

THE EZINE FOR MONTESSORI PROFESSIONALS

informed

ISSUE 46
August 2014



Hello,

This is the second issue of Informed for 2014. Many thanks to Jan Gaffney, Anne-Marie Love, Michela Homer, Cathy Wilson and Rose Phillips who have written reflections on the recent conference.

If you have not yet responded to the MANZ Census please take the time to make your voice heard.

Ana



Ana Pickering

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MONTESSORI AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND

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2014-16 Professional, Meeting and Event Dates



2014

> Montessori Near You:

Children Who Push Our Buttons

- New Plymouth, Saturday August 9
- Tauranga, Saturday August 16
- Hamilton, Saturday September 20
- Auckland, Saturday September 27th
- Dunedin, Saturday October 11th

> MANZ Auckland Reception

Friday October 31, 7.30pm (venue tbc)

> Montessori Mystery Bus Tour, Auckland

Saturday November 1, 10am-3.30pm **SOLD OUT**

2015

> MANZ Workshop with Julia Hilson

Auckland Saturday February 28-Sunday March 1
Montessori for Under Threes

> MANZ 2015 Conference, Tauranga

Saturday April 11 - Monday April 13,
Trinity Wharf, Tauranga

> MANZ Workshops with Alison Awes

■ Auckland Sat May 30

Supporting the Dyslexic Child in Montessori from 3 to 12 years: one day workshop

■ Auckland Tuesday June 2

Public Lecture on Language and Literacy

■ Wellington Wed and Thurs June 3-4 (evenings)

Supporting the Dyslexic Child in Montessori from 3 to 12 years: two consecutive evening workshops

■ Wellington Sat-Sun June 6-7

The physical and psychological prepared environment for the primary child

2016

> MANZ workshops with Carla Foster

(venues tbc)

May 15-16 From Constructive Triangles to Pythagoras

May 21-22 Supporting Literacy in Montessori from 3 to 12 years

2014 Meeting Dates

- MANZ Council Meeting Friday September 5th, Wellington
- MANZ Teacher Education Hui, Auckland, Thursday October 30th.
- MANZ Council Meeting Friday October 31st.

Professional Events

> Montessori Near You:

Children Who Push Our Buttons

There are five more workshops in the 2014 Montessori Near You series – with an additional workshop in the series being offered in New Plymouth on August 9 and in Dunedin on October 11th. If you want to attend and have yet to register please do so at www.montessori.org.nz/professional-events

Pam is also available for in-centre consultancies and parent talks in Auckland Sept 22-26. If you are interested email eo@montessori.org.nz asap.

> MANZ Auckland Reception, Friday October 31

Last year MANZ Council hosted a reception for centre owners, trusts and other interested people in Auckland. It was such a success we are planning the next Auckland reception for Friday October 31. Invitations and details of the event will be sent later in the year. Mark it in your diary! It will be an evening of fun and networking with perhaps a Halloween theme.

WHAT'S ON 2015-16

MANZ Under Three Workshop with Julia Hilson

February 28-March 1, 2015 Auckland

Julia Hilson is coming to New Zealand in early 2015 and this long-awaited workshop focusing on Montessori for under threes will be of great interest for teachers and parent involved in parent-infant playgroups. Julia has Montessori qualifications for 0-3, 3-6 and 6-12 and is nearly finished the AMI Training of Trainers programme for 0-3 and will soon be the first Australian AMI 0-3 trainer.



Montessori for Under Threes

This two day workshop is an opportunity for teachers and parents to gain an appreciation of the Montessori approach for babies, infants and toddlers under three years of age. The principles will draw on Montessori philosophy and pedagogy together with current understandings about the development and psychology of the young child.

You will learn about relevant differences between the children under three and the Montessori approach for 3-6 year olds. An overview of Montessori theory and practice, following the child's natural development and focusing on the period from conception to age three will include the physical, psychological and developmental needs of the child. You will gain an understanding of the child's absorbent mind and the sensitive periods important at this time of life.

Julia will outline the critical importance of observation with the 0-3 child and give practical ideas about how the environment needs to be prepared and what you should try to achieve in the 0-3 environment. She will help you understand how to work with young children from birth to three and outline why, when and how parents can be involved. Julia will focus on the environment being 'fit-for-purpose' and provide ideas and examples of how you can provide for the particular needs and cultures of the children attending in your setting.



MANZ Workshops with Alison Awes

May 30-June 7, 2015

Alison Awes from the Montessori Centre of Minnesota will travel to NZ in June 2015 to lead a one-day workshop focusing on supporting children (3-12 years) with dyslexia in Montessori in Auckland. A public lecture on language and literacy will be held in Auckland on Tuesday June 2. This workshop will be repeated in Wellington on two consecutive evenings Wed-Thurs June 3-4. She will also led a workshop for Montessori primary teachers on the physical and psychological prepared environment for the primary child in Wellington the following weekend.

Workshop: Supporting the Dyslexic Child in Montessori, Auckland May 30, Wellington June 3-4 (evenings)

Dyslexic children need sequential, multi-sensory and explicit experience with the sounds and symbols of our language to read fluently. The richly prepared environment provides a plethora of language experiences for the preschool and primary-aged child. This workshop will cover characteristics of dyslexia, recommendations of the US National Reading Panel, and how to support the dyslexic child in a Children's House and then through Cosmic Education. This workshop is suitable for early childhood and primary teachers, parents and interested educators.

Workshop: Principles of the Prepared Environment: How the Prepared Environment Supports Cosmic Education, Wellington June 6-7

This workshop will explore the details of the psychological and physical prepared environment for the elementary child. In addition to the theoretical aspects of Cosmic Education and the characteristics of the child, Alison will also address how to encourage and inspire meaningful work including how to generate interest, inspire follow up work, and increase the variety of work in the 6-12 classroom without using imposed assignments or teacher directed activities. She will provide practical advice on the organization and maintenance of your classroom as well as working with parents, administrators, and staff. Refresh and energize your spirit with ideas for improving your work while remaining calm and focused on the essential priorities of a successful Montessori classroom. This workshop is suitable for primary teachers in Montessori 6-12 classes.

Alison Awes

Alison Awes is the Director of Elementary Training at the Montessori Center of Minnesota, Assoziation Montessori Schweiz, and the Co-Director of Elementary Training at the Maria Montessori Institute, London. She holds AMI diplomas for 3-6 and 6-12 and has taught in both six-to-nine and nine-to-twelve classrooms.



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■ WHAT'S ON 2015-16

■ MANZ Workshops with Carla Foster

May 15-16 and May 21-22, 2016

Another set of weekend workshops are being organised with Carla Foster, director of training from the Montessori Centre of New England. Carla will lead two workshops that are for teachers from three to 12 including the Montessori approach to literacy and a workshop that focuses on geometry in the Montessori environment – From Constructive Triangles to Pythagoras. The workshop details and venues still to be confirmed.



Have you filled in the MANZ Census?

How responses have been received in the MANZ Census to date??

92 teachers from Montessori early childhood centres
32 Montessori early childhood employers
21 teachers from Montessori primary plus
2 Montessori primary employers

Many more responses needed by August 31!!



■ Professional News

■ MANZ Census 2014

MANZ is developing a new strategic plan for 2015-19 and one focus of this work is around leading the development of a viable, sustainable workforce for Montessori early childhood centres. The challenge of having a pool of teachers with Montessori qualifications has been on-going since the second wave of Montessori in New Zealand in the late 1970s.

The need for teachers brought about the development of the Aperfield Montessori Diploma, the establishment of the B. Ed (MECT and MPT) at AUT University and the local provision of Association Montessori Internationalé (AMI) and Montessori Centre International (MCI) diplomas.

To begin this new focus MANZ needs baseline data from current employers and existing workforce.

What do we need from employers?

MANZ needs information from employers in Montessori early childhood centres and schools about their current staffing, qualification requirements, thoughts about current Montessori qualifications and your ideas for building a sustainable workforce. *What size are Montessori early childhood centre and schools in NZ? How many teachers are employed? Do teachers hold NZ teacher registration? What Montessori qualifications do employers prefer? What strategies do employers have employ Montessori and early childhood qualified teachers?*

What do we need from teachers?

We also want to know about our current workforce in early childhood and primary plus ... *How many teachers are in Montessori early childhood centres and schools in New Zealand? What qualifications do teachers hold? Is our workforce aging? How many teachers have early childhood or primary qualifications and Montessori qualifications??*

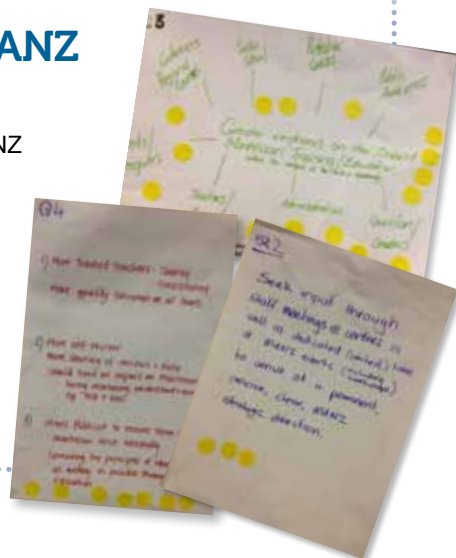
Employer and teacher responses will help inform MANZ and Montessori teacher education providers who meet on October 31 to begin a collaborative renewed focus on developing a sustainable workforce.

The results of the MANZ Census will be available for MANZ members in September. MANZ asks for your assistance in gathering the information. We need replies from the 400-550 teachers and 100 plus employers of teachers in in Montessori centres and schools. **Don't miss out on having your say ... the survey is open until August 31, 2014. PS. Spread the word!!**

www.montessori.org.nz/MANZ-Census-2014

Consulting on the draft MANZ Strategic Plan 2015-19

MANZ Council have begun work on the next MANZ Strategic Plan. The draft goals and strategies were outlined in the April Montessori Voices magazine and delegates at the conference focused on the strategic plan at the MANZ Open Forum. MANZ Council is keen to get your response – you can do this www.surveymonkey.com/s/MANZ_draft_strategic_plan_2015



NEWS

Dr Nicola Chisnall Award

Over 650 votes were cast in the inaugural Dr Nicola Chisnall Award in 2014. The overall winner of the inaugural award was Wa Ora Montessori School from Lower Hutt.

Wa Ora Montessori School won the online vote and Kowhai Montessori Preschool won the conference vote.

The award was made by Dave Stott at the MANZ Conference dinner in New Plymouth on September 6th, 2014 to Krista Kerr who accepted on behalf of Wa Ora Montessori School.

Congratulations to Kerry Pratchett from Wa Ora Montessori School for co-ordinating the school's entry to the award.

This message from Jenny Stott, Nicky's daughter was read at the presentation of the award:

"Congratulations to the four nominees in the inaugural Dr Nicola Chisnall Memorial Award. Each of you have undertaken and achieved inspiring projects that focus on areas Mum was particularly passionate about – supporting children in their immediate and wider communities and working with those communities to open pathways for children to teach and inspire the people around them.



As you will all know, and as Mum worked tirelessly to promote, children have a lot to teach us. Mum believed that the Montessori framework supports peace and social justice, in the way that it allows children to think for themselves, but also the importance it places on being part of their wider community. It promotes independence and the pursuit of subjects they are truly passionate about, but also teaches children that their actions and the actions of others have an impact on the people and environment around them.

If children are taught to respect and be part of their community and to respect and love the people within those communities, their actions can influence the people around them.

Each of your projects show how you have taken forward this philosophy of working with your local and wider communities to offer children an environment that inspires their learning and promotes a sense of belonging, whether that is being welcomed from one classroom to another; developing and being part of the environment outside the classroom; or developing relationships and partnerships with other local groups to support the children in your schools, all of these projects focus on preparing your children to live in and be part of their community and to teach and inspire those around them.

I am very happy to see that the philosophy Mum worked so tirelessly to promote is alive and well in Aotearoa's Montessori movement, and that Mum's memory is being honoured by continuing to promote projects that reflect that. Good luck and congratulations again on your inspiring projects".

We encourage Montessori centres, schools and students to start thinking about entering this annual award in 2015.



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MANZ Council and new President

There is a new President of Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand. Jan Gaffney stood down after the recent AGM, after serving as president since 2007. The MANZ Council appointed Gillian Somers as the new president. Gillian has served on the council since 2008.



At the conference closing Jan was given a standing ovation from the delegates in acknowledgement of her years of leadership for Montessori in New Zealand. She remains on Council for a further two years.

Anne-Marie Love from Montessori Children's House in Wanaka was elected on to MANZ Council at the AGM and is the only South Island representative. She is the centre manager and has been involved with the Montessori Journey to Excellence Pilot Programme over the last 18 months.

Claire Nesdale, Wee Wisdom Montessori in Auckland has been co-opted onto MANZ Council until the next AGM. Claire has been on MANZ Council for two years. MANZ Council have also co-opted Mamira Ali from Waikato. Mamira was formerly centre manager for Kidicorp and has recently opened her own centre, Montessori House of Children in Hamilton.

At the AGM in 2015 members will be asked to vote on a remit to increase the number of MANZ Council members from 6 to 9 members. MANZ Council have noted that in recent years there has been more members willing to contribute as part of the Council than available positions. Increasing the number of positions will enable more people who wish to contribute at national level to have the opportunity to be successfully nominated and voted onto the Council.

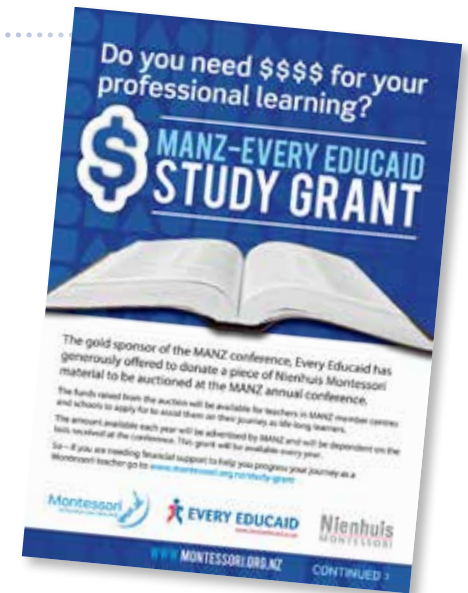
The next meeting of the new Council is on September 5th in Wellington.

MANZ Study Grant

The gold sponsor of the MANZ conference, Every Educaid has generously offered to donate a piece of Nienhuis Montessori material to be auctioned each year at the MANZ annual conference.

The funds raised from the auction will be available for teachers in MANZ member centres and schools to apply for to assist them on their journey as life-long learners.

The amount available each year will be advertised by MANZ and will be dependent on the bids received at the conference. At the 2014 conference the material was The Farm – used for language. The winning bid was placed by Wa Ora Montessori School for \$455. This amount is available for the study grant. The application is available to download <http://www.montessori.org.nz/study-grant>.



MANZ Research Grant

The MANZ research grant was advertised at the recent conference and flyers have been sent to all member schools. This year there is \$6500 available for teachers to apply for. You don't have to be at university to be a researcher – perhaps there is support you need in your centre for centre inquiry or self review? www.montessori.org.nz/research



Reflections from the MANZ 2014 Conference

The Reflective Montessori Practitioner Te Pouako Huritao o Montessori

MANZ Council members have provided a reflection on their learning at the conference to share with you through this e-zine. This may provoke some further reflection by delegates who attended the conference and give a small insight into the wealth of learning made possible by attending the MANZ Conference to teachers who were not able to be in New Plymouth this year.

Reflecting on the past to inspire the future

Claire Nesdale, Wee Wisdom Montessori, Auckland

In her keynote speech, Uma Ramani took the delegates of the 2014 MANZ Conference on a journey back through time. She took us back to the original Casa de Bambini in the slums of Rome, to the hustle and bustle of a group of unkempt preschool children in a small room with only two adults to care for them. Unlike our modern day environments there were no regulations to guide them or teachers with specialist training and degrees - just Dr Montessori's keen eye for observation and her ability to apply common sense. Uma's story took us back to the basics of how Dr Montessori discovered her baseline ideas that today we call the Montessori Method - simple ideas that if followed in the true spirit they were discovered make all the difference.

The greatest gift that we can learn from the story of the original Casa is to be reflective in our practice. Following in Dr Montessori's footsteps we must reflect continually not only on what we do or don't do, but on how we prepare the environment. When Dr Montessori first observed and reflected on the Casa she saw there was a need for basic health and safety. She was aware that the children were more than capable of looking after themselves and their environment. With trust for the children's capabilities Dr Montessori set the environment and then guided them in the basic activities such as washing hands, preparing food and general housekeeping. Dr Montessori was also aware that these small children were very capable of being part of a social community so she guided the children in the practice of social graces. In our classrooms today we know these basics as Practical



Life and Grace and Courtesy, the very core of the Montessori Method. At this point Uma challenged us to reflect on how we as practitioners, as the children's guides, ensure our environments support these basics and that we do not interfere with their natural progression.

In the next part of our journey, Uma described how Dr. Montessori introduced the children to the didactic materials that we see in our classrooms on a daily basis. In the original Casa the caretaker was in control of the materials which were kept in an adult cupboard. Each day he would take out the materials for the children to use, and then replace them back in the cupboard at the end of the day, safe and sound away from the children. One day the caretaker was late in performing his duty and the children decided to take out the materials by themselves and were found by the adults using the materials. This infuriated the adults who took their complaints directly to Dr Montessori who being reflective in her approach observed the children. Her observations lead her to believe that the environment should be in the children's control and constantly set up with everything in its place.

The stories that Uma shared really resonated with me and I believe many others in the room. Being a reflective practitioner can be as simple as getting back to basics and reflecting on our environment to ensure that it serves the simple needs of the child. Do our environments allow children full independence to truly and freely look after themselves, the environment and others? Do we allow time and space for children to practice social graces without interruption? Do we as adults get in the way, lead rather than guide and generally poke our noses in where they are not needed? Uma's visit to New Zealand was short and sweet, but I'm sure for the delegates of the 2014 MANZ conference she has left a lasting impression that will surely lead us one step closer to being better reflective practitioners.

My reflection on an environment for life

Michela Homer, Kidicorp, Bay of Plenty

When we consider environments within a Montessori context, we often only think of the prepared *physical* environment. Uma challenged us to consider the environment as a 'life giving environment.' When you think in these broad terms, you realise that the environment encompasses so much more than just the physical. Uma reminded us that we are a part of this environment and therefore have a responsibility to reflect on ourselves. Are we as adults in this child's life giving environment supporting and serving children's self-formation or are we actually an obstacle within it? She broke the environment down into three areas to reflect upon;

- the physical environment,
- the means of development (materials and socio psychological)
- the prepared adult.

If we consider the environment as being an 'agent of education' then we need to move beyond just making it 'pretty' and look deeper. Uma reminded us that we need to protect, predict, stimulate and nourish the environment in order for children to form themselves. Uma introduced us to the principle of "subsidiarity." What she meant by this is that we must first look to the environment, then the materials within it and then only when absolutely necessary step in ourselves. She stated that we have the responsibility for creating the conditions for life then we must take a backseat. We have to remain non-judgemental and help the child to navigate. When the child deviates, we need to do it respectfully and unobtrusively. Taking a backseat to me means that we need to observe the environment and consider if it has all it needs to support the child's development. After observing we must reflect on what help is required and how best we can offer this help. Both Uma and Jamie Roux spoke to us in their keynote speeches about the analogy of being a good waiter which supports this principle of subsidiarity. To me this really affirmed my role in a Montessori environment as being observant, anticipating needs, setting up an optimal environment so that I don't need to be central to it, knowing when to intervene and when to be in the background and foremost being humble and non-judgemental.

So when we start, we need to start with the physical environment first. For example, are the furnishings just right for the children in it? Do we have areas set up that allow for children to engage in sustained concentration? Then she asked us to consider the 'means of development'. Most of this comes from the materials off the shelf but on its own, this is limited because we provide the language and meaningful practical life that evolves based on *our* observation of children. We need to reflect on everything in the environment and consider if the materials in it provide the raw material for the creation of the human being. So as teachers we must reflect on the practical life materials on the shelf and consider if the activities provided support the context of the environment? She also reminded us to reflect on the socio psychological aspects of the environment for example, is the pace we set in the classroom supporting the younger children in their self-formation (i.e. allowing more time for them to dress or undress)? Lastly, we have to reflect on ourselves as the 'prepared adult.' As stated before this means thinking deeply about our role in the environment and how it enhances or obstructs learning within it.

I know that Uma's workshop challenged my own thinking as I know I often step in and try and intervene before I look at what I am actually providing in the environment. Uma stated that when we get the 'whole' environment set up for children's learning we'll see independence, spontaneous discipline, the work cycle, social cohesion and concentration occurring within it. To achieve this then we need to make careful observations and reflect on this so that we are able to create positive changes for our children. I'll end on a quote from A.M Joosten, Uma's mentor. When we set up our 'environments for life' our intention is that it becomes so interwoven through all we do that it's not just set aside for when we hold meetings it becomes "like the beating of the heart."

Observation is a brush and we are the artists

Anne-Marie Love, Montessori House of Children, Wanaka

Uma Ramani used the analogy of the brush and it was one that really prompted me to ask myself a number of questions:

- How good are my skills of observation?
- What does my brush look like?
- How do I become a Picasso?

Uma reinforced to us over the two days that as with everything, preparation is the key and if our minds and hearts are not prepared we will not see. She stressed that as the teacher you must have the skill to view the child with openness and to consistently ask yourself, am I observing with an open mind? Our observational skills must have the capacity to observe without judgement, much less pre-judge, judgement will follow but only after we have looked as to what the developmental needs of the child are.....

Uma related observing the child to the TV show 'My Kitchen Rules'. Each of the contestants are given a basket of ingredients with no prior knowledge of what is inside. On opening the basket the rules are simple they must use everything that is enclosed within the basket to produce the end result.

Transfer this to when observing, the same rules apply in that we must observe all that encompasses the child to ensure that what we are seeing is a true reflection. Uma reminded us that our basket should include the child's level of independence, not only physically but also their emotional, social and intellectual independence. Likewise their social interactions, use of materials, work habits and their physical movements should be evident in your observations.

It was now I realised that my brush had previously been missing a number of bristles. I can think of a number of observations that I have completed over the years where I believe I had already pre-judged and I definitely know that I had not included all of the ingredients listed.

Uma also spoke to us about how essential it is to learn to direct our observations so that merely sensorial looking becomes mentally alert intelligent observing.



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Observing and questioning your own actions must also form part of your daily practice. What do you need to respond to, is it the behaviour, the child's need, the community's need, your own need or the needs of the system? Question your actions are they reflexive or reflective?

If supporting the developmental needs of the child is our goal, then we need to find out what will guide our actions.

Throughout the weekend I listened in awe as Uma presented her workshops. She held my attention, interest and made me question and reflect on my practice. As I observed her with my brush, albeit missing some bristles, the pace of her delivery struck a chord with me. Her deliberate moments of silence and pauses made me at first speculate she had lost her place but as the day unfolded you realised the silence and break in proceedings were for us to really reflect on what we had just heard. Uma was modelling our role in the environment and the time and pace at which she spoke I believe was a lesson for us all.



Implementing Cosmic Education through observation

Rose Phillips, Eastern Suburbs Montessori School, Auckland

In her session on observation, Jamie spoke of the importance of this necessary tool that is the cornerstone of our work. She stated that Montessori does not start with the curriculum but with the child and our observations of the child will show us the needs of the child and out of these needs, we as the adult then respond. It is like watching theory come to

life. The more we observe, the more we see. Observation is validation for what we do.

With this in mind, Jamie gave us some direction on being observers and that observations need to be deliberate, non-judgemental, unobtrusive and always looking for the human tendencies that we know so well through our training.

In the answer to her question 'What are the Goals of Our Observations in our classrooms of 24 – 45 children?' she gave the following three answers:

1. To determine the needs of each child in our care.
2. To lead us to respond to these needs in appropriate ways and in appropriate times.
3. To guide us in removing obstacles to each child's development.

We were reminded that Maria Montessori was a scientific observer. She didn't jump to conclusions but collected the evidence to know how to respond to what the child was showing. We were also instructed to be scientific observers and to have an objective view to what we saw and not a subjective view, e.g. Sally came in in happy (subjective) or Sally came in smiling (objective). These two observations can have an effect on how the adult might respond to a situation. Jamie emphasized that we need to learn how to observe and gave the following pointers to help us get under way.

We were encouraged to develop the habit of observing EVERYDAY for 10 minutes, having a book in hand, an observer's chair and a policy of not being disturbed. The following observation techniques were discussed:

- Observe in a way that no particular child feels watched.
- Scan the whole classroom without focusing on a particular group of students.
- Write notes, being careful not to write when a child observes you.
- Pay attention to a child's body language and tone of voice in addition to what is being said.

Jamie encouraged us to formalize these 10 minute daily observations by recording in the first two minutes what each child was doing. The remaining time should have a focus and to record the focus at the top of the observation page and take objective notes. These notes need to be reviewed weekly and used to plan lessons the following week. It is wise to change the time of observations around depending on the purpose. The observer should always be reflective about what is observed and observations will bring forth a myriad of questions e.g. Does the class run smoothly without teacher?

Jamie then spoke about what we should be observing and that our observations should be purposeful and open. She suggested posing some of the following questions to get us started:

- How do the children enter the room at the beginning of the day – Is it purposefully? Hesitantly? With a smile? Do they start their work? She mentioned that the teacher should not be waiting by the door and that a class group should only happen on a Monday to set up and guide the week.
- How is the first work of the day chosen by the children? It is a friend, teacher, parent or another child making the decision?
- Are the children working in groups? Why or why not? The 6 – 12 age are very social and group work is essential for their growth and development. Jamie also commented that having children plan what they are going to work on is not necessary and that the journal is for recording work that has been done.
- Are all the areas of the classroom in use by the children? There are 8 areas including art, biology, geography, history, language, math, music & geometry. If not, why not? What can I do to change that?
- What human tendencies do you see engaged? The list includes: concentration, movement, exploration, order, communication, association with others, orientation, exactness and self-perfection. When we see these tendencies we should be challenging children to their next step.
- How do children solve problems that arise? Is there a need for grace and courtesy lessons that can be role played in a funny way by the teacher and having children role play the correct way?

- How do the children form their working groups?
- Are the children all engaged in work?
- Are the children going out?
- What is each child showing interest in? The pattern for learning is: memory, interest, understanding and reason. Being familiar with something leads to interest. Interests support work.
- Is there hands on work in the classroom? Work of the hand is essential even 9 – 12 year olds need work with the hand.
- Does the environment provide the means for the children to check their work? Lessons are to give impressions and lead to exploring so process is often more important than correctness.
- Do you see evidence of the child's creativity?
- Is great work happening in the classroom? This can be seen when children asking questions, work in groups, show their reasoning mind, have imagination, are sturdy physically, want to do big things, and have deep intellectual conversations.

With this list of questions, we could be wondering how this could be done in 10 minutes! Certainly we have ideas to keep us motivated to form the habit of observation! So that led onto the next step in observation - What do you do with the data you gather from observing?

With the emphasis on observation being 'what we do', observation notes are essential for reflecting and planning in our classrooms. Jamie told us ways that we can use our observation notes and these included:

- looking for emerging patterns,
- using the data as a guide for planning lessons,
- seeing the need to change something in the prepared environment,
- seeing the need to change your own response to a child's behaviour,
- sharing with parents or administration as appropriate,
- observe more.

Of course this formalized 10 minutes of observation is not the only observation that occurs in a classroom, and as practitioners we were encouraged to be aware of the constant observations that occur. These should also be noted down as well so that they can be referred back to.

Observations occur during lessons so:

- Watch to see who is engaged in the presentation.
- Observe social dynamics. Do the children take turns without adult interventions? How do they?
- Observe to see who is grasping the concept being presented.
- Who is ready for the next lesson? Who needs the prior lesson?

Other observations referred to as 'spontaneous observations', also occur and should be noted. Keep your observation notebook with you at all times to record notes as you move through the classroom.

So we have observations....what now? The answer is simple.... Reflect, Reflect, Reflect. Observations do not have to drive you to immediate action. After reflection, respond to your observations, then observe, reflect, observe again, reflect and the cycle continues. We truly will be reflective practitioners if we simply observe and use what we see to drive how we respond to the children.

Jamie has continued to inspire me in my Montessori practice – spending just an hour and a half on observation and coming away from the session with this wealth of 'knowledge and refreshment', I feel 'well fed' to continue with this job I love so much!

Testing and homework

Jan Gaffney, Wa Ora Montessori School, Lower Hutt

This was an amazing conference with such a lot to take in, digest and begin to work out how to use. One session I went to was presented by Jamie Rue on testing and homework.

We are lucky here in New Zealand that we don't have tests that everyone has to sit at a certain time and perform at a certain level. We do have national standards that children have to be at by a certain time, but Jamie was amazed that teachers got to use their own judgement and include work done at school at different times in making those judgements.

She felt that tests for the sake of comparing results with others had no place in a Montessori environment.

I was really interested to read that when tests do happen, test scores improve when:

- Students get more PE during the year
- Take music classes
- When students tutor and support each other
- When students have strong relationships with their teachers
- When they feel safe in their classrooms
- When students work in a learner centred environment
- When teachers work collaboratively and supportively with one another.
- And there is no impact on scores when students have had significant test preparation.

What this suggests is that in a Montessori classroom, we can keep doing what we are doing because research supports that these children perform better in the tests they do sit!

Jamie then went on to talk about homework and its use to children. There is a lot written about homework these days, and even in schools that have long held that homework is important, there is a growing understanding that unless it is individualised, used to practice something already learnt, purposeful, attainable in a reasonable time and not tied to success or failure in the class, it is not helpful to the child, nor actually conducive to great familial relationships. Many are the families who report struggles over getting homework done!

Jamie assured us that homework should not be assigned by the teacher, but rather should really be the work of the home. So instead of worksheets or mini projects she suggested that the child be involved in the work and life of the house in a real and valued way. Some ideas for this could include cooking, housework/chores, music practice, community service, relaxing time, sports, art projects, library/museum/gallery visits, trips to the park, playing board games, budgeting and planning for meals, trips, family events etc.

She did talk about reading separately – as that is something that we should be encouraging children to do all the time. But she suggested that the family set up a family reading time where everyone read together – emphasising that it was important that children saw reading as an important activity for their parents as well as themselves. When I think back to my own children, I recognise that I did that by mistake. My children knew that when I was sitting in a particular chair, with my book and my cup of tea, that that was my time. Often they would get their book and join me – even if they were only looking at the pictures! Amazing that sometimes the things you did end up being right (a relief really when I think about all the things that I did that weren't so great)!

Teaching as Inquiry and Joining the Dots

by Cathy Wilson, Wa Ora Montessori School, Lower Hutt

I was really fortunate to attend two workshops with Nicki Dowling and Karen MacKay from Massey University. These two workshops were connected and built on one from the other.

The first part was *Teacher as Inquiry*. This has been a focus of Wa Ora Montessori School this year as the basis for our new appraisal system and I found this workshop provided me with an opportunity to become more concrete in my knowledge.

In small groups we commenced by brainstorming what Teaching as Inquiry was to us, what it meant. When we had done this we designed a graphic picture of what this would look like sharing with the other members at our table when we were all finished. We then looked at what the theorists said. A particular definition I liked was;

Teaching as inquiry allows me to investigate my own wonderings in a deliberate fashion. I use the tools of a researcher to investigate my own environment and practice. Teacher action research provides the impetus for teachers to find solutions to their own professional wonderings.

Borst, 2009.

In the rest of the session we worked through a 'jigsaw' exercise where we worked out the process of the inquiry cycle. It was an interesting process for us to do with many of us having different ideas of what it 'looked' and we practised respectfully challenging members of our groups if we disagreed where a statement was being placed.

What I realised in this session was that *Teaching as Inquiry* is a systematic, intentional inquiry into my own or my team's practice – on how I can improve what I do looking at what I know, how I know it and what can I do about it. Teaching as Inquiry can be my own personal self-review/inquiry or that of the team and is a definite cycle!

In the second session as a large group Karen and Nicki led us through the outline of the format of Teaching as Inquiry commencing with an evaluative question of inquiry which started with 'how well', 'how effective' or 'to what extent' We then looked at an exemplar Montessori centre's strategic plan and the draft MANZ strategic plan to see if we could see links from one to the other. This was really interesting and provoked my thoughts as to whether/or would the Wa Ora Montessori's strategic plan link back to the draft MANZ strategic plan.



Teaching as inquiry is about becoming a self reflective researcher who challenges assumptions, gains a deeper understanding of our teaching practices and creates enhanced outcomes for children.

From this we chose a strategic goal from the exemplar strategic plan and developed our own evaluative question of inquiry directly from it. The purpose of this was to start our own self review/inquiry. We then used the quality indicators from the Montessori Journey to Excellence to and identified four indicators which we would value as quality practice for our evaluative question of inquiry. By doing this whole process - looking at MANZ draft strategic plan, a centre's strategic plan, designing an evaluative question and indicators from the centre's strategic plan and finally indicators from Montessori Journey to Excellence really assisted me in 'joining the dots' to ensure that in reality teaching as inquiry should directly link back to our centre strategic plan and then to the national strategic plan for Montessori in Aotearoa New Zealand. The inquiry could then link to my own appraisal and provide evidence for the registered teacher criteria and help me identify my professional learning goals. I realised I would be able to work smarter to support a culture of effective, evidenced and connected practice with tamariki of course being at the centre of my work.

What I really enjoyed about both these sessions what that they were interactive and were more about us working things through ourselves to strengthen our learning and understanding with Nicki and Karen guiding us. A very Montessori approach !

I recommend that you take the time to look on the MANZ website for the 2014 conference downloads relating to these workshops. There are some wonderful resources on it which will assist you on your *Teacher as Inquiry* journey.

Photos from the Montessori Journey to Excellence Bus Stop

There are over 180 people at the Montessori Journey to Excellence Bus Stop at the conference. Here are photos of nearly all the presenters...

Feedback about the bus stop included these comments from delegates.

The bus stop was the most insightful, relevant learning I have ever had at a MANZ conference in 14 years. It was definitely worthwhile having MANZ invest in the Montessori Journey to Excellence Pilot.

MJE is an amazing initiative that is obviously yielding positive results for those schools participating. I think those involved have shown extraordinary commitment to Montessori education by taking this on, on top of their teaching work load, and all of us stand to benefit from their learnings.

LOVED some of their ideas, identified with the common themes of their processes, eg recognising that staff come from different training programmes, different age/experience bases and how to bring them together before anything else can happen. I feel inspired to follow through with some of their ideas, eg documentation which allows for ease of planning. Lots to think about!

I am excited about the MJ2X and I think it would be great for MANZ to host some PD workshops specifically on MJ2X.

Please continue to grow MJ2EX, it is a wonderful foundation document and with ongoing reflection and commitment will assist in the longevity of quality Montessori practice in New Zealand.



Kids Choose Their Own Work in a Montessori Classroom

This article is from a blog called the Conversation. Written by Dr Susan Feez, it gives a concise overview of the Montessori educational approach and addresses some of the frequently asked questions.

<http://theconversation.com/kids-choose-their-own-work-in-a-montessori-classroom-26452>

Every day, in classrooms everywhere, teachers grapple with the age-old challenge of how to capture the attention of young people and engage them with the things we think they should know about. In 1907, in the slums of Rome, Dr Maria Montessori designed an experiment to tackle this challenge.

In a room housing about 50 very young street children, Dr Montessori placed some carefully designed learning materials, showed the children how to use the materials, and then left them free to choose their own activity. These unlikely children made rapid progress, both socially and academically. They soon overtook their counterparts in schools where the harsh traditional methods of the era were in force.

More than a century later Dr Montessori's experiment has become an educational tradition that spans the globe. It continues to be replicated in thousands of classrooms across the world. Last year more than 200 Australian Montessori schools celebrated the centenary of Montessori education in this country.

What is Montessori education?

The majority of Montessori schools in Australia are preschools, but there are also quite a few that provide classes for children from preschool age to Year 6, and in some cases to Year 10 or Year 12.

Montessori classrooms are filled with materials designed to spark interest and purposeful activity. Children are free to choose their own materials and to work with them for as long as they wish. At the heart of the Montessori approach is the view that children's freely chosen activity builds independence, self-discipline and the ability to concentrate.

Montessori teachers are trained to observe children's activity very carefully so lessons are matched to each child's developing needs and interests. Each lesson is selected from an

extensive repertoire of graded lessons and exercises. Using child-sized, but functional, objects – cloths, brushes, buckets, brooms and jugs - children learn how to complete practical everyday tasks.

In Montessori preschools children learn to write before they read, by tracing sandpaper letters and making words with movable alphabets. Once children know their sounds, grammar games involving lots of drama and movement speed up the transition to fluent reading as they move



into primary school. Active games lead on to the study of mathematics.

The same instructional pattern – independent exploration of concepts using concrete objects, learning the language and symbols for the concepts, and later discarding the concrete materials once the concepts are mastered – is applied across the Montessori curriculum, in music and science, creative arts, history and geography. Older children apply this knowledge in research projects tailored to their interests.



While Montessori classrooms around the world can be found in both public and independent schools, in Australia, Montessori schools are most often privately owned or community/parent-run independent schools, which charge fees. There are several Montessori classrooms in Australian government schools.

All students in Montessori classes, whether in government schools or independent Montessori schools, are required to address Australian curriculum outcomes. For example, students in Montessori primary and secondary classrooms participate in external assessment such as NAPLAN.

While the Montessori tradition can accommodate external assessment - in fact, Dr Montessori realised children in her schools were achieving better results than their peers in mainstream schools because they sat external examinations – the results of this type of assessment are considered a by-product, and never a goal, of Montessori education. The results of external tests might be helpful information for teachers and parents, but are never used to punish, cajole, compare or praise students.

Where does Montessori fall short?

A challenge specific to Montessori schools is the difficulty of recruiting specialist Montessori teachers because of the cost and limited availability of internationally recognised Montessori teacher training. Montessori education has faced two main criticisms since its inception:

- *Children free to choose their own activity will learn little and become undisciplined.* This criticism was first made in 1913 by Dr Geraldine Hodgson of the University of Bristol, who argued that Montessori “supplanted thoroughness and honest effort”.
- *Montessori pedagogy emphasises academic knowledge at the expense of creativity.* This argument was first made in 1915 by American educator W.H. Kilpatrick, a supporter of philosopher and education reformer John Dewey. Kilpatrick dismissed Montessori as too atomistic and old-fashioned. The focus on self-discipline and academic subjects was thought to be outdated.

The Montessori response to these criticisms over the last century has been to point out that liberty and discipline are interdependent. The more opportunities children have to build self-discipline, knowledge and independence, the more freedom they gain, socially, intellectually and creatively.

Can a century-old model work for 21st-century children?

Maria Montessori's century-old experiment incorporates traditions stretching back to the 18th century yet she was also the first progressive educator of the 20th century. By 1914 there were Montessori schools all over the world, including in Australia, when already influential academics were labelling the pedagogy old-fashioned.

Nevertheless, Montessori continued to flourish. Schools were opened for World War I orphans in Paris and London. While Bertrand Russell was praising the active discipline at his son's Montessori school in London, in Russia psychologist Lev Vygotsky was using Montessori methods to inform his famous learning theory.

In a few years Anne Frank would benefit from the attention she received at the sixth Montessori School in Amsterdam. In Colombia, luckily for lovers of literature, Gabriel Garcia Márquez would overcome reading difficulties when taught the Montessori way. The founders of Google, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, are more recent graduates of Montessori schools.

While the Montessori experiment continues to be replicated around the world, and anecdotes abound from those who have benefited, for many in the research community, Montessori remains at the margins of valued educational practice. Until recently, there have been few reputable studies evaluating the relative achievement of Montessori students. Does the continued widespread implementation of this century-old pedagogy by committed advocates demonstrate that Montessori benefits 21st-century children?

To meet the perceived needs of today's children, Montessori schools are often pressured to update aspects of the traditional program. Recent studies in the United States, however, tentatively point in a different direction. The Montessori programs that produce the most significant gains in student achievement relative to other schools appear to be those strictly implementing the traditional Montessori blueprint, unsullied by supplementary materials of more recent origin.



This is part of a series on Alternative Schooling. Read the other pieces here. If you have any ideas on alternative types of schooling you'd like to know about, or write about, please contact The Conversation

Letter from America

Rebecca Nicholson, Eastern Suburbs Montessori School and Letitia Neil, Nova Montessori School are in the second summer of their Montessori 6-12 training at Toronto Montessori Institute. They recently made the trip from Ontario across the border to Ohio to visit the Hershey Farm School. Here is their news...

We had an AMAZING visit to Hershey! What an incredible school. We found David there from Wa Ora Montessori School; it was lovely to see another Kiwi :) We got a PowerPoint from Laurie who runs the school about adolescents and how they cater to their needs and stage of development and then her husband Jim gave us a tour of the farm. The students run their own waste water system, make maple syrup, run a commercial kitchen, keep bees, have an organic garden and farm animals. They even slaughter their own chickens! Amazing!

Meanwhile Dimitra Pantazis, Montessori @ Berhampore and Carol Palmer, Wa Ora Montessori School are in their second summer at the Montessori Training Centre of New England in Connecticut. Dimitra writes...

I am now looking forward to finishing and coming home in 4 weeks. We are doing a lot of 9-12 content at the moment and the content is onerous, but there is enough geography, history and music etc to keep it light. I really love that side of the curriculum. The geometry is good too. I have got to know Americans a lot better this time, they have a different perspective on a lot of issues, I am so glad we live in New Zealand. Next summer I can look forward to oral and written exams next year plus a complete album check.



Montessori All Day: Gracious Living With Children Beyond the Hours of a Typical “School” Day

By Connie Black

The first Montessori Children’s Houses were “All Day” programs. Returning to those roots, explore the notion of “Montessori All Day” and how we can provide the child with support of optimal development throughout long hours of care without compromising Montessori principles.

This is a topic that has been visited and re-visited in the United States. I hope we see greater consensus around the topic than in the past, but there remains a great variety of practice and disparate attitudes about how to provide long hours of care for children in a Montessori setting. We still seem to be in search of “the right way” of doing it. I can’t imagine that I am going to say anything radically different from those who have stood here before you in NAMTA Conferences past. If you search the NAMTA archives you will find a rich collection of proceedings, dating as far back as 1975.

It is perhaps most important to remember that what we are really providing is a place for children to live, a Children’s House, a home. This homelike environment is a place where the child experiences basic trust. It is a place to safely belong. In such an environment the child is able to absorb, to be independent, and to express herself. In such a living community the child experiences choice and freedom, can work and concentrate. With all that in place, Dr. Montessori observed the child to be able to achieve levels of reflection and spiritual awareness many did not think the child capable of. Our task, then, is to prepare a living environment that extends beyond the four walls of the Children’s House, beyond the hours of the standard school day and nine-month school year. We want to create the possibility for the young child to experience the outdoor environment in a way that beyond simply acquiring knowledge of nature, the child comes to live naturally. When the child is afforded the opportunity to live naturally, he reveals his strengths, developing a profound respect and love for the natural world. With access to the outdoors, the child develops an intense interest in the nature outside the door and sees it as something to be observed and cared for.

When we are successful, we have created an oasis that allows our children to grow up whole, contributing to a strong community fabric. As they enter into a society that is increasingly less than whole, they find a frayed social fabric. In a developmentally responsive prepared environment, children who have been afforded an oasis in which to live and develop fully, are equipped not only to survive but also to thrive. That thriving manifests in a strong, vibrant thread to reinforce the tattered social tapestry. We are providing an optimal environment for the hope for the future. The tapestry is changed, to be stronger, more supportive to all, and more beautiful. When we are successful, we have not created a school, but a place to live and grow.

I would like to give you a perspective that is backed by Dr. Montessori’s writings as well as those of her early colleagues, some things I and others around the country have put into practice, and to invite you to be open to thinking about some different ways to approach long hours of Montessori. Let this be a real reflection on building community around the Exercises of Practical Life in the context of that community, and socialization around the reality of community work.

While we have to be aware of personal biases, and always open to seeing from a new perspective, I fully admit that I hold a personal bias in what we call these programs. They are often called “All Day Montessori.” For me, that describes the Montessori, as if All Day Montessori were somehow a different Montessori that we are offering. Sadly, in too many cases in the United States at least, it is a different kind of Montessori that is offered. We see odd aberrations, particularly in the late afternoon, with adults thinking children “need a break from Montessori” and offering less productive activities for children that are not in the least purposeful. My response to the “needing a break” argument is that it must be the adults who need the break! If what we are offering in the name of Montessori is so heinous that we must afford children a break from it, it certainly cannot be the authentic Montessori that we know to be developmentally responsive and that children have thrived in around the world for now over 100 years.

Here’s what Dr. Montessori had to say on the matter:

“Our observation of children has made us realize that work is man’s fundamental instinct and that the child can work from morning till night without ever feeling tired, as if his labor were part of the order of nature”.

(Education and Peace, pg. 96)

She says elsewhere in that volume,

The child likes neither to play idly, nor to waste time doing useless things, nor to flit about aimlessly, as most people believe. He seeks some very precise goal, and he seeks it with an instinctive directness of purpose (...) When he has freed himself of the oppressive adults who act for him, the child also achieves his second goal, working positively toward his own independence. (55)

I much prefer the term “Montessori All Day” to make it perfectly clear that it is authentic Montessori we are offering, all day long. All the developmental gifts with which the child is endowed do not switch off at 3:00. We don’t see Sensitive Periods suddenly stop at some magical point in the day, whether that is 11:30, 12:30 or 3:30. We don’t see all the Human Tendencies suddenly evaporate into thin air. I’ve never seen a child suddenly become less curious or less intent on making discoveries simply because the clock indicates late afternoon. Simply put, these children are fully engaged in living, and they don’t stop living at any point during the day, they never “take a break from life.” We have made a commitment to live with them and to support their process of self-construction. Our Montessori training has put us in the best possible position to do that.



informed

Historically, at least the first five Children's Houses Dr. Montessori opened offered care to children in what we would today call "All Day" formats. Indeed, she was probably living with the children not only well beyond the hours of a typical "school day," but beyond what most of us would even think of in terms of an all-day program. In *The Montessori Method* she writes about being with the children as late as 7:00 p.m., so it is quite possible that she had shared three meals with them in addition to the snacks in between. (32) That's a lot of living together! In those early environments the guide actually lived in the housing where the children lived, right among their families (and we see that again today in environments like Crossway Montessori Communities, providing housing and serving mothers and children). We have returned to those roots here in Minnesota, working to identify training candidates from within the community to be served when at all possible in our *Montessori Partners Serving All Children* programs. If they don't physically live among the families being served, they at least look like them, coming from within the community, sharing cultural roots.

So how did we get away from this practice of being embedded in the community and partnering for long hours of care? Let us remember Dr. Montessori's words about the purpose of the Children's House:

We do not say that we want to prepare a school for the [child]; we wish to prepare an environment for life, where the child can develop a life. That is why we call this institution a House of Children. The idea is to give the children a house of their own, a house in which they are the masters of themselves. (Creative Development of the Child Vol. 1, page 52)

Remember the passage in *Discovery of the Child* where she so eloquently speaks again of this house of children:

We Italians have elevated our word 'casa' to the almost sacred significance of the English word 'home,' the enclosed temple of domestic affection, accessible only to dear ones. (37)

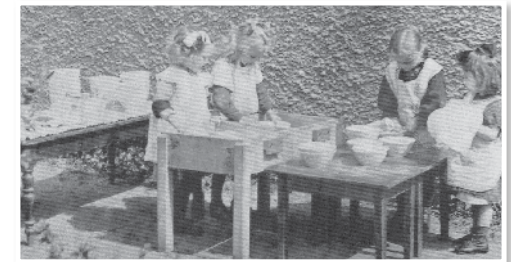
Not only did she advocate for a new approach to early education, giving us an exquisite developmentally supportive approach, Dr. Montessori knew this was indeed a second home for these children, who spent many long hours there. For some of the children, they were in the home of their Children's House more of their waking hours than they were with their own parents at home. We still see this to be true for some of the children in our care today. The prepared adults who live in this Children's House are much more than the dynamic link to the materials and many activities. They form significant bonds and relationships with the children, serving as role models and performing in ways that might traditionally be thought of as more like parenting. In many ways, they become a part of each of the families, an extended family member. How many of you have heard stories from parents about being blessed in nightly prayer rituals right along with all the members of the immediate family? How many of you have been asked by children to be present at their birthday celebrations? This is an important relationship.

Again, how did we get away from this practice of setting up a house, of creating a home for dear ones? I think, in the United States at least, we got away from the notion of living with children and supporting optimal development and began thinking in terms of "schooling." We became engaged in trying to "teach" children rather than supporting their self-construction. We operate from a place of fear that drives us to "get them ready for

school" rather than working toward getting school settings appropriately ready for children. That's probably the origin of the idea that children need a break. Many of us have experienced school as tedious and tiresome and we all needed a break from it. But we aren't supposed to be "schooling" children. We are supposed to be supporting development. Instead, we started offering a "break from Montessori" and started wheeling out shelves and bins full of traditional toys in the late afternoon.

By contrast, in Dr. Montessori's original Children's Houses, there were no toys. In *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook* she tells us that rather than providing an endless parade of dollhouses, dolls with wardrobes for the dressing and undressing of the dolls, play kitchens where the children pretend to cook, toy tea sets for pretend tea parties, etc. Dr. Montessori tells us we seek "to give all this to the child in reality – making him an actor in a living scene." (44-47) Isn't this a much more respectful response to the child's burgeoning development? In those early Children's Houses Dr. Montessori tells us the children themselves did everything, including sweeping the rooms, dusting and washing the furniture, polishing all the little objects made of various material, whether brass, silver or wood, laying and clearing the table for meals, washing dishes, perhaps a few items of clothes, and cooking eggs. (44)

We must constantly self reflect on our own attitudes, and be aware of all our biases. Is the notion that our day as a professional who works with children should be a regular 9 to 5 or 8 to 4 day merely a bias on our part? My doctor is a highly regarded professional, and I am grateful I can count on her outside those traditional "work day" hours. We, too, are well-trained professionals, if not as highly regarded as our physicians by society in general. If children and their families need us before 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. shouldn't we be willing to make our services to support optimal child development available when it is needed? We are, after all, that dynamic link between the child and this carefully prepared environment with its many developmental materials and activities. These children and their families are rising early and arriving to our buildings. Shouldn't they be greeted and welcomed into their home away from home and their great task of self-constructive work by those of us best prepared to support them? Don't they need and deserve the same dynamic link in the later hours of the afternoon? Proper presentations, no matter what the time of day, ensure purposeful, self-constructive activity. (Verschuur, 64) The discussion around getting our salaries on par with that of the other highly regarded professionals is left for another time, and I am in no way suggesting that we give even more of ourselves without adequate compensation.



We must make sure that we are not passing judgment about children and their families. We went through a period of bias in the United States that “children belonged at home with their mothers.” Montessori programs were designed so that it was expected that the youngest went home at the end of the morning, which we know necessitated that many went to other child-care options as more and more mothers were working outside the home. Remember, this is not at all how those first Children’s House environments functioned.

Then we started to provide “care” on site, but it was down the hall from the Children’s House. We had “before care” and “after care,” even “lunch care,” and we came up with all manner of catchy names for each session of care. Sometimes each of these was staffed by different people and might even have occurred in different rooms. So we set up a lot of transitions for children throughout the day, and we know how hard transitions can be. While flexibility and the ability to handle transitions well are valuable skills, we were asking children to practice this far too many times a day, without adequate tools and knowledge to do so well. When do we observe the highest number of meltdowns? During transitions, of course.

We set up a constellation of relationships, each with perhaps a slightly different set of expectations for ways of being within a particular environment. We talk so much about the importance of community and how it is so beautifully manifested in our environments, yet we were breaking up the Montessori community and sending children who were not staying in the Montessori prepared environment for the afternoon down the hall or to the basement to another room. In some cases, the younger children of other Children’s House communities joined in, creating a new group, which may or may not have successfully created a second community.

Children napped and then played with traditional toys often in the supervision of staff that was not Montessori trained. Then another transition occurred as the older children who had stayed in the Montessori prepared environment for the afternoon now joined this group for late afternoon “after care.” Again, it might be older children from more than one Children’s House community so now there was a third group dynamic that this young child had to fit into. Throw in the possibility that elementary aged children might be included in this late afternoon “after care” group, and you can see that we have definitely stretched to the limits our developmental support of these young children.

The youngest do need the opportunity to rest or nap, but why not come back into the prepared environment as they wake? Why not keep them as vital members of their own Children’s House community of mixed ages? Why not use that late afternoon time for more complex Exercises of Practical Life? Why can’t they be engaged in care of the environment, doing the laundry, cooking for tomorrow’s lunch or snack? The authentic possibilities are endless!

Rather, we have set up circumstances where children are on site for long hours (up to ten hours or more in many programs) and they are in their prepared Montessori environments for only three of those hours. So the youngest children, with the most development to accomplish, are spending far more time in daycare type rooms, with staff of varying levels of experience and few with Montessori training, than in the developmentally supportive environment that I’m sure Dr. Montessori expected they would be in for the entire ten or more hours. We do have some programs that have taken a leadership role in changing

some of these practices, but in far too many instances what I have just described continues to happen every day.

So I would like to describe what I think the ideal “Montessori All Day” looks like. What are the physical aspects of this environment? My ideal “Montessori All Day” environment is based on words from Dr. Montessori herself in *Dr. Montessori’s Own Handbook* to guide us. She says,

It ought to be a real house; that is to say, a set of rooms with a garden of which the children are the masters. A garden which contains shelters is ideal, because the children can play or sleep under them, and can also bring their tables out to work or dine. In this way they may live almost entirely in the open air, and are protected at the same time from rain and sun. (37-38)

Rather than one room, it is probably a series of rooms; but they are all connected, under one roof as it were, so that children do not have to be shepherded from one environment to another. Instead they move from room to room just as we all do within our own homes. Remember that she called it a home. She was very specific about the fact that this new way of being with children was not a school. We are not teaching; we are supporting development.

We are all familiar with the Prepared Environment and its full complement of developmental materials, the traditional Montessori materials. Dr. Montessori referred to this as the “room for intellectual work.” (38) Lili Peller, a close friend of Dr. Montessori and a designer of spaces to serve children, spoke of the importance of the preparation of this space:

The [prepared environment] can become the [guide’s] most valuable assistant. The [guide] that wants to give her group a great deal of freedom yet does not want this freedom to degenerate into chaos, and one who wants to make her guidance more and more subtle, will find that time spent with the room and equipment [to create a prepared environment] pays ample dividends in improving her work. (21)

Let’s consider some of the others “areas” necessary to create a homelike atmosphere for the children.

The “cloakroom” is the bane of existence for many a guide or assistant. Some guides complain bitterly about the cubby areas or cloakroom being located within the prepared environment. They want it entirely removed from sight, located out in the hallway, so that it does not interfere with either “their” physical space or the routines of the work cycle. I see having this area under the roof of the Children’s House as a golden opportunity for authentic work! Older children can offer help to younger ones in how to hang, fold, and organize all their personal belongings within the space. It might



contain a small table with a mirror that the child can use to take care of the “hat-hair” we experience in Minnesota, retrieving their own comb or brush from their personal storage to groom them selves before entering into the work cycle.

In Minnesota we remove our “outdoor” shoes or boots and put on “indoor” shoes or slippers when we come into the house. In the Children’s House, muddy shoes or boots provide a lot of authentic work for cleaning and polishing. I’ve seen young ones deeply engaged and finding great joy in lining up the boots perfectly, all standing at attention. By the end of the day there is often debris that has dried and fallen off boots, providing the opportunity to again have a communal response to the environment and sweeping the whole area. Isn’t that an authentic response to the care of the environment? If the cloak area is within the Children’s House, as opposed to being somewhere removed “out in the hall” peers are readily available for assistance when needed.

In addition to what we might call the “Intellectual Room” or what we all know as the Prepared Environment that holds all the Montessori materials, there is a dedicated dining room where meals are taken together. Some of the children will choose it as their work during the morning work cycle to set the tables, laying the table cloths, putting out place settings with china and cutlery, arranging flowers, etc. We provide attractive storage to orderly arrange all the linens and tableware needed for shared meals, all accessible to the children.



Margot Waltuch has wise words for us about the importance of mealtime in the Children’s House:

We had a full-course meal daily. We ate with the children and discussed their experiences in the parks, the museums, their parties, etc. They talked about future events and past events, always making laughter and jokes. The French children were masters of conversation at the table. Also typically French was the style of waiting on the table. The eating and talking alone usually took an hour. (50)

Margot certainly is not describing an aggravating, difficult time of the day that we all just have to “get through.” She is describing a most pleasant, gracious event, to be looked forward to each day, treasured and participated in by all members of the community, even the community’s adults. For me it was always one of my favorite times of the day. It was when I really heard about their lives, “between the peas and the carrots” so to speak. We shared stories over this mid-day meal about our pets, our siblings, and our travels. It was frequently when I became aware of particular interests or special experiences on the part of individual children, and could make plans to respond to those interests with authentic pieces of work for them to choose during the work cycles, at any time of the day.

Especially in an all-day environment we have the opportunity to really engage in Exercises of Practical Life in the context of the community. This is the real heart of the purpose of the exercises, and reaches far beyond the simple activities on trays that we find on the

shelves in the Practical Life area. Every morning there are basic preparations for the work cycle that children are perfectly capable of taking care of themselves. Things like preparing the Tasting Bottles, refreshing the Smelling Bottles, and preparing the Thermic Bottles. These are activities usually held for the guide or assistant, or are not present on the shelves at all because they are considered too tedious and time consuming to prepare each day. There are pouring vessels to be filled, sponges to be dampened. There are paper supplies to check and replenish. There are pencils to be sharpened. There is laundry to be done daily, complete with ironing, folding and replacing to storage. Ideally there are laundry facilities on site, but if not, the laundry has been taken home by one of the adults or the family of one of the children. A lot of laundry is done by hand. Cloth washing can be just as beautiful as any other exquisitely prepared Exercise of Practical Life. It can go well beyond simply using plastic Rubbermaid tubs to offer historical galvanized tubs, interesting pitchers and of course the lovely little washboard that I watched my own grandmother use for small items of hand washables. She knew nothing about Montessori (to my knowledge) but I spent many hours in her kitchen washing, starching and ironing doilies by hand in her enamelware tubs. The ironing was done with the small, heavy iron made of iron, which had long sense been put into service as a doorstop, but with which I gleefully ironed as she used her hotter, electric iron.

The child has the opportunity to really explore beyond meeting merely her own needs, but how to function within the community. The child starts to feel that she truly is the master of this environment, and that this environment belongs to her and her peers rather than the adults in the room. Many of us are in the habit, first of all of calling it a classroom, and then referring to it as “my” classroom. Giving these opportunities for the child to be involved prepares the conditions for the child to begin to have a communal response to care of the environment. He will love this environment, his home, and he will want to take care of it. If we have appropriately prepared the conditions he will have all the needed protocols and tools to do so independently and joyfully.

It seems that in order to do Montessori All Day really well, we need to invest in a working kitchen as a part of the Children’s House. Rather than cold food packed in lunch boxes, in the All Day environment we have the opportunity for all to experience the graces of a shared meal, part of which might have been prepared by the children them selves, but all of which is certainly served by the children them selves. This entails real table linens (tablecloths, napkins, bread basket liners, etc.), real china, glass tumblers, and a complete setting of flatware, including knives. Can we provide more complex Exercises of Practical life around cooking, with children independently choosing and engaging in cooking activities from beginning to end, rather than the “cooking project” where several gather around an adult and simply get to take turns dumping and stirring ingredients? Have we provided recipes tailored to result in individual servings as well as enough to be shared with the group? There are inventories of the pantry to complete, and shopping lists to be made, just as we do at home, giving rise to authentic practice to the budding writers in the group.



There is another room, alcove or just dedicated area where children might sit and engage in conversation, observe a tank of fish or aviary of birds, or listen to music.

Dr. Montessori suggests in *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook* that this is an ideal space to house a piano, a collection of small musical instruments, and a perfect place to invite a small group of children for stories, which invariably attract a circle of interested listeners, especially in the later hours of the afternoon. Every child in the Children's

House is in a sensitive period for language development, and we should be offering exquisite Spoken Language experiences throughout and right up to the end of the day. Dr. Montessori tells us that the furnishings for this area "should be especially tasteful." (40) Beautiful child sized pieces of wicker furniture are now available, as well as leather club chairs. Look for small, upholstered settees and wing back chairs, little area rugs and side tables. Most floor lamps come with a sectioned pole, and if the middle section is not included when it is put together, it fits perfectly next to this child scaled furniture.

There is also a napping room; a place for the youngest to rest and sleep if need be after lunch. Again, this room is attached so that as children awake they simply fold their bed linens and re-join the group already engaged in the afternoon work cycle. And there are of course the requisite bathrooms with facilities for toileting and washing.

There is an outdoor environment immediately accessible from the indoor environment; this is the garden she spoke of. Not only is this a viable workspace, where one might choose to bring material to sit in the sun and work while being serenaded by the birds, this outdoor environment itself is full of opportunity for meaningful activity. There are as many means to care for this outdoor environment as there are for the indoor environment. We have to self-reflect about our preparation of this aspect of the prepared environment. Are we in the habit of relegating all the chipped, cracked, stained or otherwise less than perfect vessels to the outdoor space? We are well trained to prepare developmentally supportive Exercises of Practical Life. Are we preparing the necessary tools and analyzing the necessary movements and protocols, offering beautifully attractive, purposeful activity in the outdoors? There are plants to be cared for, pots to be scrubbed and stacked, garden tools to be cleaned and oiled, patios or pathways to be swept, woodchips to be raked, birdbaths to be cleaned. There are bird feeders to be maintained. There are observations and data to be collected as children watch carefully what birds come to the feeders. There are decisions to be made on the basis of those observations. Do we see more of a particular species if we fill the feeder with a particular mix of seed over another? Do we have plants that attract butterflies, birds, or even mammals? Do we know all the proper names of every living plant species in our outdoor environment? Are we prepared

to share all this botanical vocabulary, as well as that of all the species of mammals, birds, insects, amphibians, reptiles, and perhaps even fish that might be found in this environment? We must never forget the importance of this connection to the outdoor environment and the necessity for the free flow between the indoors and outdoors.

In addition to the "man-made" outdoor environment that we might create including swings, slides, climbing apparatus, etc., it is important to remember that children need to navigate natural spaces. This means there might be large rocks or stumps that the children might climb and jump from. Well-developed outdoor spaces are particularly important for children who are living with us for most of their waking hours.

There should be open spaces for running, but also small spaces in which children can seek solitude. There should be a variety of plants and trees, and it is our responsibility to know the names of every one of them and to be able to share this information with the children. Are we making connections between the indoors and outdoors with first experiencing plants and animals and then finding card material relating to those experiences on the Language shelves?

We have to be acutely aware of how the needs of the child in long hours of care differ from those enrolled in the traditional half-day preschool program. Lili Peller, had these words for us:

The children whose nursery day is longer than three or four hours need several rooms. For the child who comes for a half-day only, the company of others is the main need; but if he comes for a longer period, privacy is as important as company. Both are needed for social and emotional balance by children no less than by adults. (12)

Most of us can probably conjure up memories of those sacred little places we used to retreat to as children. I had several; one under the stairs in a coat closet, one in the attic by a window that looked out onto the street, where I could observe the comings and goings of the neighborhood, one in the calf stall in the barn of my grandparent's dairy farm; a calf will lovingly and attentively listen to anything you tell it! Children need these spaces that they can retreat to of their own accord, by choice, to find the serenity that comes with reflection and relaxation. Within that delicate balance of freedom and discipline, then, the child in Montessori all day should be able to freely choose activities from among the "rooms" of this house without interference from adults or the dictates of schedules.



informed

As we take a closer look at the opportunities for authentic Exercises of Practical Life, it is important that we understand the significance of these exercises, and their constructive nature for the child. According to Joosten, the adult participates in these daily-performed practical life activities

in order to maintain and restore proper conditions. His purpose in doing so is, therefore, purely conservative and utilitarian; they have an “outer aim” as far as the adult is concerned. They serve this preservative and restorative function not only with regard to things (conditions), but also with regard to persons (relations). (1)

The child engages in these exercises for entirely different purposes of course. Joosten goes on to tell us

In the young child’s case these very activities have a more important and more personal function. They are not merely preservative and restorative; they are truly constructive, not with regard to the environment of course, but with regard to the child himself. Those simple daily activities are for the child, DEVELOPMENTAL, even CREATIVE activities. In that function we call them “exercises of practical life.” (1)

Why then, would we limit the child’s access to these vital exercises to his self-construction to the morning hours only?

Margot Waltuch wrote,

“All the aims of Montessori education can be developed through the Exercises of Practical Life – concentration, normalization, repetition of the exercises, refinement of movement, independence, social development, and freedom of choice. Practical Life is the soul of the Montessori [prepared environment].”

She goes on to note

“Many times children find their place in the community by the service they offer others. Practical Life entails real tasks where there is challenge and a quality of “grown-up-ness” providing for the young child “that sweet feeling of being needed.” (52)

We have the opportunity to reflect on the Exercises of Practical Life that we offer. Have we become complacent, with the same repertoire of exercises always available, or in limited rotation?

Some programs in the United States have fallen into the habit of excluding the younger children from the Montessori prepared environment for the afternoon hours. Wouldn’t those same programs be quick to identify the mixed age group as one of the hallmark principles of the Montessori approach? Beyond the “needing a break argument” some of them cite that the younger children are somehow “not ready” to be in the presence of the trained guide and their older peers for the afternoon. What better way for them to “be ready to be there” than to be there? They can continue to develop their language, to develop their hands, to journey the path towards normalization in the afternoon hours. We

can continue to provide a nourishing, protective environment for this social embryo with the built-in experiences provided by the mixed age group for the entire day. The benefits of that mixed age group are just as important to the older children in the environment, who do not have the opportunities for leadership and guidance of younger peers when they are not included.

Of course this all day environment is led by a Montessori trained adult. I’m going to suggest there should be two trained adults. I am not advocating a team teaching situation. That second trained adult serves as the “trained assistant,” assuming the traditional role of the assistant, but of invaluable service to the lead guide in terms of making appropriate observations, and supporting the process of recordkeeping. This is a model now being used by many programs in the United States, including in our *Montessori Partners Serving All Children* collaborative. With these two adults book ending the day, with one of them there as the first children arrive and the other one there when the last one leaves, we assure that the children are under the observant eyes of one who, through careful study and preparation of the self during a Montessori training course, understands child development and how to respond to it within the framework of the Montessori approach. The first children to arrive in the morning are immediately supported should they wish to begin their work cycle. There is no waiting around for the real Montessori guide to arrive. The child’s work with the Montessori materials can begin immediately within the partnership with the Montessori guide. In the late afternoon, after the lead guide has departed for the day, this trained assistant can continue to support children as they work with the materials, leaving careful observation notes for the lead as plans are made for future presentations for individual children. The all-important aspects of rich Spoken Language experiences can continue throughout the long hours of the day, with the second adult trained to understand its importance and how to use it responsively.

We bridge the center portion of the day with a traditional, untrained assistant. This allows for the three adults to be present for the children during lunch and nap, with the opportunity for either the assistant or second trained adult to step out of the room to work on the creation and maintenance of materials, take a child along to attend to the laundry, etc. This also allows for the second trained adult to be with children through the nap routine. This is again a time of day that is frequently turned over to the person with the least amount of training, when it can be a crucial place for understanding and responding appropriately to child development.



Does it take a different kind of adult to successfully implement an All Day program? Not necessarily, but if we are to uphold the highest Montessori standards and provide days uninterrupted by specialists, it does take commitment to become facile in providing daily experiences in music, art and literature. Just like practicing with the developmental materials before presenting them to the child, this means practice in singing all manner of responsive songs, telling exciting stories, reciting beautiful poetry, providing means for expressive movement through simple dance activities. The guide then is an exemplary life-long learner, self aware of his or her own spiritual needs and tending to them with the same focus and attention as tending to those of the children, constantly developing his or her own talents and interests. In this way the guide daily brings into the environment the flame of inspiration, and truly becomes a beacon of light.

The prepared adult leading an effective All Day program is also skilled at relating to parents and providing sound parent education and deep parent engagement. Parents who have their children in long hours of care are sometimes riddled with guilt, or are just desperate to know that they have made a good decision, that their children are in good hands and thriving. So the all day guide must possess extraordinary communication skills, readily putting parents at ease and making them to feel that they know about their child's day. To that end, parents should be encouraged to observe, so that they see first hand that their child is thriving. And this communication is imperative for the guide as well, learning about the family life of the child and any special circumstances that might require a new level of understanding or support. In this way, a true partnership is forged, with guide and parents sharing information and knowledge in support of optimal development of the child.

When most of us think about parent education we focus on what we can tell parents and caregivers about Montessori. It's easy to become 'stuck' in patterns of presenting the various areas of the prepared environment and our materials. There is so much more parents need to know. What kinds of education events can be developed to enhance parents' understanding of child development in general and the Montessori approach to that development?

We also need to shift our focus from being the experts who can offer "education" to being partners who can "engage" with parents and caregivers. What kinds of activities can be offered within the social context of the community? (e.g. Family Fun nights, potluck dinners, etc.) What kinds of community-building activities can we offer that might become traditions for the community? If the children are in long hours of care, it means that their parents and caregivers are in long hours of work. Sometimes they, too, need a social context in which to make connections with others in the community. What a relief to know that their children are preparing a simple supper in the Children's House and they will be able to join them after work for a time of getting to know the rest of the community, without having to hurry for pick-up, getting a sitter, getting everyone fed and only to return the Children's House for another "education" event. And how gratifying for parents to see

first hand the competence and confidence of their young children as they go about serving a simple meal, with grace and courtesy they may not witness in the home environment. This is how we begin to influence a shift in the home environment to embrace Montessori principles, not because we have "instructed" parents at an education event, but because we have "engaged" with them as fellow members of a community at a social event.

So if I had it as my task to create that oasis, that living, breathing, dynamic prepared environment to provide a residency for our children of 3-6, a place for living, that is what I would strive to create.

Dr. Montessori and her early colleagues have left us some pretty clear standards, against which to measure our practice and to guide our reflection. I have the pictures to prove that there are many who are indeed successful at preparing and staffing these remarkable environments, which serve our children as oases. At one time or another in our careers, many of us have had to do some serious self-reflection and examine our practices to get beyond, "but that's how we've always done it." I cannot solve your challenges, but I can challenge you to think, once again, about the possibilities.

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