitby School for 12 years. He consults and writes about education and religion, and produces interfaith documentaries for television. Contact him at j.p.blessington@worldnet.att.net.
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Montessori Education and Practice:


By Janet Hall Bagby

As a university-based educator and avid supporter of Montessori education, I have often wondered to what extent Maria Montessori’s work is continuing to influence education and learning in other disciplines. The purpose of this review was to identify articles published in non-Montessori professional periodicals that included information about Maria Montessori and/or the Montessori method of education. A 10-year time span seemed appropriate, so articles published between 1996 and August of 2006 were reviewed.

A total of 54 articles are included in this review of the literature and are presented in alphabetical order by author’s name. Although approximately half of the articles appeared in educational periodicals, a number of diverse publications are represented as well. These range from Architecture (Giovannini, 2000) to Neuropsychological Rehabilitation (Camp, 2001). The majority of the articles address curriculum and classroom characteristics of the Montessori method of education.

About 20% of the articles focus on historical aspects of Maria Montessori’s life and the development of the Montessori method. Most notable to me is the significant number of published articles on the therapeutic use of Montessori-based activities with persons with dementia. While we have long recognized the benefits of the Montessori approach for children, the many articles dealing with the effectiveness of Montessori-based interventions with individuals suffering from dementia support the application of Montessori’s philosophy to such efforts and may support its use in programs developed for the elderly.


This article describes a 3-year study that analyzed 216 class meetings in a Montessori upper elementary environment. The guiding hypothesis was that class meetings grounded in the principle of justice and equality would promote the development of democratic attitudes, respect for individualism, and values among the students. The study showed that 9–12-year-olds’ natural inclination to work together did provide a window of opportunity for developing these skills. Despite occasional disruptions, the group ethic in the classroom appeared to promote moral reasoning, equality, and justice.


This author writes about a relatively unknown time in Maria Montessori’s life, the years from 1896 to 1907. During this period Montessori graduated with a degree in medicine and wrote her “method of scientific pedagogy.” The author discusses how Montessori’s interest in medicine and feminism eventually led to the development of her educational pedagogy.


This article focuses on children’s musical intuitions and the two distinctive methods to construct meaning: pathmaking and mapmaking. Pathmaking is defined as a succession of constantly present, continuous actions. Mapmaking is a mental construction. Case study research was conducted using Montessori bells that the author described as “a rather extraordinary technological invention.” Unlike other instruments, the Montessori bells look alike but play at different pitches.


This article reviews the research literature related to Montessori-based interventions that support the use of Montessori principles and techniques for dementia patients. The research team examined five studies (included in this review) that were internally and externally valid and that utilized Montessori methods with the participants. There were approximately 74 participants, mostly female, ranging in age from 60–103. The activities were chosen for their ability to test a variety
of principles such as seriation skills, object permanence, and symbolic function. The average length of the studies was 9 months. This review found conclusive evidence that Montessori techniques were effective in working with patients diagnosed with mild to moderate dementia symptoms.


This author examines the role Montessori had in promoting individualized instruction over whole group education. A historical overview of educational movements in England and the U.S. is provided. The article emphasized that in addition to promoting the concept of individual work, Montessori advocated for changes in schools such as introducing Darwinian concepts in education.


The purpose of this article is to educate caregivers in effective ways to care for persons with dementia and other neurological disorders. Many caregivers operate with therapeutic nihilism, a belief that dementia patients cannot be taught new skills and behaviors. The Montessori Method, specifically Memory Bingo (a small-group, Montessori-based activity developed by the authors) was used with the patients who were unable to participate in traditional activities. The author concluded that the attitudes of caregivers must change in order for them to effectively treat and work with dementia patients.


In this study, 12 older adults (median age of 88) with dementia were paired with children between the ages of 2 and 4. The pairs were matched in ability levels using seven Montessori baseline activities. The results showed that the elderly patients could be effective teachers and mentors for preschool children. The results also showed that participation reduced apathy in the dementia patients. The authors concluded that this type of intergenerational program was successful with dementia patients because it provided them with compensatory skills and provided the opportunity for them to use their abilities.


Four female dementia patients living in a senior center were trained in Memory Bingo (see above). This training included small group techniques in the Montessori method that had proven in previous studies to enhance engagement levels in dementia patients. The results of this research showed that early-stage dementia patients were successfully trained to be effective small group facilitators.


This article describes the first-time use of Montessori’s method in language immersion schools at Fort Peck Reservation in northeastern Montana. The two immersion schools taught cultures rooted in the Dakota and Nakota languages to preschoolers and their parents. Because the Montessori values of encouraging independence and responsibility are mirrored in the Native American culture, the author recommended expanding the program to other Native American schools.


Beginning with the perspective that philosophy is an essential part of being human, Christie states that Montessori education has historically omitted philosophy from the curriculum, replacing it with geometry, reading, and writing for very young chil-
dren. She argues that Montessori education should introduce early levels of philosophy into programs through imagination, rational thought exercises, and reason, using a curriculum such as Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children. By merging the two curricula, philosophy could successfully be integrated into Montessori education.


This article highlights the similarities between Montessori education and the Adlerian approach to individual psychology. Montessori used sensory techniques in her educational theory because she stressed that intellectual development is built upon sensorial elements. Adler believed early recollections can trace the beginnings of a person’s insight into mistaken beliefs, and that it is logical to use sensory elements to trigger early recollections. When these two methods are used in conjunction, the therapy process can become more productive and efficient.


Cossentino argues that Montessori’s concept of “work” dramatically influences the dominant views of learning, teaching, and schooling. The theory of work with children vastly changes the way teachers interact with their students and how students view themselves in terms of school and their personal work. Work in a Montessori classroom enables the children to gain deep concentration in an activity they will encounter in the real world. Work also teaches the child how to work toward the betterment of society as well as themselves. This author concludes that Montessori’s enduring emphasis on work has created an alternative educational worldview.


This article describes a values curriculum designed and implemented by the City Montessori School (CMS) in Lucknow, India. At the time the article was published, CMS was the largest school in the world with 19,000 students in 15 sites. The CMS-designed values curriculum, Four Building Blocks, integrates universal values, excellence, global understanding, and service into the Montessori learning communities with the involvement of teachers, students, parents, and administrators.


These authors compare Steiner, Montessori, and traditional methods of education in order to determine which approach is best for children’s drawing ability. Sixty primary-aged students, 20 in each school setting, participated in the study. The educational methods were evaluated by assigning three drawing tasks to the children in each of the British schools: free drawing, scene drawing, and observational drawing. The results indicated that the Steiner method was the most conducive to creative, general drawing, and color detail. Steiner also produced better overall results in accuracy and detail of observational illustrations. However, the authors did caution that the outcome of the study could have been influenced by the strong emphasis the Steiner method places on art and creative environments.


This article examines how research styles of teachers have changed over time. For years, only experimental research was deemed acceptable. However, recently this type of research has been described as too limited to accurately understand learning in children. The authors draw on historical influences such as Montessori’s promotion of observational techniques to determine students’ “sensitive periods” of learning to highlight the importance of teacher research and practice for improving education.


Dreher recommends applications of Montessori’s principles and practices for patients with Alzheimer’s. She proposes that the concept of “work” as implemented through Montessori will increase the attention levels and sense of accomplishment in cognitively impaired elders. Topics covered in the article are: prepared environment, practical living, visual and auditory discrimination, and active learning.


Edwards compares and contrasts the Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia approaches to education. These progressive approaches emphasize the importance of respect, peace, and reconstruction in the development of individualistic and intelligent children. The role of the teacher is to be a supportive, nurturing guide to the child, providing minimal instruction in order to allow individualism. Of these approaches,
Montessori education has the most empirical research on learning outcomes.


The author argues that “play is not the child’s work nor is work child’s play.” Drawing a contrast with Montessori’s viewpoint, Elkind cites Freud and Piaget as prominent psychologists who differentiated between work and play in their developmental theories. Play has an immediate value for the child, while the concept of work is preparing for the future.


Giovannini describes how an architectural firm transformed a Milwaukee office building into a Montessori school. The designers focused on creating large open-plan environments and spaces outside the school building that could be freely interpreted by the students. The hallways of the building were designed to simulate streets in a city leading to a central area in the school. The architecture became an instructional tool to maximize Montessori teachings. Numerous photographs are included with the article.


The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between physical growth, morbidity, and nutritional status of preschool children receiving food supplements in urban Montessori schools. 265 children, aged 30 to 60 months, from slums and middle-class families in Pune City, India, participated in the study. The results indicated that housing conditions, hygiene, and sanitation influenced the nutritional status of Montessori children receiving supplementation.


The poem “Among School Children” by Yeats is the focus of this article. The author examines the influence of two of Yeats’ main intellectual sources, Maria Montessori and Giovanni Gentile. Although they had conflicting politics, both scholars agreed that freedom and self-discipline could be simultaneously achieved in a classroom setting. Both also agreed that people naturally desire the opportunity to learn. The author concluded that Yeats’ poem was based on Montessori’s “spiritualized materialism” and Gentile’s “politicized aesthetics.”


Humphryes advocates for the acceptance of quality Montessori programs as developmentally appropriate for young children. She describes Montessori education as providing a balance between freedom and discipline, ensuring security and fostering independence, providing sufficient challenge as well as opportunities for success. The teacher’s role, the curriculum, the classroom areas, and developmental assessment of children are discussed as well.


Nineteen participants completed this nine-month study of engagement levels during activity programming. While the control group engaged in the regularly scheduled activities, the treatment group participated in Montessori-based intervention programming. Results clearly indicated that “Montessori–based activities are designed to elicit positive forms of engagement in persons with dementia . . . .”


This article describes the development of a multi-method approach for understanding program processes in an Early Head Start program. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered. A Montessori curriculum was used at all the schools that participated in the study. The main focus of the study was to see how the interventions affected the child, though the parent’s reactions and opinion were taken into account to get a more global view of the effects. The results were collected through teacher rating forms and an ethnographer’s observation. The authors concluded that program evaluation
benefits from a multi-method approach to gathering data.


The purpose of this study was to examine how preschoolers’ private speech developed in a Montessori program and in a traditional, play-oriented program. According to the authors, this was the first study to examine preschoolers’ private speech development in a natural setting. A total of 59 3- to 5-year-old middle socioeconomic-status children participated in the study. Observations were made in six classrooms, three in each preschool, over a 2-month period. Outcomes indicated that children in the traditional program engaged in more private speech than those in the Montessori classrooms. The authors concluded that fewer opportunities for make-believe play, more direct involvement of the teacher in the children’s activities, and more frequent classroom transitions in the Montessori classrooms contributed to the lower rate of private speech.


This article provides an historical overview of the Dalton Laboratory Plan, an individualized instruction system that began in the United States and thrived in England in the 1920s. Helen Parkhurst, the plan’s creator, worked with Maria Montessori in the early 1900s and became an avid Montessori follower and teacher. At Montessori’s request, Parkhurst taught the demonstration classroom for her at the 1915 San Francisco exposition, directed the national Montessori promotion fund, and at that time, was the only person granted the authority to train Montessori teachers. Montessori’s professional influence was evident in Parkhurst’s Dalton Plan.


The purpose of this article was to demonstrate how the Montessori approach could be used in teaching art to young children. The teacher at this private northeastern Montessori school used an innovative approach by encouraging students to create through their eyes rather than starting with tools. Using objects from their immediate environment and nature, the children were able to experiment, inquire, and construct, which resulted in visible enthusiasm and energy in their cooperative efforts.


This study explores the meaning of being a Montessori teacher. Eight female Montessori teachers participated in interviews, journal writing, and reflections to create occupational life histories. The author researched which aspects of Montessori’s philosophy attract teachers to the profession, ways in which teachers’ professional roles align with their personal values and belief systems, and teachers’ views on the current and future direction of Montessori education.


This article compares and contrasts child-centered, progressive, and holistic alternative educational programs in the United States. Referred to as philosophically based alternatives, the following approaches were included: Democratic and free schools, folk education, Quaker schools, home-schooling, unschooling, deschooling, Krishnamurti schools, Montessori schools, progressive education, open schools, and Waldorf schools. The author stressed the importance of continuing to fund these diverse educational approaches to ensure that the basic societal values of diversity and democracy will endure.


This Montessori teacher presents his perspective on holistic education as not a single method but a multifaceted approach to learning. While analyzing the Waldorf approach, he provides comparisons to Montessori’s philosophy. The author concludes that in holistic education, the most important factor is the relationship between the teachers and the students, not the method of education.


This more recent article by Miller describes how Montessori blended science with religion in her worldview. Her theory called for a spiritual renewal of humanity that could be prompted by the creative powers of a child’s mind. Montessori believed that everyone was called to work in partnership with God. Children were viewed as spiritual energies whose inner discipline developed through purposeful activity.


This author argues that educators should abandon the “child-centered”
educational theory. He criticizes the child-centered movement as just another prescribed set of theories and practices about the “right” way of doing things. Mirochnik describes the pop singer Madonna as an example of a nontraditional educator and contrasts her to Montessori, the traditional educator. Montessori’s method teaches to a higher power, or rather, limits creative new methods, while Madonna’s nontraditional approach allows current culture to interpret the style of teaching.


This article discusses the reform of Swedish schools as voucher systems in public schools and a free choice policy in private schools were implemented. Montessori is described as one of the most common types of private schools with a special pedagogical approach. The reforms in free choice allowed students to have more choice in the type of education they wished to receive. Of the private schools, Montessori schools were found to have the greatest increase in enrollment.


This South African educator argues that the Montessori method can be recast as a contemporary constructivist approach for early childhood education. Using Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s theoretical frames, Moll concludes that the Montessori method should be interpreted as a contemporary form of constructivism, and that he and his colleagues will continue to engage in this research agenda.


Conducted over a 9-month period, this study examines the effectiveness of Montessori-based activities programming for 16 residents with advanced dementia in a long-term care facility. The results showed that the Montessori activities did significantly increase engagement and affect levels. The authors conclude by expressing their hope that Montessori-based programming will be implemented with dementia patients in numerous varied settings.


Replicating the Orsulic-Jeras, Judge et al (2000) research, these authors also found positive effects on engagement and affect for the 25 dementia patients in the study. The treatment group participated in individual and group-based Montessori activities at least twice a week for the duration of the study.


The article describes an environmentally friendly project called Our Green Classroom. The author is a teacher in gifted education and an environmental studies specialist at a public elementary Montessori school. The goal of the project was to develop an outdoor garden and to teach students greater respect for living organisms. The students improved their observation skills and received hands-on training in caring for plants and animals.


The authors encourage educators to provide children with authentic tasks for learning. Maria Montessori is presented as one of the proponents of engaging children in real-life work. Montessori acknowledged the importance of children engaging in real tasks from the world as opposed to make-believe activities. She also stressed the need for exercises that promote independence. The authors identified authentic work activities such as carrying wood, housekeeping, animal and child care, and errands, and conclude that these are productive ways to teach children responsibility and values.


In this article Montessori’s structured, multisensory language curriculum is described as an effective tool for teaching writing and reading. According to Maria Montessori, the implementation of a multisensory approach is a requisite for teaching children with specific language learning disabilities. Montessori’s developmental approach teaches phonological rules that build writing and reading skills. The article stressed the importance of individualized teaching for children with learning disabilities.


The hypothesis for this study was: Materials that promote use of fine motor skills developed from Montessori’s theory will improve children’s fine motor skills in a public school kindergarten when compared to more traditional fine motor activities. Using a pre-test-post-test
design over a 6-month period, the experimental group of kindergarteners significantly outperformed the control group. With support for their hypothesis, the authors concluded that the Montessori activities produced the desired fine motor development.


This article presents findings from a research study on cognitive, linguistic, and attentional characteristics of young children between 1 and 6 years old diagnosed with Williams syndrome. Ten children participated in a 45-minute play session conducted by a special educator. A non-directive Montessori approach was used in the study because it built on children’s strengths and attentional focus, encouraged children to select and complete their chosen activities, and minimized the role of adults in the interaction.


These authors describe an experimental program in which Montessori activities specifically developed for dementia patients were implemented by nursing assistants (NAs). The study was designed by the staff at the Myers Research Institute, the same researchers who have completed the majority of studies using the Montessori method of education with residents with advanced dementia. The implementation was described as beneficial for the residents as well for the nursing assistants, who felt rewarded for their efforts.


In this theoretical article, Sobe describes Montessori’s 1915 demonstration classroom and the importance of attention in the learning process. This glass-walled classroom at the San Francisco International Exposition was the first major demonstration of Montessori’s method in the United States. Montessori’s pedagogy from this turn-of-the-century classroom illustrates what we can learn today about the role of attention in the learning process.


This qualitative study examines the nature of language and literacy, specifically the growth of reading and writing during a child’s first six years. The research was conducted in an accredited Princeton Montessori school. The researcher observed in three settings—an infant classroom, a toddler classroom, and a preschool classroom—to capture how the children learned sounds and combined those sounds to make words and to construct written sentences. The findings concluded that early childhood language and literacy training are vital for future success.


The authors argue that the relationship between culture and child development is so close and complex that the two should not be treated separately. The culture of a particular country directly influences the content of its early childhood curriculum. Montessori is one of several models the authors present in an historical perspective to support their hypothesis.


These authors reanalyze data from the original study (Vance & Porter, 2000) “to determine if specific cognitive domains or abilities were more sensitive to the benefits of the Montessori materials.” Results showed cognitive benefits on basic mental abilities (i.e., attention, object permanence, and memory) but no benefits on more complex mental skills such as vocabulary, spatial attention, and reasoning and abstract thinking.


Alzheimer patients at two day-care centers participated in this 6-month study to evaluate the effectiveness of using Montessori activities as a cognitive intervention. After receiving 3 months of Montessori activities and 3 months of routine activities, the participants were evaluated on 22 cognitive measures and a Montessori Benefit Score was derived. The results indicated that the Montessori activities benefited the Alzheimer patients more than the regular activities.


Through qualitative research methods, the author explores empowerment in the organizational context of a midwestern Montessori school. In many educational programs, the power rests solely with the instructor, and students have little ability to exert their own beliefs and opinions. Results of this study indicate that empowerment was approached in this Montessori school as a communicative process in which teachers and students balanced their individual freedom with the need of the class community.


This article describes how the Montessori curriculum fosters democratic attitudes in both the workplace and the social life. According to the authors, Montessori education stresses that living and working should be learned together and that a Montessori environment is a “workplace democracy.” Montessori emphasized the need to educate young children in the practice of democracy, and she identified education as a primary tool for promoting democracy. In many ways, democracy is one of the most important frameworks for Montessori education.


This study explores the relationship between temperament and behavioral adjustment in constructivist and Montessori programs. The methodology included teacher ratings of behavior and maternal ratings of temperament for 102 children. The findings indicated a small but noticeable tendency for active boys to adjust better to constructivist preschools than to Montessori preschool programs. Montessori teachers were found to be more likely to perceive high activity as a behavioral problem. The same was not found for young girls who, even if temperamentally active, may adjust their behavior to meet adults’ expectations. The authors state two limitations of their study: no observational data by neutral observers and the variability found in the Montessori programs.

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Children learn, with or without teachers. They absorb knowledge from whatever environment they are in. The type of environment conducive to children’s learning depends largely on adults. Adults have always professed to love children. Less often have they professed a need to respect them. Many are the adults who believe that the role of the child is to respect the adult and not the reverse. Maria Montessori believed that any effective education of the child must necessarily involve a modification of the adult.

The adult considers everything that affects the psyche of the child from the standpoint of its reference to himself, and so misunderstands the child. It is this point of view that leads to the consideration of the child as an empty being which the adult must fill by his own endeavors, as the inert and incapable being for whom everything must be done, as a being without an inner guide, whom the adult must guide step by step from without.

Finally, the adult acts as if he were the child’s creator, and considers good and evil in the child’s actions from the standpoint of relation to himself. . . . Any way in which the child departs from the characteristics of the adult is an evil that must be speedily corrected. And, in adopting such an attitude, which unconsciously cancels the child’s personality, the adult feels the conviction of zeal, love, and sacrifice. (Montessori, Maria. The Secret of Childhood, p. 18. Orient Longman: Calcutta, 1961.)

It is the transformation of the adult that is the underlying theme of the Montessori Teacher Training Program. What makes a Montessorian? A Montessorian is compounded of observer, exemplar, and protector of the child’s right to learn.

The Montessorian is an observer. To learn from the child, one must observe the child. Observation is an art which must be a highly developed skill in Montessorians. The necessity for observing children and anticipating their needs becomes of increased importance in the classroom situation, where individual work allows a number of children to be engaging in different activities simultaneously under the direction of one teacher. The art of observation is a learned art. In classroom situations where the teacher is the active element and the children are passive, it is not important for the teacher to watch the children, as it is the teacher who determines what will be taught, when it will be taught, how it will be taught, and what the gratification will be for both teacher and learner.

In a Montessori class, a teacher must anticipate the needs of the child, as well as answer them by indirect. The Montessorian must be an exemplar for the child. If the child is to imitate the actions of the adult in the environment where the adult “shows” rather than “tells,” it is important that the adult himself, or herself, study carefully his demeanor from which the children will derive their principal behavior clues. Teachers learn to move quietly, to work carefully, and to give the children a chance to follow an example that is geared to the child’s capability and not to the adult’s facility.

The Montessori teacher is the protector of the child’s right to learn; that right is little appreciated and understood in the young child. We have long protected the child’s right to play in conventional, nursery, and kindergarten education. How much more does the child have the right to learn, when, in a few short years, the complex and competitive culture into which he is going will demand a great deal of him at a time when he may be unready; time will have run out for him by his sixth birthday.

There is little opportunity for the child to enjoy learning if he has not learned how to learn initially. The Montessorian, recognizing the individual rhythm of the children, offers each, at his own pace, varied activities, which are both direct and indirect preparations for academic learning, and is protecting the child in his first steps toward knowledge.

How is a Montessorian trained? Montessorian Teacher Training attempts to incarnate in the individual the skills of observation and participation in classroom activity that develops the
integrated responses of a Montessori teacher. Through many long hours of observation and classroom participation, the trainee learns to relate the theory to the actual practice in the classroom. Through lectures on theory and practice of Montessori, as well as exposure to educational and developmental trends in early childhood education, a Montessorian learns to relate the insights of Montessori to those of American educators. Through arduous work developing the “albums,” the vade mecum of the Montessori teacher, the workbooks in which a trainee illustrates and describes in sequence the Montessori learning material and methodology, the trainee makes habitual the learning sequence.

The Montessori Teacher could be characterized briefly in this way: He does not tell, he shows. “If the child is to increase, the adult must decrease,” Montessori says. A Montessori teacher must have experienced a conversion, a transformation, if he is to be a condition rather than an obstruction for the child’s learning.

The Montessori Teacher Training course is an annual full-time apprenticeship for college graduates. It leads to the International Montessori Diploma, the basic qualification for organizing and teaching a Montessori class of children from three to eight years of age.

The official American body, empowered by the International Montessori Association (Amsterdam) to provide such training, is the American Montessori Society, Greenwich, CT.
By Beverley Blount

As we come to the beginning of the second century of the Montessori system of education, Montessorians are in agreement that following the principles and guidelines set out by Maria Montessori a century ago empowers them to present to children an environment that truly “works.” But why does it work?

We read one educational study after another that supports the use of hands-on, progressive, self-correcting graphic materials; the freedom of choice in the prepared environment; the trusting of the children’s inner will to always be learning; the importance of bringing the outside into the classroom and taking the children outside; and the understanding that children thrive under the proper challenges. Much has been written during this past century about Montessori without clarifying why her observations of children and her documenting of and experimenting with their natural tendencies produced such a successful method of education. To truly understand the reasons that the Montessori system honors the child’s inner learning processes, one must go back in time—and not to the studies of the periods of mankind’s written history, but even farther back, to the beginnings of advanced primates and to the thousands of years of prehistoric humanity. One must look at how children learned then, before modern times and so-called “modern education.”

Looking back at thousands of years of human history, one must realize that during much of this time, children did not learn by being sent to school; large groups of children engaged in rote learning is a development of the last few hundred years. It has been widely shown, by recent research, that tiny children are gifted with a psychic nature peculiar to them. (Montessori, 1995, p. 5)

I feel that parts of these psychic patterns continue, possibly throughout life, and can only be nourished by giving the child the most natural environment possible as indicated by Dr. Montessori.

Understanding the terms Maria Montessori used to describe the “planes of development” or “stages” that she observed children pass through to reach adulthood and maturity enables us to compare these stages with the environment in which the prehistoric child lived. During prehistoric times, behavior patterns were established in humans that survive today. Montessori documented these during her years of careful observations of children. Many of her colleagues, such as Freud and Erickson, later integrated these stages into their own theories, giving them other names and relating different psychological reasons for the child’s personality changes during each stage.

The first stage is from birth to age 6 with substages from birth to 3 and 3 to 6; the second stage is from 6 to 12 with substages from 6 to 9 and 9 to 12; the third stage is from 12 to 18 with substages from 12 to 15 and 15 to 18; and the fourth stage is from 18 to 24 (Montessori, 1937–1939, 1967, 1995, Grazzini, 1973).

As the child is very different and the changes very evident between one stage and the next, it is important to investigate why children pass through these physical and psychological changes during their growth stages. What are the reasons for these stages? Why isn’t it better for the children to just grow smoothly from birth to maturity with no abrupt changes? Why are they programmed to have such different stages? Why are we able to say that Montessori has been successful for 100 years? This article presumes to answer these questions while giving historical reasons for Montessori’s planes of development and, therefore, her educational system.

To begin, it is important to define the term “reality” I am using when referring to small children and the way they perceive and live their lives. A child’s reality is what he actually sees, hears, touches, and lives from birth to 6 years of age. It includes the entire gamut of what he can actually

SPOTLIGHT: 100 YEARS OF MONTESSORI EDUCATION

Generations of children have lived the Montessori experience and placed their children and grandchildren in Montessori schools. But who among us really has contemplated the answer to:
see of his community’s inhabitants, occupations, and activities. This view of reality postulates that children born in small, self-sufficient societies have a much larger and more positive “reality” than our “modern” children, whose lives are restricted to living amidst their families and immediate neighborhoods, watching their parents acquire products at huge shopping centers, eating mass-produced food-stuffs, learning about their society through the often artificial and destructive world of the media, and directly seeing very little that is understandable of adult occupations.

The Role of the Child in Society

How are children prepared by their inborn psychic nature to become wholesome, productive members of society, and what kind of society should evolve from this natural progression? What piece of the total plan do children represent? How does our modern society fit the child into this plan and the environment into which he or she should be growing? There is no way to know what specific and necessary occupations children will need when grown, especially in our rapidly changing society. There needs to be a multitalented group of youths with enough different types of personalities, myriad physical abilities, and multiple intelligences in order that each new occupation of our future society will have an apprentice preparing to fill that currently unknown activity. We can look at prehistoric times for a model of this.

The very first humans gathered into small self-sufficient groups: cave dwellers, nomads, clans, hunter-gatherers, and extended families. Later, they developed small villages, agricultural groups, hamlets, defensible areas, and so on. The inhabitants of these small societies could walk across the immediate boundaries of their communities without too much trouble, and this space was the free territory of the children of the past. The young of even our immediate past learned by experiencing life in a context of seeing actual people doing their work. Children appear to be programmed to want to observe and manipulate real materials in order to learn from others and understand what they need to survive as individuals within their society (Blount, 2006, p. 40). Montessori was correct in stating that children need to physically act upon their environment in order to satisfy their immense desire and will to understand their world.

The First Plane of Development: Birth to 6

In prehistoric times, during the first plane of development, the 2-year-old who said, “Now that I’ve got my legs, I’m off. Good-bye,” would literally walk out the door of his or her dwelling and for the following years would not be cared for by adults but by the older children in his or her group (Montessori, 1995, p. 155). The child’s territory would have been the expanse of the village, cave, habitat, or neighborhood. One of the problems of parents today is that they are unable to give the children the time and space for walking that they so need. In chapter 13 of The Absorbent Mind (The Importance of Movement in General Development), Montessori comments:

The very existence of the social order depends on movement directed to constructive ends. . . . To have a vision of the cosmic plan, in which every form of life depends on directed movements which have effects beyond their conscious aim, is to understand the child’s work and be able to guide it better. (1995, pp. 146–7)

The prehistoric “gang” of children I am envisioning would wander freely around their village from the time they were toddlers, watching the adults at work in their many obvious, easily understood, and real occupations such as weaving, planting, harvesting, cooking, husbandry, marketing, crafts,
exploring, art, music, hunting, agriculture, weaponry, protection, leadership, spiritual rituals, and more. All the children would know the occupations of their parents; they would see them at work every day. The smallest children would be watched and guided by peers just older than themselves, and those older children in turn by the next oldest. Adults would not be the caretakers for the children out of arms; their occupations would keep them far too busy.

In their daily wanderings, the children would copy and construct as best possible the tools and materials of the different trades they observed and try to learn how to use them themselves by constant repetition (Blount, 2006, p. 43). One of the key aspects of Montessori education is the use of the hand; prehistoric children would be using their hands all day. Montessori says in *The Secret of Childhood:*

> The human hand, so delicate and so complicated, not only allows the mind to reveal itself but it enables

the whole being to enter into special relationships with its environment.

We might even say that man takes possession of his environment with his hands. (1966, p. 81)

What some people call “playing” is actually children recreating a miniature “real” society at their own level. In pre-20th-century times, children would not be using abstract “toys” that represented a society completely different from the one in which they lived. There would be no toys that were not imitations of adults’ tools, nor any need for them. Typically in museums, “toys” found in archaeological excavations, other than dolls, are things for throwing, miniature animals, art materials, child-sized weapons, and armor: all small copies of those articles used every day by the adults of the community. Prehistoric children would use cast-off articles and bits and pieces of natural objects to try to imitate the adult world they were observing. They would construct small dwellings and act out roles in their own miniature community. They would decorate themselves as they saw the elders do—vanity seems to have been an integral part of even the earliest societies. Adults would share bits of yarn, seeds, rope, pottery, bread dough, weapons, scraps of cloth, and other tools of their trades for the children to practice with. Even a toddler would be able to understand and try to imitate the actions of the adults around him and, by the time he reached the age of 6, he would probably be turning out recognizable copies of those adult activities (Blount, 2006, p. 44).

As the first plane of development ended, the 6-year-olds would already be well-founded in the social structure of their society. They would also begin to be the messengers within their society and, in all ways, tremendously useful to the adults of their clan. Young children probably were already helping the craftsperson to whom they were most attracted (by their own talents, physical abilities, and psychological makeup). Children would be able to work in apprenticeships of those crafts that most appealed to them (Blount, 2006, p. 44).

At this point, the child at the threshold of the second plane would now be ready to become the hardworking 6- to 12-year-old that Montessori describes from her observations. During this period, the young apprentice would pass through a period of intense learning of the craft that would become his or her life’s work. Montessori comments that the child in this stage is a very special young person: He is calm and capable of intense learning. He respects, admires, and wants to learn from the adults and peers around him and seeks to know about their society and its rules.

### The Second Plane of Development: 6 to 12

The children in the second plane would sort themselves out among the tribal occupations they would have been observing from the time they were toddlers. Their innate talents, psychological makeup, and physical abilities would play a part in their assuming a place in the community. Some of the very necessary male roles in a primitive society would have been hunter, explorer, warrior, and scout. All of these men would need apprentices who possessed certain characteristics. For example, the hunter in a dangerous forest would need his apprentice to be someone who could be physically active for many hours and who could develop an intense 360-degree awareness of his surroundings. He would need to be able to pick up any sound or sign that might indicate danger, such as a bear or tiger.
stalking the hunting group, or the imminent attack of a group of marauding humans. At the moment of approaching their designated prey, the hunter and his apprentice would need to be able to concentrate on the animal they were stalking.

I believe that we can recognize the hunter’s apprentice in the ADHD children we encounter in our schools today, as they are often very conscious of movements going on all around them but have difficulty concentrating on that which is immediately in front of them. Their problem in attending to what is in front of them compares to the way the hunter has no need to see his immediate surroundings (he had recorded them when that area was still at a distance). This may, in part, explain why a majority of ADHD children are male (Blount, 2006, p. 48).

The hunter/explorer/warrior would not have wanted the quiet, patient, artistic weaver-type for his apprentice, nor would the weaver want the hunter’s hyperactive apprentice. The weaver-type exemplifies a personality exactly the opposite of the hunter. Even today, that personality needs to be able to be almost immobile all day, and to be able to memorize complex fabric patterns and reproduce them from memory on the weaving frame. The weaver does not need to know or care what is going on around him but rather must concentrate on the task immediately in front of him. This is the personality type that today’s traditional schools love, but it is not so common in “real life”: The ancient societies did not need as many weavers as they did hunters/warriors/explorers.

The child in the second plane of development would ideally be apprenticed by the person whose craft most closely matched the child’s personality and physical abilities (Blount, 2006, p. 49). These 6 years of preparation would have aided the young apprentice to become more useful and adept until he reached the next plane of development, a period of radical change that today we call adolescence.

The Third Plane of Development: 12 to 18

Between the ages of 12 and 15 (the first half of the third plane of development), the young people in these earliest communities would have become well prepared to earn their living in their selected craft. Social bonding would have knit this younger generation together with the community’s older members. By this time, many female children would have already had many years of child and home care experience with their siblings and neighbors and this experience would prepare them to care for their own offspring as, during this period, youths would search for their partners and mate. The new couple would have to become an integrated part of their society and would have started their families during the second part of the plane, between the ages of 15 and 18 (Blount, 2006, p. 49).

During the last few centuries, it slowly has become necessary to put this pairing period off for more than 10 years, causing upheavals in the natural progression of the child’s still existent internal programming. Adolescence has become a most difficult period for young people.

This is not to propose that today’s children mate between 12 and 18, although they are still doing so in many primitive societies. UNESCO statistics show that since 1994, 90% of the babies born in the world are being born in the poorest 10%, so this pattern is still prevalent in the world today (Carty, 2002).

We need to explain to the young adolescents the reasons why their bodies are passing through this disturbing period that moves them toward consequences no longer acceptable in our society. They must prepare to wait at least 10 more years before seeking a mate and entering the child-rearing period.

In To Educate the Human Potential, Montessori talks about the lethargy and slowing of the mental development during this growth stage in the child’s life:

It is an error to expect hard work and unimpeachable progress during the age of Puberty. Indulgence should be shown to those who lag at this time. The life of [humans] is whole in its length, like a cord. Touched in one part, the whole length vibrates, so there may be far-reaching consequences in adult life to some occurrence that seemed trivial in childhood and as unfavourable happenings are likely during these weakened stages, the teacher’s responsibility is great towards humanity. (1967, p. 116)

During the third plane of development, children may have the curiosity but not the strength and will necessary to overcome this lethargy, causing their families to lose patience with them and accuse them of being lazy and inattentive. It is very much the age for going out, daydreaming, and watching nature.

During this period, these youths (today’s middle schoolers) find this newly discovered attraction between sexes an overpowering novelty, and all else becomes secondary. “Their character is seldom stable at this age; there are signs of indiscipline and rebellion” (Montessori, 1995, p. 21).

The Fourth Plane of Development: 18 to 24

Adolescents now become full adults and, as described in Montessori’s planes of development, become calmer. (The planes go roughly along with the changes of teeth; we get our first permanent teeth and 6-year molars at the change of the first plane, our 12-year molars at the change of the second plane, and after age 18 we finally get our “wisdom” teeth.) This stage in the
adolescent’s development as studied by Montessori is described by Standing (1962):

Other traits in the adolescent [Montessori] mentions are “a state of expectation, the tendency towards creative work, and a need for the strengthening of self-confidence. . . .”

Whereas in the preceding epoch the individual tended to be an extrovert, the adolescent tends to look inward. It is one of those mysterious periods when something is being formed which does not yet exist; a “mystery of creation” which is taking place within him independently of his own will—the creation of the socially conscious individual.

Just here—according to Montessori—is the crux of the whole matter, the most essential feature of adolescence, and therefore the most important for all those who have to do with the training of adolescents. There is being born in [them] a new “sensitive period” which reveals itself in a greatly increased sensitiveness to all facts and experiences which relate to his life as a social being. For the first time he becomes clearly conscious of himself, not simply as an individual—i.e., a member of a herd or gang—but as a separate member of human society with all that it implies. He feels, for instance, the need of being treated with a new kind of dignity and respect. Similarly he becomes acutely sensitive to all forms of criticism; and is quick to imagine he is being ridiculed. He feels himself observed; and is anxious to cut an equal figure with those around him. He begins to be acutely conscious of differences in social status. Such matters as clothes, pocket money, personal appearance become of great importance to him—things which did not bother [him] so much in the earlier period.

Compared with the “tough guy” of the preceding period (8–12)—he is like a crab which has just cast its old strong shell, while the new one is still soft and sensitive—a dangerous condition. “It is just because this is the time when the social man is being created—but has not yet reached his full development—that many defects in adjustment to social life take their origin. For example, a feeling of inferiority at this period may give rise to an ‘inferiority complex’; and there may arise a repugnance to social life which may endure for years. Such defects in social adjustment may have dangerous consequences for the individual, resulting in timidity, anxiety, depression, as well as the inferiority complex just mentioned. Bad results may follow for society, too, in the form of incapacity for work, laziness, dependence on others, a cynical outlook, and even “criminality.” Here—in the problem of social adjustment—lies the really vital problem of education for adolescents (far more vital than simple passing of examinations).

How would Dr. Montessori have us organize the life of the adolescent so as best to respond to his dominant need of right social adjustment? . . . It must suffice to note that Montessori would have the whole life of the adolescent revolve around this idea of society, its structure, and its obligation. . . . the life of the adolescent would be so arranged that, through his participation in a special form of social life (the new “prepared environment” which corresponds to this stage), he would be made ready for his participation in the great world of adult society. Through his studies, which would be related to practical activities, he would become acquainted with the structure of society—its very ligaments—which are production and exchange; because, says Montessori, “the basis of all civilization rests on the products of the earth.”

As each previous stage of development was marked by the acquisition of new forms of independence, so should and would be in this. The form of independence which is most necessary for the adolescent to acquire is . . . economic independence. . . . We can only lay down the general aim—that “the whole life of the adolescent should be organized in such a way that it will enable him, when the time comes, to make a triumphal entry into social life—not entering it debilitated, isolated, or humiliated, but, with head high, sure of himself.” (pp. 116–117)

By this point, young adults in prehistoric times would have been heads of households and providers. They would have to dedicate themselves to starting their family and feeding and clothing them. They now would bear the fruits of their years of apprenticeship and would become self-sufficient and productive, useful and needed members of their communities. In today’s society, this period compares with the period after age 20 when many young couples are forming their households.

Profile of the Self-Sufficient Community

One of the less obvious occupations of the children of these self-sufficient communities would be that of learning leadership and learning how to function in a group. The groups of children from 2 to 6, running over their community territory, would have already begun to cooperate in group activities. The future leaders of the society would have been earning their leadership positions throughout their childhood and adolescence, and the
community would begin to recognize all those members to whom they could possibly entrust the general decisions of their society; they would support the ones who had already started to prove their leadership abilities by helping their peers successfully carry out their activities.

Some members of the societies might have become wanderers, explorers, and traders. Even these seemingly lonely or very curious people would have their place in their society’s fabric as they would travel from community to community bringing fresh ideas, new merchandise, and discoveries from other places.

Why were prehistoric youth programmed to learn a trade and pair off so young? Because they needed to find their mates during the first half of plane three between ages 12 and 15. In turn, this led to the calm, working second half of the third plane, between 15 and 18 years of age, and through the next stage to age 24 where they supported and raised their children. It would have to be the most productive period of their lives. It all makes sense when we look at life expectancy; most people in prehistoric times did not live beyond age 30. Successfully passing these learning stages by age 24 would ensure they had time to give their own children a start on life.

In this past century medical care has improved and life expectancies have increased, granting many societies a gift of 40 or more years of life (although there are still poor nations today with national averages for life expectancy of 30 to 40 years), but our internal biological clocks don’t know that. Our children’s clocks are still running on prehistoric time. Although in many rural communities today improved medical care has added years to life expectancy rates, customs continue to encourage very young girls to marry and have children.

Most nations start formal school- describes in each of her four planes of development. The child of 6 who begins elementary school has already passed through what many people, especially Montessorians, would consider the most important formative years of his life. The formation of the child’s personality and the way he will face the trials of the world are already developing. His fate will lead him down many different paths, but his flowering as a human being and the ways in which he responds to the events of his life will depend a great deal on his childhood environment and the encouragement he received in the use of his physical and mental abilities during the first plane of life, from birth to age 6.

Many of today’s problems with young children come from the absence of an environment where they are able to live in a simple, unhampered manner. Many children no longer have the opportunity to run free with their peers within a large territory; outside of recess, they often only interact with adults and they spend hours in dormant positions watching television or playing video games. Looking at chil-
contact with their peers? Many children go to adult-controlled classes after school and find recess their only free environment; neither setting offers occupations for the children to observe. What can we do to make sure our children will face the world with self-confidence and with confidence in the people around them? How can we help them walk in an understandable world? The answers lie in remembering the village and the way children have learned through the ages. An environment where small children can observe and have the chance to freely imitate the activities of those around them is the answer.

It is difficult for young parents to understand that their small children must live in a world that they can understand in order to be able to autoconstruct their futures as adults, especially since it seems that many of the human activities today’s children see are the portrayals in the media of wars, destruction, murder, as well as music, and art. Children who need to walk for hours every day, observing and acting upon their environment, are now strapped for hours in cars and then wheeled in carts around shopping areas, employing little of the physical movement so necessary for their development.

This is why I choose Montessori for my own daughters and have dedicated my life to Montessori. A Montessori school attempts to build the atmosphere of a tiny human community in its classrooms. Although unable to squeeze all the activities of an entire human society in one building and its surroundings, the Montessori environments are full of materials covering a multitude of skills and sensorial trainings. The children are free to talk and interact with their peers of different ages and to watch them at work. Each exercise is a bit more difficult than the one that comes before and children are stimulated to continue by watching older children using the materials that comprise the next step. The children are attracted to the material because of its beauty and the intellectual challenges it provides, and they are guided into working with the more advanced materials by constant presentations of the use of each piece of material and by observing their peers. The children choose materials that their subconscious sensitive periods require. Just as in the village atmosphere, there are no “toys,” only intellectually stimulating natural materials. Each material has its own control of error, thus aiding the children to figure out for themselves a way to master it. The teacher/guide takes the place of the hardworking craftsman in the village: She presents the use of the material as though it were her own work and then leaves the child to experience the work by whatever manipulations are required. Ideally, as the children grow, the environment should cover more and more space, often taking the child away from the school environment into the outside world. As the child progresses through the stages of development, he needs to experience the world both by observing and by working on practical problems.

In the self-sufficient small communities of early times, every human needed to be occupied by a constructive work. The community could not exist without each of these workers and each one had an equally important place in the community puzzle. Each of the members of the community possessed the psychological certainty that he was a needed, important, and useful member of the society (compare this with many of the psychological disorders developed by humans today who feel useless). Prehistoric children also instinctively felt the importance of their work. They could see that they were preparing both for their futures and the future of their community.

Two of the most important fundamental needs of humans of all ages are
the need to feel *useful* and the need to have the required environment to *develop an occupation* that best fulfills the individual’s talents and physical abilities. The role of childhood in prehistoric society was a most essential one; children were engrossed in the totally important work of creating a self-sufficient adult.

As teachers and guides, we cannot imagine what the children in our classes will become as adults, nor can we foresee what occupations will be available for them. We can only depend on Montessori’s wisdom in offering each child as broad a range of experiences as possible and obey her instruction to “follow the child.”

**References**


UNESCO, Study on worldwide education for the 25th anniversary of UNESCO.

**Suggested Reading**


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“Read it again, read it again,” cried the children as the teacher turned the last page of a book at an early childhood center I recently visited. The children’s responses reminded me of how much young children love books, especially those with wonderful stories and beautiful pictures.

Good literature helps children learn about the world in which they live and encourages them to fantasize about other worlds as well—in addition to aiding them in becoming good readers and writers. Children’s literature can help in character development: When children hear or read well-written stories with characters who are industrious or who help others, they take in moral lessons. Some books can help children overcome fears or anxieties, while others may help them surmount obstacles or confront difficulties. Some books invite children to seek out adventures, and others remind them to appreciate the safety and security of home.

The list below includes a range of 50 time-honored, well-loved classics for children ages 2 to 7. All of the books on the list can be read aloud to children by parents and teachers. Children can also enjoy paging through many of the books by themselves before they can read; young readers might also be able to read many of these books on their own.

Although I have selected only one book as a representative sample for each author, some of the authors I have included (such as Ezra Jack Keats, Dr. Seuss, and A. A. Milne) have written several excellent books for children.

The list includes prize-winning books such as Caldecott winners Make Way for Ducklings, The Snowy Day, and Where the Wild Things Are; old books like Aesop’s Fables and Mother Goose; and newer books such as Stellaluna and The Kissing Hand. Some books contain retold stories from the past, while others are new stories for the children of today. Although many outstanding concept and skills books exist, like those by Tana Hoban and Keith Baker, I included only books with stories and characters for this list of young children’s literature. The books included have a broad appeal, can be used in a variety of ways with young children at different ages, and are sure to give children hours of pleasure.

### Toddler to 3 Years

**Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?**
by Bill Martin Jr.
In chant form, a variety of colorfully depicted animals respond to the question, “What do you see?”

**Goodnight Moon**
by Margaret Wise Brown
A poem of goodnight wishes from a little rabbit who is trying to postpone going to sleep.

**Harold and the Purple Crayon**
by Crockett Johnson
As little Harold takes a walk with his purple crayon, he draws himself into some exciting adventures.

**Mother Goose**
by Sylvia Long
A collection of 75 classic Mother Goose rhymes with beautiful and detailed illustrations.

**Rosie’s Walk**
by Pat Hutchins
Rosie, a hen, is taking an enjoyable walk around the farm, unaware of the difficulties she is causing a fox that is stalking her.

**The Runaway Bunny**
by Margaret Wise Brown
A little bunny proposes leaving home, while his loving mother assures him that wherever he goes, she will always find him.

**The Very Hungry Caterpillar**
by Eric Carle
A hungry caterpillar eats a variety of morsels and grows up to be a beautiful butterfly.

**Where’s Spot?**
by Eric Hill
When Spot the dog goes missing, everyone joins in to find him.
3 to 7 Years

Aesop’s Fables
Short stories with moral lessons.

Amelia Bedelia
by Peggy Parish
Amelia Bedelia, a charming housekeeper, often gets things mixed up in a delightfully humorous way.

Andy and the Lion
by James Daugherty
Andy meets a lion on the way to school and, by doing a good deed, receives one in return.

A Bear Called Paddington
by Michael Bond
The adventures of a teddy bear found in London’s Paddington Station.

Bedtime for Frances
by Russell Hoban
Frances does not want to go to bed, so she finds many ways to delay the inevitable event.

Blueberries for Sal
by Robert McCloskey
Sal, a little girl, and a little bear have an unexpected adventure while they are picking blueberries with their mothers.

Caps for Sale
by Esphyr Slobodkina
A peddler finds the caps he is trying to sell on the heads of a band of frolicking monkeys and tries to retrieve them.

Carrot Seed
by Ruth Krauss
A little boy persists in believing the carrot seed he has planted and tended will grow into a carrot.

The Cat in the Hat
by Dr. Seuss
Two bored children wish for excitement but regret their wish when a badly misbehaving cat and several of his friends wreak havoc in their house.

The Complete Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales
by the Grimm Brothers
A collection of classic fairy tales for children.

Corduroy
by Don Freeman
A shopworn teddy bear finds love and a home when a little girl named Lisa falls in love with him.

City Mouse and Country Mouse
by John Wallner
When two mouse cousins, one from the city and one from the country, visit one another, they realize the differences in their environments and discover their preferences.

Curious George
by H. A. Rey
George, a curious monkey, leaves the jungle with the man in the yellow hat and explores the world.

Danny and the Dinosaur
by Syd Hoff
A little boy befriends a dinosaur in the museum and the two of them go off to spend the day exploring the city.

Little Bear
by Else Holmelund Minarik
Four adventure stories about Little Bear, his friends, and his caring mother who always supports him when he needs her.

Little Blue and Little Yellow
by Leo Lionni
Two spots, blue and yellow, blend and then explore the world together as green.

The Little Engine That Could
by Watty Piper
Little Engine overcomes insurmountable odds to pull his train to the other side of the mountain as he tells himself, “I think I can, I think I can.”

The Little Red Hen
by Paul Galdone
The Little Red Hen asks for help turning wheat seed into flour to make a cake but her lazy friends refuse to help, except when it’s time to eat the cake.

Lyle, Lyle Crocodile
by Bernard Waber
The adventures of a crocodile who lives with the Prim family in New York City.

Madeline
by Ludwig Bemelmans
Madeline wakes up one night with an attack of appendicitis and finds that sometimes adversity has its own rewards.

Make Way for Ducklings
by Robert McCloskey
A family of ducks finds a home in Boston’s Public Gardens.

Mike Mulligan and the Steam Shovel
by Virginia Lee Burton
Mike Mulligan relies on his old steam shovel, Anne, to do a job, even when he is challenged by new machinery.

Millions of Cats
by Wanda Gag
An old man sets out in search of one kitten and returns with a multitude of cats.

Mr. Popper’s Penguins
by Richard and Florence Atwater
The story of a kindly man who enjoys the friendship of a family of penguins.

No Roses for Harry
by Gene Zion
Harry, a dog, tries his best to discard his birthday sweater.

Snow
by Uri Shulevitz
Falling snowflakes are ignored by the people in the city except for a young boy and his dog, who delight in their beauty.

The Snowy Day
by Ezra Jack Keats
A little boy has adventures on a snowy day.
**Stone Soup**  
by Marcia Brown  
Three soldiers in a French village convince the reluctant villagers to share their food by showing them how to make soup starting with a simple stone.

**Stellaluna**  
by Jannell Cannon  
After accidentally falling into a bird’s nest, a baby bat finds herself trying to adapt to life as a bird.

**Stuart Little**  
by E. B. White  
The adventures of a courageous, quick-thinking mouse who helps his friends.

**Sylvester and the Magic Pebble**  
by William Steig  
When Sylvester is frightened by a lion on his way home, he uses a magic pebble he has found to make a wish that brings many surprising results.

**Swimmy**  
by Leo Lionni  
A little fish, the only survivor of a school of fish swallowed by a tuna, finds a way to protect himself and his new friends.

**The Flag We Love**  
by Pam Munoz Ryan  
Sixteen short poems for young children about the American flag, including its history and symbolism.

**The Kissing Hand**  
by Audrey Penn  
When Chester the raccoon doesn’t want to go to school, his mother gives his hand a kiss that he can take with him wherever he goes.

**The Story of Ferdinand**  
by Munro Leaf  
When Ferdinand, a mild-mannered bull, finds himself in the middle of a bull ring, he chooses to smell the flowers rather than fight.

**The Tale of Peter Rabbit**  
by Beatrix Potter  
Peter Rabbit fails to heed his mother’s warning not to go into Mr. McGregor’s garden and finds himself in some challenging circumstances.

**The Three Bears**  
by Paul Galdone  
Goldilocks visits the house of the three bears and discovers things that are right and not right for her.

**The Three Billy Goats Gruff**  
retold by Peter Christian  
Three goats try to cross a stream and are almost thwarted by a troll.

**The Velveteen Rabbit**  
by Margery Williams  
A dirty, worn-out, stuffed rabbit finds that love and magic help him to become real.

**Winnie the Pooh**  
by A. A. Milne  
A young boy, Christopher Robin, and his stuffed animal friends, including his teddy bear, Winnie the Pooh, have many adventures and, in turn, learn life lessons.

**Where the Wild Things Are**  
by Maurice Sendak  
When a misbehaving boy named Max is sent to bed without his supper, he imagines he sails away to a land of wild things where he is the king.

**Whistle for Willie**  
by Ezra Jack Keats  
A young boy wishes he could whistle for his dog.

**PATRICIA A. VARDIN is chair of the Early Childhood Education Department at Manhattanville College in Purchase, NY.**
Multicultural Books
FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

By Jane M. Gangi

Children of color make up almost 40% of the population in the United States, and 70% of the population of the world, yet too often their stories, their families, and their communities are minimized in classroom collections of children’s literature, as well as in the books chosen for reading aloud. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) offers an interesting theory: All children need both “mirror” books and “window” books—books that reflect back who they are, as well as books that open worlds larger than the one they know.

Mirror books are especially important for literacy development. Research shows that, to become proficient readers, children must be able to make personal connections with books. When there is an abundance of books by and about white people, white children have significantly more opportunities to activate their prior knowledge and, thus, progress further along the road to reading proficiency. When there is a paucity of books by and about people of color, children of color are not afforded the opportunities white children have to activate their prior knowledge.

Children’s book authors and illustrators are often pictured on book jackets, and children of color also need to see authors and illustrators who look like them. There are fine white writers of multicultural children’s books (for example, Vera Williams and Ezra Jack Keats); however, there are also many equally deserving authors and illustrators of color. And children of all colors need to see that talent comes in all colors.

Including a more equitable balance of multicultural books in the classroom will ensure that all children have both mirror and window books. For me, as a white person, Tomás and the Library Lady by Pat Mora is a window book into the life of a migrant child who loves books and learning, yet does not have a library card (something I have almost never been without). For a Mexican American and/or migrant child, Tomás is a mirror book. Pat Mora and her beautiful books can be a source of pride for Mexican American children, who can be mentored both by Mora, a writer, and Tomás Rivera, the main character of the story, who became a chancellor of the University of California.

The following list offers multicultural books in a range of genres: poetry, folklore, picture books, concept books, drama, and nonfiction (informational books and biographies). Informational books and biographies are especially important for boys, who often prefer nonfiction to fiction. Teachers can validate nonfiction by including the genre in read-alouds.

PICTURE BOOKS
Featherless/Desplumado
by Joan Felipe Herrera; illustrated by Ernesto Cuevas, Jr.
A story in which a young boy with spina bifida is able to score a soccer goal, even though he’s in a wheelchair, with the help of a new friend.

Going Home, Coming Home
by Truong Tran; illustrated by Ann Phong
A Vietnamese American girl’s fears about her first trip to Vietnam are quickly quelled when she meets her Vietnamese grandmother.

Jingle Dancer
by Cynthia Leitich Smith; illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu
All the women in her family help Jenna get ready for her first jingle dance by each giving her one bell. Family love is apparent, and it is refreshing to see contemporary American Indians in contemporary dress and occupations.

Little Sap and Monsieur Rodin
by Michelle Lord; illustrated by Felicia Hoshino
This historical fiction picture book is based on the true story of a Cambodian girl who came with her dance troupe to Paris in 1906, where Rodin sketched her.

Lizzie Nonsense: A Story of Pioneer Days
by Jan Ormerod
In the Australian outback during pioneer days, Lizzie’s imagination infuses her life—and her mother’s life—with beauty and magic.
Marianthe’s Story One: Painted Words and Marianthe’s Story Two: Spoken Memories
by Aliki
Aliki has written and illustrated over 100 children’s books. This partly biographical picture book tells the story of her family’s immigration from Greece and her subsequent adjustment in school. Befriended by a sympathetic teacher, who recognizes her talent for art, Marianthe, after initial sadness, becomes content at school. A winner of a Jane Addams Children’s Book Award, an annual honor given to books that promote peace and social justice.

“More More More,” Said the Baby: 3 Love Stories
by Vera Williams
This book lovingly depicts babies in nontraditional families.

My Very Own Room/Mi propio cuarto
by Amanda Irna Pérez; illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez
With help from her family, a little girl creates a small space she can call her own.

Quinito’s Neighborhood/El vecindario de Quinito
by Ina Cumpiano; illustrated by José Ramírez
Quinito sees how everyone in his family, neighborhood, and community contributes to the good of all.

The Araboolies of Liberty Street
by Sam Swope; illustrated by Barry Root
This story addresses being at peace with one’s neighbors, whether they are similar or different.

Tomás and the Library Lady
by Pat Mora; illustrated by Raul Colón
Based on a true story, this moving account describes the relationship between a child of migrant workers and a librarian. Because Tomás had no home address, he could not check out library books until a librarian loaned him her card.

Too Many Tamales
by Gary Soto; illustrated by Ed Martínez
Maria loses her mother’s engagement ring (it is later found) on Christmas Eve in a Mexican American household.

Uncle Jed’s Barber Shop
by Margaree King Mitchell; illustrated by James Ransome
A loving uncle postpones his lifelong dream of owning his own barbershop to help pay the medical expenses for a niece who is ill. Ransome drew upon the work of artist Andrew Wyeth to illustrate this book.

PICTURE BOOK BIOGRAPHIES
Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra
by Andrea Davis Pinkney; illustrated by Brian Pinkney
One in a series of biographies by the Pinkneys, this colorful, musical book can be accompanied by jazz selections. Brian Pinkney’s characteristic scratchboard style of art is at its best and can be easily replicated in early childhood classrooms.

Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez
by Kathleen Krull; illustrated by Yuyi Morales
Winner of a Jane Addams Award, this picture book biography tells the inspiring story of Cesar Chavez, leader of the United Farm Workers, who brought hope to many.

In My Family/En mi familia
by Carmen Lomas Garza
Garza describes her Mexican American heritage in the style of Mexican folk art.

Richard Wright and the Library Card
by William Miller; illustrated by R. Gregory Christie
So great was his desire to read that Wright borrowed a white friend’s card to check out library books.

Satchel Paige
by Lesa Cline-Ransome; illustrated by James Ransome
Stunning illustrations of the great African American baseball player.

Poetry
Ashley Bryan’s ABC of African American Poetry
by Ashley Bryan
The letters of the alphabet organize the poetry.

Arrorró, mi niño/Latino Lullabies and Gentle Games
by Lulu Delacre
The games and lullabies in this gentle book are comforting to children and their parents.

Bein’ With You This Way
by W. Nikola-Lisa; illustrated by Michael Bryant
Expect to be charmed by a little girl who leads others all around the neighborhood; this book won a Jane Addams Award.

Cada Niño/Every Child: A Bilingual Songbook for Kids
by Tish Hinojosa; illustrated by Lucia Angela Perez
A well-balanced collection, from fun and fanciful songs to loving and quiet songs about a child’s abuelita (grandmother).

Confetti: Poems for Children
by Pat Mora; illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez
Mora’s poetry celebrates all kinds of phenomena—colors, for example—familiar to young children.

Honey Baby Sugar Child
by Alice Faye Duncan; illustrated by Susan Keeter
A mother’s love for her toddler, told through poetry.

Honey, I Love, and Other Poems
by Eloise Greenfield
African American children’s poetry, full of love.

Hopscotch Around the World
by Mary Lankford; illustrated by Karen Milone
The rhythm and the movement this book fosters are a strong base upon which to build literacy.

Hush! A Thai Lullaby
by Minfong Ho; illustrated by Holly Meade
A mother quiets the water buffalo, the monkey, and other animals while her baby sleeps.
In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers
by Javaka Steptoe
Steptoe worked for 4 years on the art and design of this book; children can easily experiment with Steptoe’s collage style.

In the Hollow of Your Hand: Slave Lullabies
collected by Alice McGill; illustrated by Michael Cummings
All children love to hear lullabies and will especially love these tender, rhythmic songs.

Jonathan and His Mommy
by Irene Smalls-Hector; illustrated by Michael Hays
This lovely book invites participation as young children can pantomime Jonathan and his mother out walking in many different ways.

Poems to Dream Together/
Poemas para sonar juntos
by Francisco Alarcón; illustrated by Paula Barraquán
Winner of a 2006 Jane Addams Award for younger children, the book helps us all to dream of a better world.

Thirteen Moons on Turtle’s Back:
A Native American Year of Moons
by Joseph Bruchac and Jonathan London; illustrated by Thomas Locker
The combined talents of the poets and the illustrator make this an especially worthwhile collection of American Indian poetry, organized by seasons of the year.

FOLKLORE
A Big Quiet House: A Yiddish Folk tale from Eastern Europe
retold by Heather Forrest
This story of how a noisy house becomes even noisier, then reverts to its original noise level, which does not seem so noisy anymore, is a favorite one for telling and enacting.

Aesop’s Fables
retold and illustrated by Jerry Pinkney
Pinkney’s watercolors convey the ancient fables in an inviting way.

Baby Rattlesnake
as told by Te Ata, adapted by Lynn Moroney; illustrated by Mira Reisberg
Children of all ages enjoy this story about a baby rattlesnake who wants to grow up too fast.

How the Chipmunk Got His Stripes:
A Tale of Bragging and Teasing
retold by Joseph and Jesse Bruchac; illustrated by Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey
How an argument between squirrels ended up with one squirrel becoming a chipmunk.

Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters
retold and illustrated by John Steptoe
The author spent 4 years and time in Zimbabwe rendering this variant of Cinderella.

Noodlehead Stories: World Tales
Kids Can Read & Tell
by Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss
Children delight in these funny folktales, and can easily learn to tell them.

One Grain of Rice: A Mathematical Folktale
retold and illustrated by Demi
Teaching opportunities abound in this tale about how a young woman saves her Indian village from starvation by her cleverness and kindness.

Peace Tales: World Folktales to Talk About
retold by Margaret Read MacDonald
A master storyteller shares her favorite stories about peace.

Peter and the Wolf
by Sergei Prokofiev; illustrated by Michèle Lemieux
Be sure to include accompanying music in the timeless tale of a boy who ventures out too far (as most children do at some time or another).
The Hatseller and the Monkeys: A West African Folktale
retold by Baba Wagué Diakité
This variant from Mali of the monkeys that steal the seller’s hats can be contrasted with Slobodkina’s Eastern European version.

The Rooster Who Went to His Uncle’s Wedding: A Latin American Folktale
retold by Alma Flor Ada; illustrated by Kathleen Kuchera
Children enjoy this story of a prideful character; it is a story as easily told as read.

The Tale of Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp: A Story from the Arabian Nights
retold by Eric Kimmel; illustrated by Ju-Hong Chen
This tale from the Arabian Nights does not lose its enchantment with the passing of time.

The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit
retold by Julius Lester; illustrated by Jerry Pinkney
The African American author and illustrator have weeded out the condescension of the original tales and pulled in cultural authenticity and fun.

White Tiger, Blue Serpent
retold by Grace Tseng; illustrated by Jean and Mou-Sien Tseng
Part pourquoi tale, part fairy tale, a young boy masters adventure when trying to recapture his mother’s brocade.

INFORMATIONAL BOOKS
Efrain of the Sonoran Desert: A Lizard’s Life Among the Seri Indians
by Amalia Astorga, as told to Gary Paul Nabhan; illustrated by Janet K. Miller
This narrative combines information with a story of the desert and its natural phenomena.

i see the rhythm
by Toyomi Igus; illustrated by Michele Wood
A beautifully illustrated book that recounts the vibrant history of African American music; winner of a Jane Addams Award.

CONCEPT BOOKS
Anno’s Counting House
by Mitsumasa Anno
Any of Anno’s books are worthwhile; this one helps children with the concept of counting.

Alphabet City
by Stephen Johnson
This award-winning concept book is exquisitely illustrated; the oil paintings could easily be mistaken for photographs. The book celebrates the urban experience of Montessori Education.

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and challenges children to find recognizable patterns.

**Ten Black Dots**
by Donald Crews
This counting concept book invites children’s creativity; after hearing Crews’s book read aloud, they can create their own counting books. While the book is more universal than ethnic, Crews is an important African American children’s author and illustrator.

**WORDLESS**

**Yellow Umbrella**
by Jae Soo Liu; music by Don Il Sheen (CD included)
This magnificent wordless book, originally published in Korea, is accompanied by piano music. The aerial perspective allows the reader to view first one umbrella, then another, and another, as children band together on a rainy day. It is a perfect platform for storytelling and creative writing.

**DRAMATIC PLAYS**

**Pushing up the Sky: Seven Native American Plays for Children**
by Joseph Bruchac
Bruchac has taken American Indian folkloric stories and adapted them for the theater. These can be dramatized or read aloud as theater pieces.

**¿Teatro!: Hispanic Plays for Young People**
by Angel Vigil
Theater is celebrated in many Hispanic cultures; this collection is a valuable one.

**Reference**

For more comprehensive bibliographies of books mentioned here, see [http://faculty.mville.edu/gangij/](http://faculty.mville.edu/gangij/)

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By Patricia A. Vardin

Learning How to Learn: An American Approach to Montessori
By Nancy McCormick Rambusch

[Editors’ note: Learning How to Learn is out of print; used copies are often available through used-book sellers; prices will vary. The original cost of a hardcover copy was $4.50.]

In 1962, Nancy McCormick Rambusch, the first president of the American Montessori Society and founder and headmistress of the Whiday School, wrote a highly regarded book entitled Learning How to Learn: An American Approach to Montessori. Coming as it did in the 1960s, a period that embraced change and celebrated youth, Learning How to Learn was Rambusch’s challenge to Americans to revisit Montessori philosophy and methods. For Rambusch, Montessori was the means to reinvigorate American educational practice—to promote the development of the socially integrated child by recognizing the connection between an individual’s sense of accomplishment and his ability to interact freely and respectfully with others.

The first part of the book focuses on Montessori’s view of the nature of young children and how they learn. The second section addresses the importance Montessori placed upon the environment and the role that teachers and parents play in facilitating young children’s learning.

In her introduction, Nancy Rambusch addresses what she viewed as particular aspects of the Montessori approach that seem to match the notions of freedom and liberty so frequently touted by Americans. And in her concluding chapter she envisions a new school, whose daily schedule would match the natural rhythms of the child, whose curriculum would view learning as continuous rather than broken into age-segregated blocks, whose teachers would view “the child in the broad context of total self-realization” (p. 127).

Rambusch’s thoughts about early education and the Montessori approach seem particularly relevant today, given contemporary views on the education of young children. She quotes Robert Maynard Hutchins, (president and chancellor of the University of Chicago, 1929–1951): “Nothing is more striking than the absence of connection between the basic problems of America and the education program of America” (p. 6). Rambusch’s analysis of the gap between research and classroom practice in the field of early education during the 1950s highlights major principles of the Montessori approach to early childhood education and how these principles relate to the educational theory and research of the time.

In the introduction, Rambusch writes, “In discussing early education one must deal with a two-fold problem. What are the aims of education for the young, and what methods appear most effectively valid in implementing those aims?” (p. 6) She believes that Dr. Montessori addresses both issues of aims and of methods in her approach to the education of young children. She points out that the Montessori approach includes the application of a set of principles regarding the nature of young children and how they learn:

**The child is a creator of himself.**

Rambusch writes: “If the adult could free the child to realize his true, though hidden, potentialities, the child would be transformed, and as an adult would in turn transform the world” (p. 13). Montessori sees the child as an active participant in the process of becoming himself, wanting to know, and wanting to learn.

Most psychologists and educators today believe that, from birth, young children contribute to their own development and learning as they interact with their environment. For example, Piaget and others have shown that young children actively construct their intelligence as they interact with objects, people, and events in their environment.

**Children learn through motor and sensorial activity.**

Rambusch discusses the importance Montessori placed on children’s active learning through experiences with real materials. Her beliefs led her to create a series of learning materials that helped young children acquire concepts and skills based on sensory and motor activity.

We believe today that much of young children’s learning results from physically acting upon objects in their environment. Using concrete materials is integral to teaching in the early childhood classroom. Such materials are increasingly utilized in the elementary grades as well. Multisensory reading programs and hands-on mathematics and science approaches are commonly found in educational practice today.

**The most important period of life is the period from birth to the age of 6.**

Rambusch quotes Montessori: “There are many who hold, as I do, that the most important period of life is not the age of university studies, but the first one, the period from birth to the age of six” (p. 21). Montessori clearly understood the significance of the first years of life in the development of a young child and the great potential for progress and accomplishment in those first 6 years.

Today, with the accumulation of brain research and decades of studies on cognitive, social, and emotional development, it is now generally accepted that the first 6 years of life play a significant role in the child’s development by laying the foundation for all future learning.

**The child has sensitive periods for learning.**

Rambusch notes that Montessori believed that the child experiences cer-
tain periods of sensitivity to learning, which, if ignored, become missed opportunities for development. Research supports the presence of these sensitive periods of brain development in the first years of life. Many researchers believe that what “wires” a child’s brain during these periods is experience. The sensitive period theory has been best demonstrated in the development of language.

The child wants to do things himself or herself.

Rambusch states that the importance of allowing a child to do for himself appears to be integrally related to a child’s sense of worth. The task of the teacher is “to reinforce the child’s sense of his own worth and to interest him in continual challenges, of which the only apparent value will be his own sense of satisfaction” (p. 58), the ultimate outcome being that “competence breeds confidence” (p. 53).

Rambusch believes that this principle is key to Montessori’s beliefs about the nature of young children. Current child psychology supports the idea that babies and toddlers are naturally driven to master activities that support their development. Studies show that young children are optimistic about their ability to learn and do; and only when children are discouraged from trying things for themselves or criticized by adults does their optimism begin to diminish. When children have the opportunity to act upon their environment, try new skills, and confront new problems, their sense of initiative is supported and their confidence and self-esteem is enhanced.

Rambusch also notes that Montessori put forth specific ways in which teachers and parents can support young children’s learning:

Create a “prepared environment” in which children can learn as individuals as well as within a group.

Rambusch writes that the prepared environment is “the physical and psychological situation made ready for the young child in order to enhance his opportunity to learn through experiences provided him” (p. 71). She continues, “The ‘prepared environment’. . . is designed to help the child achieve a sense of himself, self-mastery, and mastery of his environment. . . .” (p. 71)

We now emphasize the importance of the learning environment in the education of young children. Guidelines from organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children emphasize the importance of quality environments for the education of the very young. Evaluation instruments such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale have been specifically developed to help early childhood educators examine all aspects of their educational environments.

Develop skills of observation.

Rambusch states: The art of observation must be a highly developed skill in the Montessori teacher. The necessity for observing the children and anticipating their needs becomes of increased importance in a classroom environment where individual work allows a number of children to be engaging in different activities simultaneously under the direction of one teacher. (p. 94)

One of the most significant trends in early childhood education today is the focus on observation and assessment, especially as it relates to standards and accountability; numerous books and articles have appeared in the last decade discussing the importance of observation in the early childhood classroom.

Teach in the context of the child’s whole development.

Rambusch observes that, according to Montessori, a teacher must teach the child in the context of his whole development, which includes having an understanding of his various stages of growth and development (p. 126). One of the fundamental principles in early childhood education today is the importance of teaching the “whole child” with an in-depth understanding of child development. This seems “old hat” to many of us, but the need to make such a statement in 1962 underscores just how far we have come in our understanding of early education.

Nurture a positive disposition toward learning.

In the concluding chapter of her book Rambusch states: A learning approach which emphasizes the cogency of learning how to learn, and the attitude necessary for making this possible, commends itself to our attention. The child who has the disposition, skill and attention necessary for learning will be a freer and more creative learner all his life. (p. 133)

Montessori was ahead of her time. Contemporary educational practice, in fact, has to some degree, finally caught up. Nancy Rambusch perspicaciously viewed the Montessori approach as necessary and adaptable to the particular needs of American education. In her concluding chapters, she discusses education after age 6 and the “new” school, whose radicalization will come about at the hands of the teacher.

In the next decades, the element in the educational triad most likely to assume a new form is not the child, who, thwarted or not, will continue to be himself, and less the environment, which superficially may already resemble the physical situations just described. The radical change will be in the teacher. (p. 132)

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ASSOCIATION MONTESSORI INTERNATIONALE

[Signature]

General-Director.

[Editors’ note: This is a copy of a letter from Mario Montessori to Nancy McCormick Rambusch.]
Editors' note: Due to our publication schedule, information provided on school accreditation in each issue is based on information available at the time the issue goes to press. For the most up-to-date accreditation information, please visit the AMS website at www.amshq.org.

Accredited schools have obtained the highest level of recognition by AMS and meet a standard of excellence in the implementation of Montessori education recognized by the Montessori community.

School accreditation is a voluntary process undertaken by schools committed to the highest standards of performance. Through a rigorous self-study and documentation process, a school defines itself in terms of strengths and areas in need of improvement; these processes validate the interconnection of the school’s mission, philosophy, and daily practice.

Most importantly, school accreditation requires a commitment from the entire school community toward continuous school improvement.

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MONTESSORI SCHOOL HOUSE (MSAC) BULLHEAD CITY
ST. LUKE’S SCHOOL (MSAC) PRESCOTT
CALIFORNIA
CALIFORNIA MONTESSORI PROJECT CARMICHAEL (Satellite) (MSAC) CARMICHAEL
CALIFORNIA MONTESSORI PROJECT AMERICAN RIVER (Satellite) (MSAC) CITRUS HEIGHTS
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LAGUNA NIGUEL MONTESSORI CENTER (MSAC) LAGUNA NIGUEL
VALLEY MONTESSORI SCHOOL (AMS) LIVERMORE
MISSION VIEJO MONTESSORI (MSAC) MISSION VIEJO
CALIFORNIA MONTESSORI PROJECT CAPITOL (Satellite) (MSAC) SACRAMENTO

ARIZONA
MARIA MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY (MSAC) SAN DIEGO
MONTESSORI SCHOOL HOUSE (Satellite) (MSAC) SAN DIEGO
CALIFORNIA MONTESSORI PROJECT SHINGLE SPRINGS (Satellite) (MSAC) SHINGLE SPRINGS
MONTESSORI ACHIEVEMENT CENTER (MSAC) SPRING VALLEY

COLORADO
MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF DENVER (AMS) DENVER

CONNECTICUT
GREAT BEGINNINGS MONTESSORI SCHOOL (AMS) FAIRFIELD
WHITBY SCHOOL (AMS) GREENWICH
WINDSOR MONTESSORI SCHOOL (AMS) WINDSOR

DELAWARE
ELEMENTARY WORKSHOP MONTESSORI SCHOOL (AMS) WILMINGTON
HOCKESSION MONTESSORI SCHOOL (AMS) HOCKESSION
URSULINE ACADEMY (AMS) WILMINGTON
WILMINGTON MONTESSORI SCHOOL (AMS) WILMINGTON

FLORIDA
ALEXANDER SCHOOL, INC. (AMS) MIAMI
ALEXANDER MONTESSORI SCHOOL (Satellite) (AMS) MIAMI
ALEXANDER MONTESSORI SCHOOL (Satellite) (AMS) MIAMI

GEORGIA
BLACKSTOCK MONTESSORI SCHOOL (AMS) VILLA RICA

CONNECTICUT
ALAMO MONTESSORI SCHOOL (MSAC) ALAMO SPRINGS
THE BRANDON CHILDREN’S HOUSE OF BOCA RATON (AMS) BOCA RATON
COUNTRY DAY MONTESSORI (AMS) LARGO
LAKE MARY MONTESSORI ACADEMY (AMS) LAKE MARY
MAITLAND MONTESSORI SCHOOL (MSAC) MAITLAND
THE MONTESSORI HOUSE DAY SCHOOL (AMS) TAMPA
THE MONTESSORI HOUSE DAY SCHOOL (Satellite) (AMS) TAMPA

CONNECTICUT
MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF PENSACOLA (Satellite) (AMS) PENSACOLA

CONNECTICUT
MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF PENSACOLA (AMS) PENSACOLA
MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF PENSACOLA (Satellite) (AMS) PENSACOLA
MONTESSORI TIDES SCHOOL (AMS) JACKSONVILLE

NEW GATE SCHOOL (AMS) SARASOTA
NEW GATE SCHOOL, INC. (Satellite) (AMS) SARASOTA
RENAISSANCE SCHOOL, INC. (AMS) FORT MYERS
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The Montessori schools offer:
• Montessori credentialed teachers • Montessori classes that are multiage grouped • Strong parent involvement • Montessori materials

Qualifications: • Leadership and experience in Montessori education desirable • Master’s degree • Five years successful teaching experience • Valid State of Ohio elementary/ high school principal certificate (Candidates who do not hold a valid certificate may apply for a temporary certificate when hired.) • Montessori training or willingness to complete Montessori training • Two years Montessori administrative experience desirable

Salary: $81,734.86-$101,680.93

Principals will be placed in the level commensurate to their assignment and years of leadership as principal. Excellent benefit package.

Applicants should submit:
• letter of application and resume • photocopy of certificate • the names, titles and addresses of three professional references

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29 Murphy’s Laws for a Montessori Classroom

By Joan Schaefer

[Editors’ note: This piece originally appeared in Volume 11, Issue 2 of The Constructive Triangle, Spring 1984.]

1. The child whose parent is in the observation room will do nothing that day—until the parent leaves.

2. A 2-year-old putting on his own shoes is more likely to put them on the wrong feet the closer it is to dismissal.

3. You run out of milk only on days when everyone wants milk.

4. If a child is going to be pushed down the slide or knocked into the mud, his mother will be sitting in the first car in line.

5. The child who sat in your lap all afternoon will have the flu the next day.

6. The only item all year that is brought in for “Show and Tell” and lost will be the one irreplaceable heirloom that has been in the family for 200 years.

7. Whatever the teacher thinks will be a delicious snack will be refused by over half the class.

8. If someone’s notice is lost, it will belong to the same person whose notice you lost the last time.

9. The play yard will be muddy when everyone is present and really “full of beans.”

10. No matter how careful you are with aprons for poster paint, it will somehow get on the child wearing the most expensive clothes in the class.

11. When the class is discussing who is absent that day, neither teacher will ever know who is absent until the children tell them.

12. Great ideas for practical life never are.

13. If a plant is going to shrivel up and die, it will belong to the most observant child in the room. (Healthy plants are owned by children who could care less.)

14. If someone forgets to send in a snack, that will be the day that there are no leftovers from previous snacks in the cupboards.

15. The classroom will always be orderly and everyone will be working when no one is in the observation room.

16. If someone drops the peg board with 100 pegs, at least half the class will drop something within the following 15 minutes.

17. Children in play clothes never fall in the mud; children on the way to Grandma’s house always do.

18. Even though a child has a 50% chance of putting his shoes on the right feet, he won’t.

19. The children with the tightest boots and most complicated snowsuits are picked up first.

20. If your room is a mess, a parent will come into the room to pick up a child early.

21. No one ever needs your help until you sit down.

22. No one ever gets a chance to pass a snack, be first in line, or sing his favorite song. (We don’t know who those children are who get those turns . . . maybe elves!)

23. If there is one person absent, you will never remember who it is.

24. If a child’s plant dies, it will belong to the one parent who actually remembers what it was (and was sentimental about it).

25. No one will ever look into the hamster’s cage until the day he dies during class.

26. Washable poster paint isn’t.

27. The smaller the child’s body, the louder he can cry.

28. The items in the lost and found bag do not now, and never did, belong to anyone.

29. No matter what you have for a snack, someone won’t like it.
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