direction

Freedom: The Path to Self Discipline

Issue 2
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From the Editor

Thank you for all the feedback we received on the first issue of ***direction*** – most of it positive and all of it constructive – the overwhelming feeling was that you liked it so much that you would like to have more - and so this issue comes to you as 32 full colour pages.

We have tired to create something that also appeals to parents so we very much hope that you will make ***direction*** available to the parents in your school by joining them up as AMI members through our new group membership package, details of which can be found on our website.

We are in a constant process of improvement – above all we want to give you what you need – so please let us know if there are subjects you would like us to address or features you would like us to include. We are always interested in receiving your stories about the children, things they have written, articles you have written, books you have read and stories about how Montessori has impacted your life or the lives of those you know outside the classroom.

Louise Livingston

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News

Montessori Society [AMI] UK

We were thrilled with the amount of participation at this year's first UK AMI Open Forum which was held in conjunction with our Annual General Meeting on 9th February. The common themes that came out included broadening the reach of Montessori Schools, increased public recognition for Montessori Practice and Principles at the parent level but also at the public policy level and increasing communication from the Montessori community outwards and also from within. Fundraising was also highlighted as requiring a co-ordinated effort to seek more creative ways to attract funding opportunities. At some point, it would be good to see the establishment of 'Montessori Centres' as a parent support initiative working at the community level as opposed to solely on the 'school' level. And of course, the requirement of more training centres to train more students and trainers.

As the UK Affiliate of AMI, the Montessori Society's GPC developed many of these points at our annual Strategic Planning Meeting that took place in July. This year we are looking at more creative ways to increase the public's exposure to Montessori by using our schools to reach out to their parent bodies. We recognise that there is an abundance of untouched valuable resources within our reach, and making the very most of what we have, is an important step in the right direction.

All AMI-run schools should have received our invitation to become 'group' members in July. This presents a wonderful opportunity for schools to engage their parent-body in our work. Education begins from birth: a message we need to send out as widely as possible.

Nikki Hughes gave a wonderful talk on The Pathway to Self-Discipline in March. For the first time, we saw many participants coming from outside the Montessori circuit, who attended out of pure interest. The discussion session during the afternoon proved both popular and lively. Discussion of the subject amongst experienced practitioners, trainers, educators from other disciplines and parents proved to be stimulating for all concerned and many left with much food for thought and also practical tools to help nurture 'inner' discipline in a positive way.

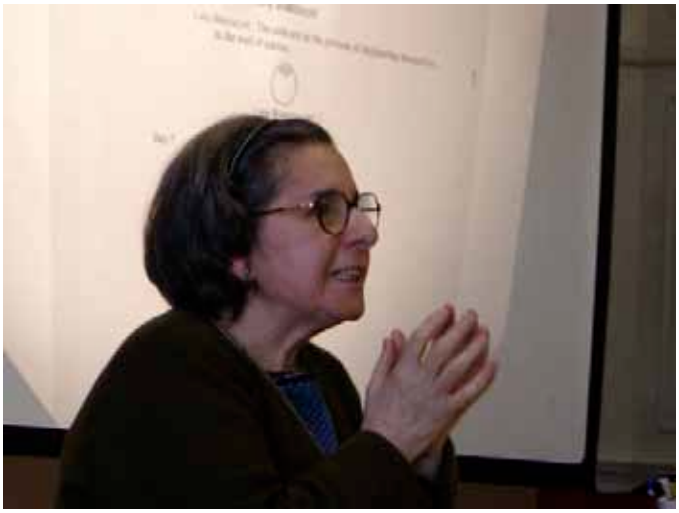
Looking forward to next year, we are delighted to announce that Mrs. Lynne Lawrence [Executive Director for AMI and Director of Training for the MMI] has agreed to talk on the subject of Language at our Seminar on February 7th next year. We are hoping to attract all those teachers who have attended her truly inspiring talks in the past, and also those other interested individuals [especially parents], who would like to learn more about how to encourage the development of language as a key to life.

The Montessori Society would also like to congratulate Lynne on her recent appointment as Executive Director of AMI. An exciting achievement with positive ramifications that will extend both organisation-wide and globally. We are tremendously proud to be affiliated to AMI and looking forward to it's future endeavours.

Marsilia Palocci 1929 -2008

It is with great sadness that we bring you news that Marsilia Palocci passed away peacefully in her sleep on Friday 25th July. The announcement from AMI read 'AMI will always be grateful to Marsilia for her loyalty and her boundless passion and dedication to the movement. We have lost a great Montessori pedagogue. Condolences may be sent to the AMI head office, from where they will be passed to Marsilia's family.'

Many will remember the last time that Ms Palocci spoke in London at the AMI Refresher Course – 'Our Vision for the Child' – her enthusiasm and conviction has lived with us in our hearts ever since. Trained at all three levels - 0-3 with Adele Costa Gnochi, 3-6 with Maria Montessori and 6-12 with Mario Montessori – Ms Palocci had an experience and depth of understanding that will be greatly missed.



The AMI Bulletin will continue to arrive to our members in pdf format. If you not have email, please contact us and let us know and we will print out a copy for you.

AMI's Communications journal will continue to be sent to you by post.

News

Maria Montessori Institute

0-3 Course at the Maria Montessori Institute 2009

We are pleased to let you know that the fifth 0-3 Assistants to Infancy Course will be held at the Institute in 2009 with Dr Silvana Montanaro as the Director of Training. Do contact us if you would like to get up to the minute information about it, or keep an eye on our website.

Elementary Course

The Elementary 6-12 training course at the Institute has a fantastic group of students who have attended for a second summer of the three summer course. For those of you who have been asking when we will be running the next AMI Elementary course – watch this space!

Alumni News

'Being and Belonging – Supporting the Socialisation Process' the AMI Professional Development Day for the Autumn term will take place on Saturday 8th November and will be presented by Nikki Hughes. Alumni who have email will have received advance details about it already. If you do not have email please contact us and we will send you more information.

If you are an Alumni don't forget to let us have your up to date contact details, especially if you have changed your email address. If you run into a fellow Diploma holder please tell them to get in touch with us at alumni@mariamontessori.org

July Refresher 2009

Our two day Refresher Course on Creative Development last summer given by Lynne Lawrence and Ruby Lau for the 3-6 level and Carol Hicks for the 6-12, and assisted by MMI training staff, took the participants to another level - so much so that the next Refresher in July 2009 will continue on the same topic, widening out further – the working title is Creative Development Mark II. If you could not make it to the first session you will still be able to benefit from this one, which will be on the weekend of July 11/12 2009.

Contact us in for further information on any of the above

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Montessori Education [UK]

Montessori Education [UK] has just celebrated its 15th anniversary, and what a lot has changed in those fifteen years! ME[UK]'s vision when it was founded is stated in its memorandum and articles of association as: '…promoting good practice and standards in Montessori schools and awarding accreditation in recognition of such.'

So, accreditation of schools was seen from the outset as being of paramount importance for raising the standards of Montessori provision in the UK, and even before Ofsted had developed its own system of inspection, ME(UK) had its first assessors out in the field. Back then 'accreditation' and 'quality assurance' were terms that were unfamiliar to practitioners in the context of their Montessori work with the children. 'We're doing what we were trained to do and the parents are happy. Why should we pay someone to come and inspect us?' was a familiar line. Now, with over 20% of authentic Montessori schools fully accredited with ME(UK), and many more in the pipeline and with our very first schools coming up for re-accreditation for the third time we are moving into an exciting new phase.

We now have the chance to work with schools to take their Montessori practice on to a different level altogether. It's no longer a question of inspecting and evaluating against basic criteria but of challenging, inspiring and supporting schools to identify the areas of their practice they most want to develop. Brimming with confidence and affirmed in their practice, our accredited schools are now challenging themselves to venture into re-engagement with Montessori principles and to hone their Montessori practice.

An exciting area for such scrutiny is the Montessori team. Sadly, but inevitably, the old model of the single Montessori teacher bearing the sole responsibility for the intellectual growth and emotional development of the children in her care is fast disappearing, to be replaced by larger, more complex organisations involving a staff team. Not every staff team works effectively, however, and this is one area of potential focus. Another area on which schools are beginning to focus is how to become stronger in applying Montessori principles to the process of practice.

As an organisation and the national standards body for Montessori in the UK, Montessori Education [UK] is committed to working with the best Montessori practitioners in the country to safeguard the uniquely effective way of working with the children that has been handed down to us for over a century by generations of dedicated practitioners.

Your Letters >> Answered by Emma Wong-Singh

A revised version of the EYFS Statutory Framework and Practice Guidance document was published on 19th May 2008. The guidelines are due to become effective from September this year. Has AMI formulated a response to this new statutory framework?

There is much of the EYFS that is compatible with Montessori practice so in theory the guidance should not cause a problem to Montessori schools. However, the problem is that these guidelines are going to become statutory and this inevitably leads to the situation where teachers will feel compelled to tick boxes which is in obvious conflict with the Montessori idea of auto-education. A task force which includes AMI trained teachers has been set up by ME[UK] to put together a comprehensive document that explains how Montessori fulfils the requirements of the EYFS. It is intended to help teachers to know how to explain their practice to officials and to raise the standard of practice as well. The document will also address the issues around those aspects that many officials believe are not covered by the Montessori curriculum – i.e. creativity, imagination and role play. It is hoped that if teachers are helped to find a way to explain how a Montessori environment provides for these things they will feel less obliged to make compromises.

I understand that the Montessori Approach does not advocate the age old method of 'rocking' a child to sleep. Where does this thought originate from and what alternatives should be used?

From the moment a child is born, he is able to fall asleep and awake by himself. Naturally, it takes time for him to get accustomed to the hours of night and day because he has not experienced night and day in the womb. The secret is to allow the child to be awake when it is light and asleep when it is dark - so don't be tempted to darken the room during the day to imitate night and induce sleep unnaturally. With patience, he will develop his own cycle and he will start to follow the rhythm of sunset and sunrise before long. Employing a low bed will allow him to crawl into bed when he is tired, and crawl out, when he is refreshed from his sleep. He is soon then able to regulate his own sleep pattern. The capabilities of the child under three are often underestimated. However if the environment is carefully prepared and the incredible power nature has given him is respected, the flourishing of his potentialities will be witnessed. The idea originates from Montessori's writings on independence, 'The child needs to do things by himself from the beginning of life, from the moment he is capable of doing things...By helping the child to do things by himself you are helping the independence of the child.' (What You Should Know About Your Child) Rocking a child to sleep implies a dependence on the adult that really does not need to exist. What 'alternatives' should be used? The question assumes that the child needs our help. At times (when he is ill or out of sorts), he may need our presence or our voice; in essence, the reassurance found in closeness, but any further 'help' offered to the child can only be viewed as an obstacle to his natural development.

What is the Montessori Approach for helping and preparing a child for using the toilet?

Right from the beginning place a 'potty' in the bathroom. As he grows more and more attuned to his environment, the potty will be viewed simply as another piece of furniture in the house. At around 6 months when changing his nappy help him to sit on the potty for a short period of time. The associations between the potty and needing to go to the toilet are therefore encouraged. As Montessorians, we are concerned with not only the physical, but the psychological impact of our actions. With a carefully prepared environment and informed adult guidance, the child is ready and able to use the potty by 18 months. The psychological impact of this act of independence on the part of the child, cannot be underestimated. The mental processes that are forming in a child so young are building the incredible structure of his being; this can never be taken away.

I understand that Maria Montessori did not encourage fairy tales for the child under six – is this true? Fairy tales are a part of cultural heritage; surely Maria Montessori did not discourage children learning about this?

There is a widespread notion that Maria Montessori was a 'bitter and implacable opponent' of fairy tales. This could not be further from the truth. When reading her books one is illuminated by her thoughts on 'imagination' and the role it plays in child development and indeed the value of fairy tales themselves to the child. In Education For Human Development, her grandson admits, 'When we were small she even told us fairy tales! She has fulminated against them in her writings, but that is because people at that time believed that children were too small, too stupid or too immature to understand reality. They thought children lived in a world of make-believe and adults should use that means to communicate with them. It was not just telling them stories, whether realistic or imaginary, but cheating them by making them believe what was not true. That is what she was fighting against.' When Mario went on to ask why she had expressed herself so vehemently against fairy tales publicly, she replied, 'There is nothing so difficult as to remove or help to remove a prejudice once it is ingrained in the human mind and adhered to by a community. If you want to bring in a new truth, you must hammer it in or it will simply be disregarded. In this way I will be criticised, but at least they will give some attention to what hit them.'

With the wealth of scientific research performed now that supports the important role of purposeful work and a curriculum based on the natural world [i.e reality] in child development, the vehemence of her message need not be taken so literally. When choosing which stories to share, we should bear in mind what Montessori says:

'While telling stories we must keep in mind certain psychological characteristics of children. The child at this age has a peculiar ability to take into consideration all the people around him.. He also desires to hear the same tales repeated. So the stories we tell must mention each member of the family... In the tale of the Three Bears, one big, one middle-sized and one small, the crux of the story always revolves around the same thing, so that the brain goes on turning around the same object...The teacher must aim to find tales which will please the child. This is a very difficult task... We do not realise that some stories may be too long for his mind. His mind is not ripe enough to understand their beauty... The most tragic scenario that the child can imagine is being left alone, being abandoned or lost. In many fairy tales, the child, the main character loses his way. For the child, it is the most tragic happening.'

However, this subject has invited much debate amongst parents and teachers over the years - what stories do you think are appropriate? Surely if there is a story we loved as children ourselves it is fine to share this - or is it? We are interested to hear your views so please write to us and share your own personal experiences with our readers.

Comments, Suggestions?

Please send in your letters to:
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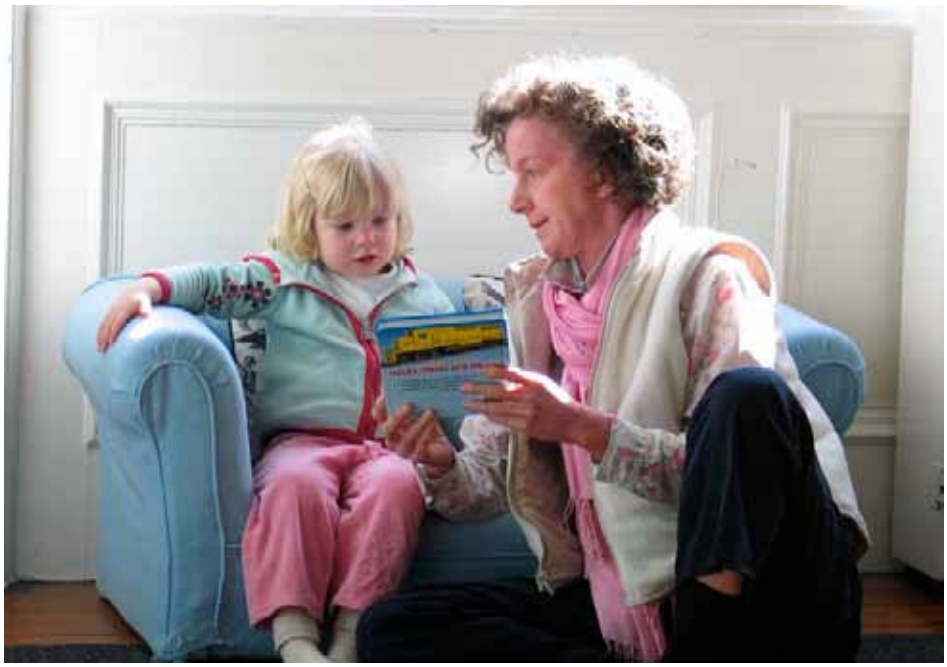


Interview

Erdkinder Project gets underway in Scotland

With the prospect of the first Erdkinder project starting in the UK at the Casa della Pace Montessori Ecoschool in St Andrews, Scotland ***Louise Livingston*** *interviews the Head Teacher* ***Lesley Ann Patrick*** *and* ***David Kahn*** *from the North American Montessori Teachers Association who is a consultant on the project.*

Lesley, it is so exciting that you are going to open the first Erdkinder in the UK. When will it open and how many children will be part of the community?

The Erdkinder will be opened in Summer 2009. We are currently preparing our oldest Elementary children; four in all aged ten, eleven and twelve, who will be the first students in the Adolescent programme.

Have all the children been in Montessori since they were three or are some from other schools?

Yes, they have all come through Montessori from the Children's House except for one eleven year old who had previously been in another school until the age of seven when she joined us. Subsequent elementary children will join each year. By 2012 the Erdkinder will be at full capacity of twenty adolescents, aged twelve to fifteen.

How long have you been planning this and what kind of help have you sought in order to make sure that is a true Erdkinder as Maria Montessori envisaged?

We have been planning this since the Elementary parents began questioning the possibility of continuing beyond the age of twelve – over the last couple of years. I had attended an AMI seminar given in London in 2004 about the Montessori Adolescent Programme, which has been developed at Hershey Farm School, based on David Kahn's study of Montessori texts. I was able to share this with parents. To be true to Montessori's vision of the Erdkinder we decided to make contact with David Kahn and to enlist his help.

What kind of hurdles have you had to overcome in getting it off the ground? Do you have any advice to give to other schools planning a similar venture?

We have a very supportive local education service who really love our Montessori environment.

Scottish Executive is keen to look at alternative educational formats as mainstream is encountering many difficulties. It is advisable to have a well-known successful Children's House and perhaps even more so a well-established and renowned Elementary class. Perhaps winning parental support is the most crucial aspect. In St Andrews we have a very international community with many students from parts of Europe and USA. Many people already have some knowledge of Montessori. Our main piece of advice [supported by David Kahn's experience] is to try to build up the community from pupils coming through Elementary and don't take in children aged twelve from mainstream primary schools.

Have you had to construct a special building?

We want our adolescents to be on the same site as the rest of the children. This is because they have a vital link with the little ones and our school is run on a Human Scale basis [like a big family really]. For the Erdkinder study spaces it is possible to keep it very simple – so much of the time is spent out at various centres and also on the land. Eventually we aim to establish a residential aspect to the Erdkinder and for this we shall look to purchase a farm style large house [not until 2012].

How many teachers will you need to have? Will you be bringing in specialists from the local community?

Our current Elementary teacher is going to USA this summer to do the Adolescent Orientation Programme and we have a second person going next year. This will be adequate to facilitate the programme. Specialists will come through the cultivation of pedagogy of place. Land workers will come through the parent body. Creative arts and literature will come through other staff already in the school.

What is the scope of your project? Do you plan to go up to 18 eventually with a Montessori High School like the one just opened in the States?

Our school has built slowly from ten children in the Children's House. Gradually the Elementary class was formed as children moved up. As those same children near the end of Elementary they will form the first Erdkinder community. By the age of fifteen we would imagine that they will be able to take Standard or Higher grades like all pupils in Scotland, or maybe prepare for the International Baccalaureate, which would sit well with our ethos. We imagine that the Erdkinder will probably extend to 18 as the young people grow.

I know David Kahn came over from the States to talk to the parents and the children who will go into the Erdkinder – that must have been so exciting for the children – now it is really becoming a reality for them - what kind of things did they say about it?

The oldest Elementary children attended David's presentation to the parents. They had all seen the Hershey DVD, and they know that their teacher is about to do the Adolescent training so they were keen to meet David. He had them bring out the Great Lesson timelines in his presentation so that he could explain to their parents how all the Elementary knowledge gained through imagination comes to fruition in the adolescent. They were eager to provide all that he needed from their classroom [the presentation was made in the Elementary class] and to answer all his questions. They have no doubts that the Erdkinder will be a reality for them and they are looking forward to David coming back and seeing the progress made. They are proud and thankful for the opportunity, which they have, but they would equally like to see it possible for more children.

David, as we have said, this is the first Erdkinder project in the UK where Maria Montessori's idea of the farm is being implemented. You have been involved in setting up Erdkinder projects all over the world. Is this project close to what Maria Montessori envisaged

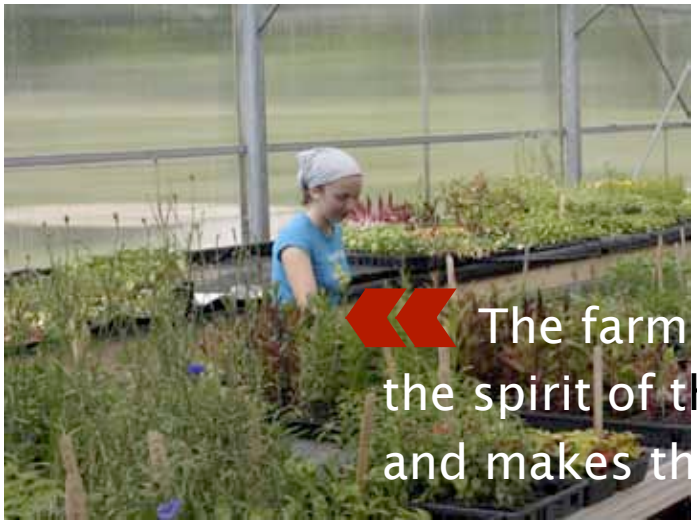
> «they really support it because they know it's good for their children»

We must really refer to these projects as Erdkinder inspired programs because they are based on what Maria Montessori wrote – she did not create an Erdkinder as we know. An Erdkinder inspired program is usually defined as land- based, community oriented, 12-15 adolescent programs including boarding. The Casa Della Pace, will be land-based, will have historic and scientific projects on the land, but it hasn't determined its site and whether it will be a boarding school. St. Andrews as a place based location is very rich in possibilities, so the final choice may mean more village land-based than farm land-based.

What do you see as the unique challenges for us here in the UK?

I think the challenges are the same everywhere. Boarding is a twenty- four-hour endeavour. Resources must be in place to make that happen. And the land-based approach requires real independence on the part of a school, although once presented to parents, they really support it because they know it is good for their children. Locating the right partnerships in the community and a good land site is particularly daunting.

The Montessori approach puts much store by the creation of the right environment for development. For adolescents it is not just a prepared environment like the Children's House, the local community must be in place too. I am sure that the Casa Della Pace project is going to inspire many others to think about setting up an Erdkinder. What would you say are the essential, non-negotiable



> The farm base builds the spirit of the adolescents and makes them feel whole

aspects of the community that must be sought when choosing a location?

The first is to find land space enough to enter into a farm market economy. Secondly, housing should be there for overnights for at least one week's sustainable living conditions. This could be done with very simple housing initially. A good kitchen is also important for the 'out of the garden' food preparation and eating lifestyle.

In the UK at the moment we are experiencing increasing problems of violence amongst our teenage population. Many say this is because these young people do not have a sense of community and are detached from society. What would you say is the most important moral and social outcomes of the adolescent programme?

Moral and social development are the crux of the Erdkinder. When adolescents live, work and study together, they are positively motivated by community relationships which in fact make for healthy, productive and 'take charge' activities that make them responsible, caring, and positive. The farm base builds the spirit of the adolescents and makes them feel whole just because constructive work in nature embodies healthy eating, exercise, good work ethic, social honesty and team spirit.

But aren't the seeds of moral development sewn much earlier in life than adolescence? Do you have any evidence that this kind of programme can have these kind of outcomes in young people who have not had the right early influences?

The farm environment has an amazing ability to stimulate personality transformations where young adolescents find a source of renewal due to positive successes in the eyes of their peers. These experiences of positive contribution are usually practical and of a social nature. Maturity is the real outcome of boarding at these institutions that are focused on development through social living and carefully observed outcomes.

I suspect that one of the main challenges to getting an Erdkinder under way might be convincing parents to commit to it. In your experience what is it that makes the most compelling case to put to parents?

Parents tend to really like the Erdkinder concept whereas trustees and administrators are usually conveying their own fears. One thing is for sure – you do not have to use the name Montessori to sell the Erdkinder. One can call it a land laboratory or a country school campus making the educational experience sound simply like a better traditional school with a living history and science curriculum. The best sell is that outdoors is healthy and renewing for young adolescents and that community life builds insight and a positive view on the future.

How would you say that children who have not had a Montessori grounding are disadvantaged in the Erdkinder?

Adolescents without Montessori experience tend to lack self-direction and independence. They expect to be told what to do. They seek approval. They do not always understand what it means to exert maximum effort around a challenge. Sometimes, if they have had a problem in school, they carry the negative burden of their cumulative bad experiences finding it very hard to find the joy and dignity of work for its own sake and for social gratification.

As yet there is no Montessori diploma for the adolescent age range. How would someone interested in doing this kind of work become trained?

There are some people that say that they are Montessori adolescent trained but that is usually false. NAMTA offers an 'Orientation Course' which provides the necessary basis for evolving an adolescent program offering a deep understanding of adolescent psychology in relation to a Montessori 'prepared environment', namely a land based environment with curriculum context built around practical occupations. This is a very specialized kind of teaching with very specific practices that work with study, exploration and collective experience.

For more information on Montessori adolescent programmes and the 'orientation to adolescent studies' course visit www.montessori-namta.org

Synthetic Phonics - A New Approach?

The recent claims that 'synthetic phonics' hold the key to transforming literacy levels in the UK is far from news to those familiar with the approach to language found in a Montessori Children's House. ***Sarah Emerson*** *looks at what is meant by this term and how far the Montessori Approach goes to fulfilling the recommendations of the recent research into literacy.*

The recent claims that synthetic phonics hold the key to transforming literacy levels in the UK is far from 'news' to those familiar with the approach to language found in a Montessori Children's House. Phonetic reading involves decoding words into their component sounds. To do this, the child needs a thorough knowledge of the sounds of his language and of the symbols (graphemes) for each sound. The research in support of phonics is overwhelmingly convincing. The Johnston and Watson (2005) report showed that children taught using synthetic phonics could read and spell seven months ahead of the norm and this level of achievement was sustained by the children involved over a number of years [1]. The key to the success of synthetics phonics is that in learning how to recognise and blend sounds, the child acquires a skill that he will be able to use whenever he encounters a new word in the future [2].

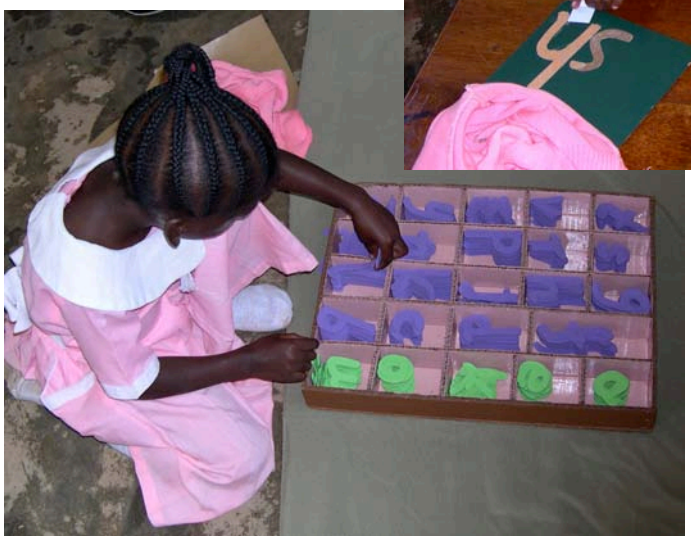
Where have we gone wrong?

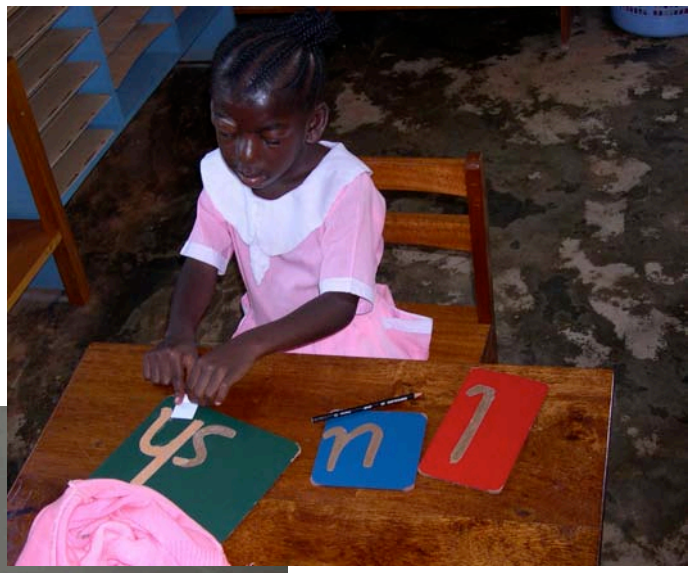
Headlines such as 'Schools plunge in the world literacy league' [Daily Mail, Nov 29 2007] certainly suggest that there may be cause for concern. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006 report [3] showed literacy achievement in England plummeting to 19th in the world, with Scotland 26th. Some blame the UK's increasingly early focus on literacy, citing the strong literacy rates in other European countries where formal language teaching is introduced after the age of six. No one can argue with the higher literacy levels in these countries, however, we might question whether this really is the time at which it is **easiest**, most **beneficial** and most **enjoyable** for children to learn to write and read. Perhaps the problem in the UK is not **when** we introduce literacy, but **how**. Newspaper headlines seem to focus on our declining literacy standards and the apparent paradox that at the same time we are in danger of pushing children to achieve too much too soon. In Montessori schools, children tend to read fluently

and with strong understanding and appreciation of the written word at a surprisingly young age – and significantly they do so with ease and great joy. Dr. Montessori realised that the young child needs to be active, not passive. Working with the Montessori language materials, the child is constantly active, whether feeling Sandpaper Letters or building words with cut out letters. In a Montessori school, each child is introduced to reading and writing individually - there is no whole class teaching, so each child can carry out the activity that is best suited to their current stage of development. Interestingly, Dr. Montessori originally had no intention of teaching children to read and write at a particularly young age. The language curriculum that she developed was intended for older children of six or seven, but she discovered that it was the younger children of four and five who were greatly interested in learning to write and read.

> Perhaps the problem is not when we introduce literacy, but how

Debate has raged for some time over the pros and cons of phonics, as well as over the different types of phonics teaching. Some nurseries and schools have in the past avoided phonics altogether, or if they have been using it, they may have opted for analytical phonics. The problem with this approach is that it requires a skill that the child under six simply doesn't have: it requires the application of a reasoning mind, which doesn't develop until the age of six. The child analyses a series of words containing the same sound, such as cup, cat, cork, and from this has to identify that the letter c makes the sound 'c'. He is then expected to apply this to other words and make deductions about the sounds from his previous knowledge. This 'inferential learning'[4] is not suited to the young child's mind and might be one of the reasons that we have come to believe that it is easier for the child to read after the age of six; when in fact, given the right approach of sensorial exploration, the child will find it easier and more enjoyable, under six.





Following the 2006 Rose Report into the teaching of early reading, the government announced that from September 2007 children in England would be taught to read using synthetic phonics. The Early Years Foundation Stage required for all providers of nursery education which came into effect in September 2008, places a strong emphasis on early speaking and listening skills as well as the use of a multi-sensory approach to systematic phonics [5]. Questions are now being raised in the media over whether we are pushing our children to achieve too much, too young. Those who have concerns over the early implementation of phonics believe that:

- Reading should be for pleasure: we risk alienating children if we pressure them too early.
- Phonics enables children to read mechanically, but not to gain understanding and appreciation, denying access to great literature.
- We run the risk of making children who don't read by the age of five feel like failures.
- We are in danger of preventing children from enjoying their childhood.

Interestingly, most of these criticisms of phonics are actually to do with the **way** in which phonics is implemented as opposed to phonics as an approach in itself. Through the Montessori approach to phonics, children of four can learn to write and read in an informal, sensorial, pleasurable and spontaneous manner. No one has forced them to do any of this, and no one will test them to see how they are progressing. This is not the formal, academic curriculum that causes headlines such as 'Stealth curriculum is threat to all toddlers' (The Times, Nov 30, 2007); this is a sensorially based, developmentally appropriate way of learning that is geared to each child's individual pace. This is Montessori.

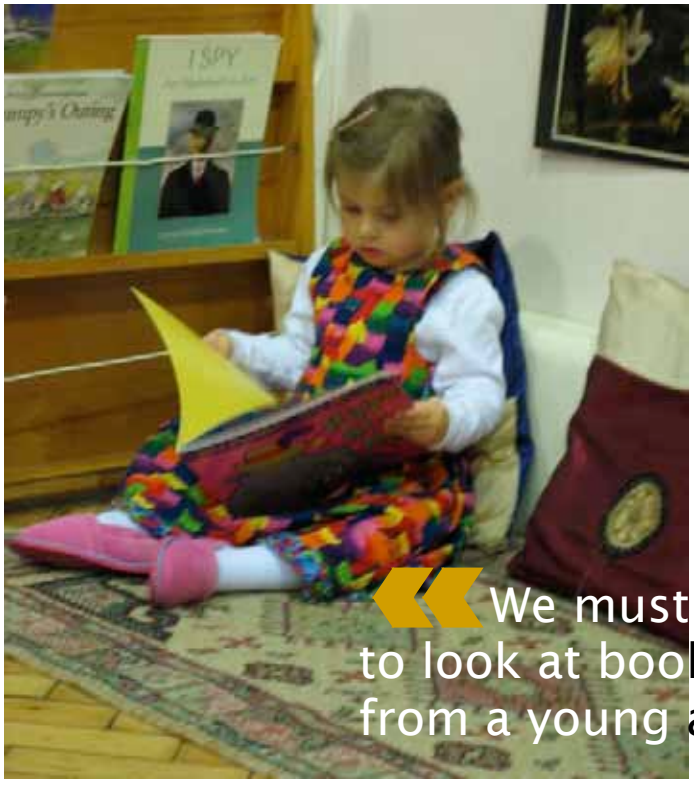
The Montessori approach is unique in that it truly takes into account the way in which children learn. The child can, in the first six years of life, achieve near perfection in learning one or more languages - an adult setting out to do the same would never achieve the same perfection. To achieve this, the child has made a detailed exploration of every sound, every nuance of meaning, every grammatical construction and has done this without the conscious effort that would be required by an adult to learn a new language. The child is aided in this by his Sensitive Periods - windows of opportunity for specific aspects of development such as language. Neuroscientist Steven Rose says:

'Thus during development certain critical or sensitive periods occur during which the brain is specifically primed to respond to environmental context and is doing so to acquire particular capacities or behaviours. During such periods

particular brain regions exhibit great plasticity, modifying their structure and connectivity in response to experience - for example, visual or linguistic.'[6]

As Maria Montessori observed, the Sensitive Period for language takes place under the age of six and is on the wane from the age of five. Children should be offered the opportunity to take advantage of their Sensitive Periods to learn to write and read in a developmentally appropriate way when it is easiest for them to do so. The Montessori language curriculum is based around the child's natural development: the development of written language mirrors that of oral language: first the sounds are learned, then the words, then phrases and finally, sentences with their full grammatical constructions.

The young child has a desire to explore every intricacy of language. Dr. Montessori designed materials that would offer a 'key' to this explorer. Once the Montessori teacher has presented this 'key' to the child, she leaves him free to explore independently, allowing him to consolidate and refine his knowledge. The first 'key' is that words are made up of a combination of different sounds, the next is the symbol for these sounds. With this knowledge, the child is able to write phonetically, at first with cut-out letters, and then, when his hand is ready, with a pencil. The mistake too often made is that we try and get children to do everything at once: to express their own thoughts, read the thoughts of others and make their hand produce beautifully scripted letters all at the same time! There is little wonder we are at risk of disenfranchising our children from the world of literature and at risk of making them feel like failures before they have even really started. However, we can take each of these separately: allowing children to prepare their mind through sound games to increase their awareness of the phonemes of their language, to prepare their hand through activities that promote hand-eye co-ordination, and to prepare both hand and mind through the Sandpaper Letters. In the Montessori approach, we consider three separate aspects of reading that will, when mastered, come together to lead the child towards what Montessori called 'total reading' because the child learns to decode, interpret meaning and appreciate the beauty of the written word. The first step involves learning to decode the words by breaking them into their phonemes or component sounds. This is the mechanics of reading and develops the skill of blending the sounds together in order to be able to say the word. Although the child is at this stage decoding a word, this is not reading in the true sense because the focus is on mechanics rather than interpretation. For this reason, we offer words and then phrases before books. To introduce books at this stage is the best way, in fact, to put a child off reading!



'A book is concerned with the language of thought and not with the mechanics of expression. This is why a book cannot be understood by a child before he has mastered logical language'[7]

Although we do not offer books as the first reading material, we must read to our children, encourage them to look at books independently from a young age and, through our whole attitude to learning and literacy, convey the joy and knowledge that can be gained from reading. Wray and Medwell (1999) note that if we are to interest children in reading, it is essential that they are able to read in a purposeful way: activities and texts should be meaningful, not just exercises for school. [8]

One of the criticisms of phonics mentioned above was that it results in the child being unable to move beyond reading purely phonetic words, with the obvious implications of this for accessing a wide variety of reading material. In a Montessori class, once the child has learned to read phonetically, there are additional activities such as the Reading Folders which enable him to explore the different combinations of letters which make up the key sounds (for example ee, ea and e-e all make the sound 'ee'); from here he can access 90% of the words in the English language.

« We must encourage them to look at books independently from a young age »

Sir Jim Rose suggested that children should start gaining phonetic knowledge and skills by the age of five, with the

aim that they will be reading fluently, with strong word recognition skills, by the end of Key Stage one [9]. Furthermore, with effective pre-reading activities in place, children may be ready to begin work in phonics before the age of five. It would not be unusual to see a four to five year old in a Montessori class reading with fluency and comprehension. This is possible because of a strong pre-literacy foundation, and, as the Rose Report also recommends, all new knowledge builds on children's existing skills. Children are **not** pressured into writing or reading (Rose notes that it is essential that teachers use observation and assessment to make 'principled, professional' judgements on a child's readiness [10] but, as he notes, it is pointless, or even harmful, to hold back child who is ready to begin reading. The systematic progression of knowledge and skills means that children's progress can be easily assessed in order to plan for future learning. Observational assessment is a key feature of any good Montessori school, with teachers constantly observing to see how they can best support the child's next steps in learning.

Rose concluded that the following strategies combine to form the best approach to reading:

- Synthetic phonics should be the foremost approach to reading
- An early focus on speaking and listening skills
- The development of early phonological awareness
- Vocabulary enrichment from a young age
- A multi-sensory approach
- The teaching of non-phonetic high frequency words
- Showing children that writing and reading are reverse processes of each other

The Montessori approach uses all of these strategies. We have discussed the first but what about the others?

An early focus on speaking and listening skills: According to Sue Palmer [11] mainstream teachers are seeing four and five year children with poor oral literacy skills. They have a lack of knowledge of the nursery rhymes and songs that have been traditional to childhood for generations; an inability to sit and listen; and an inability to 'express complex ideas in speech or writing'. The oral language gained through speaking and listening activities offers vital preparation for the acquisition of written language. Throughout the day in the Children's House, small groups of children can be observed coming together for songs, stories, poems and rhymes, as well as for pre-literacy games to develop vocabulary, language structure and phonological awareness, while news groups enable children to take turns at speaking and listening.

Elizabeth Jarman suggests that preparing the right environment is key in developing speaking and listening skills. Looking at some of her recommendations [12], we see that the Montessori environment compares favourably:

- Cosy, small areas, where children feel safe and able to chat in privacy are important.
- Spaces should take account of the physical environmental factors that can impact on learning, for example, light, colour, noise.
- Resources should be presented in an uncluttered way.
- The environment should not be over stimulating.
- Spaces should be viewed from the child's perspective

This may sound familiar to anyone acquainted with a Montessori class where there is an uncluttered appearance with materials laid out clearly at the child's height. The room will contain beautiful pictures and be attractive, but the walls will not be covered in over-stimulating, brightly-coloured displays. There will be a 'gentle hum' - children may be chatting quietly, others will be working with great concentration. The room is never noisy but the freedom to talk and interact is of paramount importance. There will be a comfortable book corner where children look at and read books alone or with a friend, or perhaps sit down for a chat.

The development of early phonological awareness: Children of two and older love to play the simple sound game of 'I Spy'. The child's awareness of the component sounds of words develops by learning to identify the beginning, end and middle sounds of firstly simple words (e.g. dog), leading to more complicated words (e.g. elephant). At a time when the child's mind is particularly sensitive to the acquisition of language, it is being prepared to identify the individual sounds

of words, and this is, after all, the basis of writing and reading.

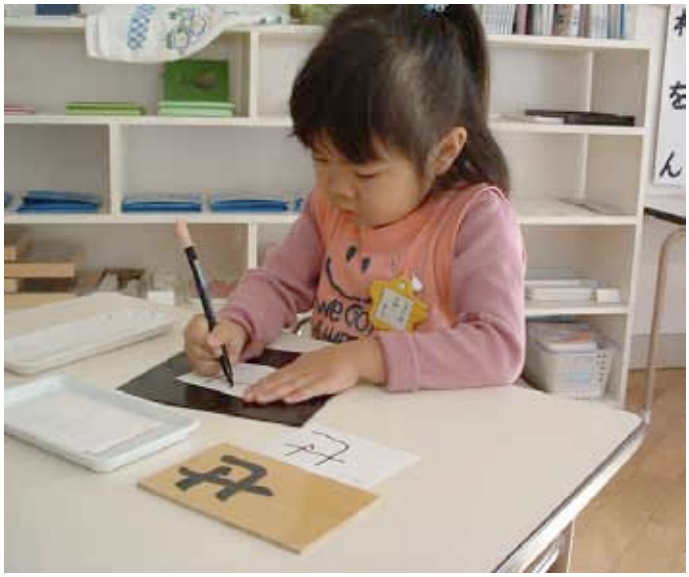
Vocabulary enrichment from a young age: There are many opportunities in the Children's House to extend and enrich vocabulary. Every piece of material is named before presenting it to the child. The 'Classified Cards' show objects to be named, as well as complex parts of animals, plants and trees which fascinate the young child in the grip of a Sensitive Period for language. Having explored the qualities of the Sensorial material, whether these be related to dimension, colour, shape, or sound, the language to describe these qualities is offered to the child using a technique that follows the process of learning.

A multi-sensory approach: The child under six is a sensorial learner, who as such benefits from a multi-sensory approach in all areas of learning. A classic example of a multi-sensory approach can be found in the Sandpaper Letters: the child sees the shape of the letter, feels it and moves his hand over it while also saying the sound.

Showing the child that writing and reading are reverse processes: Once the child knows the sounds and has learned symbols for these sounds through the Sandpaper Letters, including the digraphs such as ee, sh, oa, he is introduced to the Movable Alphabet. Using the twenty-six letters of alphabet, the child can now write any word using phonetic spelling e.g. caik (cake), zue (zoo), baibee (baby). When the child uses the Movable Alphabet to create words, he is also preparing himself for reading, and the one will quickly follow the other. Writing develops before reading because the process of writing involves using the child's knowledge of sounds to express his own thoughts. In reading, he needs to decode the words but also interpret their meaning.

The teaching of non-phonetic high frequency words: High frequency words, or as Montessori children know them, 'puzzle' words, need to be taught after the child is able to blend words for reading. Puzzle words enable the child to access texts that contain high frequency words that are not decodable, enabling them to read short phrases and sentences and extending their access to quality literature.

A century of Montessori education has shown that children independently choose to carry out 'academic work' such as reading and writing, and that they enjoy it! This is because they are well-prepared and they are introduced to the work when they are ready. The Montessori approach utilises all of the factors being advocated by experts today and there is a century of history to prove that it works.



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Noah's Story

***Donna Tuff**'s son contracted meningitis at 16 months – the doctors suggested that he would never walk and would be permanently brain damaged. Donna's incredible determination and her understanding of the Montessori principles that aid development proved all the experts wrong. This is Noah's moving and inspirational story.*

Our son Noah contracted pneumoccocal meningitis in March 2006 when he was 16 months old. As a result he suffered a bilateral profound hearing loss and has hypo vestibular function [he has no vestibular balance] and a strabismus [squint] in his right eye. Noah is now three and half years old and attending the Maria Montessori Children's House in Hampstead. I wanted to share Noah's story with you all because we, my husband, Richard, and I, believe strongly that the application of Montessori principles played a big part in Noah's recovery.

Noah was transferred to Great Ormond Street Hospital [GOSH] Paediatric Intensive Care Unit by ambulance from The Royal Free Hospital Accident and Emergency department on the morning of Saturday 11th March 2006. The ambulance that took Noah was a special ambulance that retrieves children from general hospitals and takes them to hospitals where they can get the appropriate specialist care. On board there was a doctor and a nurse. This doctor put Noah into a coma before he became too ill and he was then taken to GOSH where he was immediately given a CT scan of his brain, and blood was taken for testing. At this stage Noah was too ill to have a lumber punch, and intravenous antibiotics were given. At 8 pm that night we were told that the good news was that they knew what strain of meningitis it was but the bad news was that it was the worst kind and the next 24 hours were critical. Knowing which strain of meningitis they were dealing with meant that they were able to give the right antibiotics. The drugs that were keeping Noah in a coma were stopped and we were told to expect him to start waking up on Sunday afternoon. He did not wake up until Thursday.

When Noah came out of his coma the hospital attempted to take out the tubes attached to the ventilator but Noah was unable to breath alone so the tubes had to be put back, this time down his nose as his throat was so swollen and sore. A couple of days later they tried again and this time Noah managed to hold his own although he was completely spasticated and his eyes were both looking outward. We were taken to a side room and told – 'you only have to look at him to see he is brain damaged, he will not come out of this unscathed, the likelihood is that he will be in a wheel chair.' I had to leave the room because I wanted to run and scream, this was my worst nightmare.

The first time I held Noah in my arms after this he was crying in pain. His cry was so weak and hoarse because his throat was so swollen. He couldn't swallow, he couldn't hold his head, and he was so rigid. Before Noah was ill his movement and co-ordination was excellent, he walked at 11 months having gone through all the stages of evolution. He slithered, he crawled, he stood up and he walked. He could feed himself with a spoon, he was wearing pants during the day, he drank from a glass, all thanks to the application of Montessori principles that I had learnt from studying for the AMI 3-6 diploma. When it came to getting from A to B Noah was fearless, he was brilliant and he could work things out. I have a photo of him trying to turn the

> «He will not come out of this unscathed, the likelihood is that he will be in a wheel chair»

key in the back door having first gone to collect his chair so that he could climb on it to reach and he was only one year old! When he was born we put him in a Moses basket but by six weeks he was on the mattress on the floor because he kept getting stuck when he was trying to turn in the Moses basket even though we had got an extra wide one! He was much happier on the mattress and he never

fell out….but he did slither out and into our room when he was 5 months old with a big smile on his face at 5am!

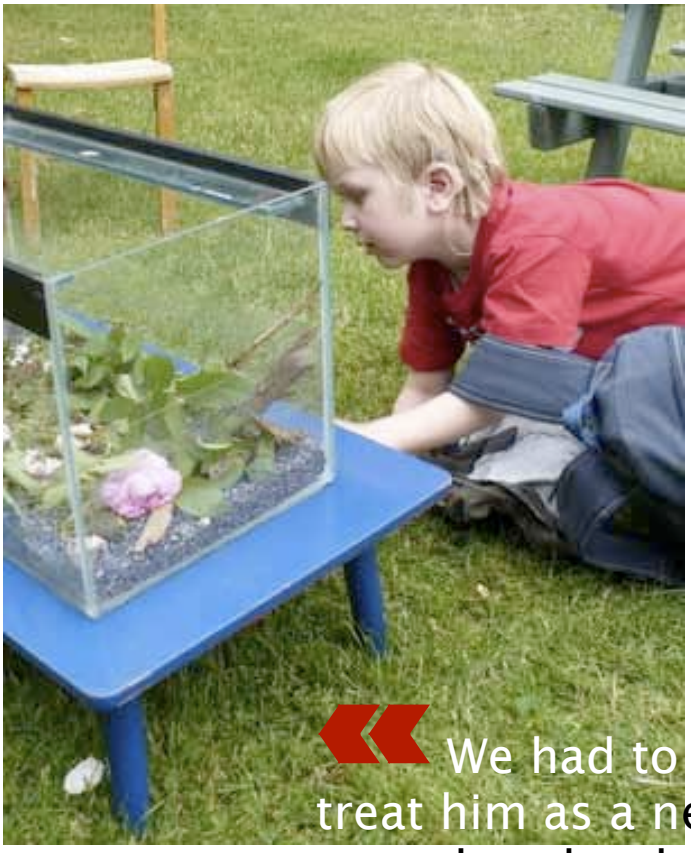
When we were told that Noah would probably be in a wheel chair I was horrified because we had always been really sensitive to his dignity and always had independence at the forefront of our minds. We had made a big effort to be good Montessori parents. Also at that time Noah was spasticated and kept making juddering movements, so as well as being in a wheelchair they also did not expect him to be mentally intact.

I was not prepared to accept that Noah was going to be like this and I set about making sure that he would get better by doing the only thing I knew how to do – applying Montessori principles. Straight away when I held Noah I started reading his favourite books to him. I asked him to 'point to the butterfly' - and he did! It took an enormous amount of effort but he did it, so I don't think he was deaf straight away. I think he lost his hearing over a period of a couple of weeks. I also asked him to 'turn the page' after I had turned a few - and he did it! You will not believe the amount of effort it took him but he did it. I asked him and I waited and expected it – and he did it - I didn't miss the moment. And I did this because that is what Montessori has taught me to do. When I told the doctor she seemed as if she didn't really believe me until she saw it herself.

As soon as we were transferred to the neurology ward we put Noah on the floor. He had a physiotherapist come to do exercises with him. We asked for a floor mat and covered it with a clean sheet and that's where Noah stayed for as much of the day as possible. At night he went into the cot. He was still running a temperature whilst on the neurology ward, his teeth started coming with a vengeance, and he was not happy, crying and moaning. He was given blood, which made a big difference and the antibiotics continued, as well as pain relief.

Noah was transferred back to the Royal Free Hospital for rehabilitation. Noah's physiotherapist, Nikki Shack, was a remarkable woman and she took us all under her wing. Obviously she couldn't give us any guarantees about Noah walking but she wasn't going to give up. She moved us onwards and upwards the whole time. She told us to make a chart of all of Noah's achievements so that we could remind ourselves how far he had come. A special buggy and highchair had been ordered for Noah via GOSH, but we refused it. We were certain that Noah wouldn't need it and the physio was right behind us. In fact I'm not sure if she was actually right in front of us! She told us what exercises to do with Noah. Two weeks after leaving GOSH he still couldn't sit alone and when you held him his head rolled. Richard was brilliant at doing the exercises and every time Nikki came back Noah had achieved his goal. We did give Noah breaks but we also worked him and challenged him within the realms of achievement. A neurologist came to see Noah at the Royal Free and kept referring to him as a 'floppy bunny' and it was obvious from the way he spoke to us that he did not hold out much hope for Noah. He painted a very bleak picture. We were devastated but, like I said to him, the brain scans do not show you Noah's personality and surely that must play a big part in someone's recovery. He basically said that the brain only has so much capacity and the cells that had died would not regenerate. Noah has suffered scattered damage to both hemispheres of his brain; the biggest hit was to the basal ganglia which is basically the area for movement.

That doctor made me so angry referring to Noah as a 'floppy bunny', the next morning when we woke up I put Noah on the mat on the floor and sat him up a few times between my legs as we had been practising and then I moved back. I caught him a few times and then started to let him go. I was sitting behind him giving him lots of verbal encouragement. It was really hard for him and he did cry but the most amazing thing happened - after about one and half hours he was putting his arm out to save himself. I will never forget that morning because it was like watching a flower bloom from a bud when they fast forward it on television, even writing it now I can feel a rush of adrenaline. Noah was starting to sit, he could only manage a few seconds but really quickly he was sitting for longer



> We had to start again, treat him as a new born with regard to development

and longer periods of time. That doctor couldn't do his rounds quick enough for me that morning! What a shock he got! What's even more incredible is that Noah had his back to me and although I was encouraging him and really excited he was deaf at that point [we didn't know then] so he couldn't hear me which just goes to show that he did it for himself by himself. I kept picking him back up because he couldn't get up and in fact that is when he would cry out because he couldn't get up. He was determined to sit without falling over. The next stage was for him to roll over and get back into sitting. That came later.

When I'm told bad news about Noah I feel a wave of terror crash over me, I go into panic and want to run and scream. No-one can see that in me because I can hold myself together in front of people. When I calm down which is probably only minutes I feel really strong and determined because I have great faith in Noah and the power within him. I always think of that first paragraph in the Absorbent Mind:

'for the defence of those great inner powers which children possess'.

I can't even remember reading that book, I have.....we all have. But for some reason those words popped into my mind and they do again and again. I think I would have gone truly mad if I had not found Montessori. I did the 3 -6 and then the first half of the 0-3 with Dr Montanaro in San Diego, USA. I didn't go back for the second summer because I was pregnant with Noah.

Whilst Noah was in the Royal Free Dr Montanaro came to visit him. Noah had been one of the babies that Dr Montanaro had used during the 0-3 course at the Maria Montessori Institute in Hampstead for student observation. She knew Noah quite well having spent quite a few hours of observation with him. Dr Montanaro was the only professional person to sit and observe Noah although plenty looked at him. She also read his brain scan results but after observing him she said, 'he shows great potential, look at the work of his hands.' It was Dr Montanaro who suggested we put Noah on the floor during the day – she said we had to start again – treat him as a newborn child with regard to development. She told us only to put him in the cot at night because that is hospital policy, she said they wouldn't understand about the floor, she was right again - they didn't. Only one doctor said he thought our set up was brilliant and couldn't understand why they hadn't thought of it. To be fair to him he also took the time to sit and observe Noah. He had seen his progress so far and said that he wasn't a neurologist but he felt that we should remain optimistic.

Noah was tube fed for nearly six weeks; we brought him home for the weekend the week before he was released for a trial to see how we got on with the feeding. On the Thursday before the weekend we had a meeting with the professionals involved with Noah's care. We were told that they were thinking of putting a peg in his stomach so that he could be fed through that when he finally went home. Richard and I were horrified. We felt that he wasn't getting enough swallowing practise because he was never hungry as he was being fed through the tube. We took Noah home over the bank holiday weekend. Noah pulled his tube out on the Sunday, as he had done many times but instead of taking him back to the hospital as we were told to we decided to puree up our dinner and offer it to him. We felt that if he was hungry he was more likely to take the food from the spoon and the water from the glass. He ate the whole dinner, it was really slow but he did it. We did the same again for the next meal and the next morning before going back to the hospital. When we arrived we told them what Noah had done and our consequential decision. By the time we left hospital Noah was eating pureed food pretty well. This is another example of catching the moment – we gave Noah the opportunity to relearn something through his own activity - a fundamental Montessori principle. I believe that Noah could have been moved on earlier if he had been given the opportunity to eat for himself but unfortunately the feeding tube was put down into his stomach too far

which meant he spent a week vomiting.

During the course of Noah's recovery we have tried to help Noah to do it by himself, helping him by removing obstacles so that he can achieve independence. We could have easily taken delivery of the special buggy and chair for Noah but we knew it would be an obstacle. The faith we have in Noah is because I was able to do the 3-6 diploma and the first half of the 0-3. Richard has always been very interested in Montessori; he just feels it makes sense. Don't get me wrong we are not perfect examples of Montessori parents but we do think about things and because of that Noah is very secure and confident. He knows he is deaf and he knows that he hears through his processors. After the operation to put the internal parts of his cochlea implants in, he had to wait a month to start wearing the external parts. It took about 6 weeks for him to completely accept them and not keep pulling them off and chucking them. There is a coil that connects the external part to the internal part, if that comes off Noah can't hear. In the beginning the coils would fall off about a hundred times a day. Every time they fell off they would bleep to alert us. As soon as Noah accepted wearing the external parts every time the coils fell off we would take his hand and help him replace it, within a couple of weeks Noah was replacing the coil all by himself and very soon he would point to his processor or take it off if it switched off. As soon as we felt he was reliably reporting when he couldn't hear we had the bleep turned off. Noah also knows how to work his processors but can't do it as it is quite intricate. However he was able to show a friend who was looking after him what to do so that she could switch him back on again. That is another example of independence. I worked for a year in the Maria Montessori Children's House in Hampstead with Karen Pearce and I learnt so much about the importance of independence. Because of that I have been able to recognise opportunities to help Noah achieve this and to let go of him for his own sake when I have to. We always try to prepare him so that he knows the plan. On his first afternoon in the Children's House I dropped him off and got in the car and sobbed my heart out. My beautiful boy has been through so much and yet he had arrived at the Children's House, where he will be helped to do it by himself as all the children there are by directresses that have faith in the child. Noah started on a Thursday afternoon and on the Friday afternoon he came out singing!

This whole experience has been traumatic and sometimes I feel so overwhelmed with anxiety, I can't even describe how I feel or felt but I think that because of Montessori's discoveries we have been able to demonstrate intelligent love. We have prepared his environment for his needs, built on what's gone before, fostered independence and followed Noah, challenging him within the realms of achievement. Noah has his problems to deal with but now he is three and half years old he is learning to speak through listening. We expect him to reach a level of spoken language on a par with his hearing peers. At the moment he has a speech delay of one year but the gap is closing. Noah is on the normal developmental pathway, hitting milestones in his own time. All children are on a journey and it is the journey that is important not the arrival. Noah is building strong foundations and we are confident that he will reach his potential and be a person of his place and time.

We as a family will be eternally grateful to the life and work of Maria Montessori and the staff and students of the 0-3 diploma course at the Maria Montessori Institute for their support and prayers. But if there is one thing that really made the difference it is Dr Montanaro telling us to treat him as a newborn and keep him on the floor no matter what – this gave us the confidence to do it no matter what anyone said.

We would like to acknowledge the following organisations and people; The Speech, Language and Hearing Centre [Christopher Place], Auditory Verbal UK, Neil Foster at Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy, The Children's Osteopathic Centre, Bruce Kitchener, The John Tracy Clinic, California, USA Glenn Doman [Richard went to Philadelphia USA on a Brain Injury Course recommended by Michelle Bernard]. Sarah Pendered, Layla Talib and Fan Yeung fellow Montessorians who have supported us every step of the way. Sarah has been a rock and her son Stanley who is two weeks older than Noah has been a good teacher.

The Path to Self Discipline

Montessori said that if we want to help children develop into self disciplined adults then we need to provide the kind of environment that will help the child to create discipline within himself – when discipline is born within the child and is not imposed externally it is a lasting discipline that will stay with the child through his life. **Nikki Hughes** *shared her views on this complex subject at the Montessori Society Seminar this year.*

One of my neighbours is the head of the early childhood program at an exclusive private school in our city. Soon after we became acquainted she learned that I too worked in a program for children aged three to six years. She acknowledged that she knew little about Montessori, but she seemed sincerely interested in learning about it. I agreed to discuss the program with her, but only after she had visited a class. Arrangements were made for her to observe in a mature primary [3-6] class. Later on the day of her observation she came over to my house and with some vehemence said to me:

'You Montessori folks know something that the rest of us don't. And I want to know what it is.'

As you can imagine many long conversations ensued. Of course she was struck by the order and beauty of the classroom and by the freedom given to the children to use the materials. She was impressed by the level of work and also by the level of independence. Most of all she was astounded to see a roomful of self-disciplined little children busily and happily working at various tasks.

To trace this path to self-discipline we must first look at the child. All life depends upon the environment for nurture and protection so as to survive and thrive, grow and develop and reach maturity – to become what nature intends. For the human infant, so dependent at birth, adults prepare the environment both at home and at school to provide all that is needed for healthy development. The Montessori class provides the conditions for full healthy development and growth. Certain characteristics are always seen and have become hallmarks by which a true Montessori class can be recognised.

A fundamental hallmark is **order**. This is reflected in the beauty and harmony of the physical environment. It is also found in the schedule, procedures and activities. It shows in the words and actions of the people. A second hallmark is that of **freedom**. There is great freedom regarding the activities of the class and for each individual. Children are not constantly under the direction of the teacher. Another distinguishing characteristic is the Montessori apparatus. Many materials were designed by Maria Montessori specifically to enable the young child to do real tasks from the home culture and to explore materialised concepts in all areas of knowledge. For the young child's use the material is concrete, 'manipulable' and limited. Once shown the child can use the apparatus independently. The child absorbs knowledge from his own experience, a process Montessori called auto-education. **Self-discipline** is another outstanding feature. Children are self-motivated, self-directed and self-controlled. Many adults, who do not understand the natural laws of development or the spontaneous manifestations of the human spirit, are surprised by the level of independence attained by little children and are astounded to see a disciplined class of young children which is not under the constant control of the teacher. A final hallmark is that of **peace**. A satisfied soul is at peace with itself, with others, with the world. It is

not disturbed or restless because of unmet needs. There is a serenity of spirit in normalised children which is visible to others.

There is, of course, a relationship among all the hallmarks, but there are two which must always be considered together. These are freedom and discipline. They are two distinct aspects of one phenomenon. Neither can exist without the other. Analogy can help to illustrate this. A coin is one entity with two different aspects, heads and tails. Each side can be seen and is distinct, but the two cannot be separated. Freedom allows discipline to arise spontaneously. Discipline is necessary if freedom is to exist. Freedom is a condition which supports human life and the human soul seems to crave it. However, absolute freedom is chaos; therefore, it is not true freedom. True freedom exists within a structure that supports and protects it. True liberty has limits. For example, we have freedom to drive down the road on the left side. If we transgress the limit it can lead to a traffic citation and a fine. Further transgression might mean loss of licence and, therefore, loss of the freedom to drive down the road. Reckless disregard of the limit to the left side of the road could result in a wreck with injury to self and others or worse. We discipline ourselves to exercise our freedom to drive down the road, honouring the limit to that freedom by staying on the designated side.

Maria Montessori defined freedom saying:

'Liberty in its essence is the ability to choose the means suited to the ends desired.'

Discipline is the ability to command oneself. Obedience is compliance with the will of another. Self-discipline comes from within and is not imposed by coercion, fear or exhortation. It is an inner condition with external expression. Self-discipline is obedience that is self-motivated, self-directed and self-controlled. Self-motivation implies choice and the knowledge from which to make choice. A decision made without knowledge is a guess, or a whim, or an impulse. True choice requires knowledge and is an act of the mind. To be self-directed is to follow one's own intention and is an act of will. Self-control involves the whole personality which is revealed in movement. Action reveals both ability and attitude. In an integrated personality mind and body work together.

Freedom and discipline are hallmarks of a true Montessori class because the environment is prepared to support the child's development and growth in such a way that he can successfully use freedom because he has self-discipline. In a class where children are allowed to follow their natural drives and impulses without guidance, goals or limits, utter chaos prevails. The support which is needed for healthy development is not there and the structures which protect freedom are not there. I have seen just such a class. While the directress gave a nice lesson to one, the other children were left to their own devices. Bedlam ensued. I was told by the teacher that she left the children free to follow their inner directives. Clearly this directress did not understand freedom and therefore could not provide the conditions from which discipline will spontaneously arise. Understanding the relationship between freedom and discipline is essential for the Montessori adult.

At the most profound level freedom is the liberation of the life force into a spontaneous, unhindered manifestation of a constructive nature. As Dr. Montessori put it:

'When the child makes an act of his own accord the life force has entered consciousness'.

Limits form the supportive structure for this profound freedom and they are in its biological nature as well as the social conditions wherein it occurs. The freedom which is fundamental for the child's development is the actual freeing of the life force itself.

> Self discipline comes from within and is not imposed by coercion, fear or exhortation

The adult's responsibility to the child is to give the little one nurture and protection. Preparation of self and of the physical environment is the first stage in the implementation of that responsibility. We prepare ourselves to serve the child by observation and study. We learn how development occurs and how we can best give aid to life unfolding. For the first plane we study human development and learn to observe its manifestations. The prepared environment will be furnished with all that is needed for development at each plane. We bring the world, the home culture and a social community to the child in the classroom. We offer concrete 'manipulable' materials which are developmentally appropriate and will give the sensorial explorer learning experiences. We present these to the child when he is ready, giving him the chance to explore on his own repeating and perfecting his efforts until he masters himself and his environment.

It is not enough to prepare ourselves and the environment and to make a nice presentation of something in it to a child. Each child must be

linked to the environment through his own interest which, though it may begin at the superficial level, will move into concentrated effort as the activity meets developmental needs heightened by the sensitive periods and the tendencies. It is through observation of continued concentration that we know the child has made a deep and constructive connection with the environment. And so we offer the environment over and over again with varied approaches to the individual and to groups of children.

The child is always growing away from the adult. This begins at birth which is the first big step toward individual independence. It continues as the child explores and masters himself and his world. He experiences, absorbs and with repeated effort conquers both the physical and the psychical aspects of the environment. Every new conquest increases the child's independence from the adult. However, independence grows by increments and the young human child has a long period of high dependence. Therefore, the adult is very important to the child. For the infant and young child the adult provides for comfort, for security and for the satisfaction of developmental needs. The adult also provides the possibilities for growing independence. The adult prepares the environment and offers activities that will enable the child to move out from dependence on the adult. Adults must also give the child tacit approval and permission to move away from them. This allows the child to feel it's okay and safe to do this.

In the class beginning with a group of new children the directress is very active. She is the centre of attention and acts very like a traditional teacher. She chooses and directs the activities. She maintains control of the group. Discipline comes from her. There is virtually no freedom in the class. In the midst of all the adult directed activity, the directress will find times to give some children individual presentations of material. With each child, she will work carefully and unceasingly for that pivotal moment - the moment when the child becomes linked to the environment - the moment when the child begins to work from his own interest and volition. Something the directress says or does or something about the material or some movement will catch and hold the child's attention because it touches his soul. His intellect is engaged and this connection with the environment is strengthened and undergirded by the power of the human tendencies and the deep attraction engendered by the sensitive periods. In this moment the child experiences freedom in the profound sense. This profound freedom releases the life force. Ordered activity follows this release in accordance with the natural laws of development. This activity places the child on the path to self-discipline.

> «repeating and perfecting his efforts until he masters himself and his environment»

Once the pivotal moment is observed by the directress she will make sure the child knows how to proceed and then withdraw from the child and his work. This withdrawal is done completely and unobtrusively giving the child freedom to direct himself. In this freedom the child is **self-motivated** – acting from his own interest, not at the request, command or exhortation of the adult. The child is **self-directed** – acting from his own knowledge and choice. The child is **self-controlled** – acting from his own will. Such an effort on the part of the child engages his whole being and the phenomenon called concentration appears. In this time of profound freedom when concentration occurs, self-discipline begins.

The child's deep, soul-satisfying contact with the prepared environment is at first fragile and delicate. It is also pivotal for development. From this contact come the child's own efforts which lead to a constructive cycle of work. From this contact comes concentration which leads to the development and strengthening of the will. From this contact comes integration of the personality. From this contact comes self-discipline. From this contact comes repetition with efforts to be precise and control error which leads to perfection. This mastery of self and task leads to independence and self-confidence. From this contact comes the dropping away of deviations which free the child to move along the path toward normalisation. No wonder the adult must make every effort to support and protect this important developmental event. It is pivotal.

There are several important points to understand and remember concerning protection and support for the child's true developmental work. When the child is working constructively from his own volition the adult must withdraw. This removes the possibility of adult interference. It frees the child to work on his own. The child is free to proceed at his own pace, to discover and reflect and to repeat and perfect his work. The level of freedom given to a child is the level he can use constructively. Freedom is extended little by little as the child is ready to use it. Freedom grows for each child as his ability to do more and more for himself grows. Greater self-discipline and independence bring greater freedom. As freedom for each individual child grows freedom for the class as a whole grows. In a mature class all but the new children or those with deep set behavioural difficulties have the full freedom of the class within the structure which supports and protects it for all. From being the centre of attention and the director of all activities at the beginning of a new class the teacher withdraws from the position of dominance and gradually fades into the background. As Maria Montessori put it:
'As the child becomes more the adult becomes less.'

Mistakes can interfere with a child's focused work. Children, like any of us, will make mistakes. How these are treated by the primary adults in the child's life can make them learning experiences or make them obstacles to learning. Some children come to the class with non-constructive behaviours. A new child may react to the classroom environment in inappropriate ways. As a child begins a new exploration his developing abilities are apt to result in error now and then and the Montessori prepared environment is an error friendly place. The child observes that anyone can make a mistake, including parents and teachers, and that it's okay. Corrections can be made. Points of interest, controls of error and concentrated efforts to be exact can help. The adult can model correction or give a re-demonstration at a neutral time to illustrate what is needed for correction. In the Montessori context control of error does not punish the child, it informs him.

Understanding rewards and punishments is important for adults who want to support growing discipline for the child. Positive reinforcement of a healthy kind can be reassuring and encouraging to the small child exploring a big world. In Montessori we do not use external rewards and punishments. Rewards are internal and come from the satisfaction of personal and developmental needs which leads to a serenity of soul that comes when the life force is free. For the young child the great reward is mastery of self and of the environment which brings empowerment, confidence and a good self image. Praise is often misunderstood by adults and is a common obstacle to development. However, praise can be a positive reinforcement if rightly used. To say to a child who shows you a completed booklet of the addition tables, 'I saw you working carefully on this booklet', is affirming. Constantly telling a child, 'great job' or 'good work' for virtually every little thing he does is neither honest nor relevant. It can set the child into a pattern of acting for adult commendation rather than for the satisfaction of his own interest. Unearned praise is not a true reward.

Participation of the adult in the child's accomplishments follows a progression and depends on the child's growth. At first the child often wants to show the adult what he has done. At this stage the parent or teacher needs to participate. As the child begins to work more for satisfaction of self and less for adult affirmation the care givers must stay out of the activity and not give gratuitous praise. For a child who seeks adult comment on his work we might say 'Thank you for showing me your painting. Do you want to tell me anything about it?' The child may do so or decline.

Fear of punishment is sometimes seen as a legitimate motivator of action. However, work done to avoid punishment is not constructive. Punishment destroys self-discipline and therefore freedom. Punishment is an external motivator leading to behaviour that comes from fear or resentment. It places the adult and child into conflict. It causes negative effects on the child's character. It interferes with the possibility for the development of self-discipline. It stifles the freedom in which the life force arises to connect with the world around it.

Maria Montessori found that in freedom – and again this is the freedom through which the life force emerges into conscious connection with the outer world – the child's independent work without the adult could and would satisfy developmental needs. From work the child gains mastery of himself and of the environment. This growing mastery in turn causes modification of behaviour. Discipline arises. In normalising activities the child has a growing consciousness of his own abilities and knowledge.

When the child has the opportunity to develop as nature intended, Montessori found 'a natural wisdom arrives in the child.'

Freedom and discipline are inseparable. Freedom makes discipline possible and discipline makes freedom possible. Both are hallmarks of the Montessori class. Freedom grows as the child develops through work to greater and greater mastery of himself and his environment thus expanding his functional independence and thus becoming self-disciplined. Freedom implies choice. To use and protect freedom the individual must have the ability to make choices.

Again to quote Dr. Montessori:

'Liberty is the ability to choose the means best suited to the ends desired.'

This ability rests first of all on knowledge. Building knowledge of the world is a major task in the first plane of development. Knowledge makes intelligent choice possible.

Choice is an act of judgement. With knowledge judgement can be made from what is real and true. This makes it possible to choose wisely the means best suited to accomplish the desired result, which is Montessori's definition of liberty. Good choices enable the individual to use and enjoy freedom. And Montessori has said:

'Free choice is one of the highest of all the mental processes.'

The freedoms of the Montessori class along with their limits can be seen to fall into two groups. There are those regarding the person of the child. These are freedom to explore, to move, to communicate, to interact socially, to express emotion, to gain physical health and to reflect. There are also freedoms regarding the work of the child. These include freedom to choose what to do along with when, where and how to do it. The limits which support all the freedoms have to do with consideration and courtesy for others, safety for all and common sense regarding practical matters. The procedures and rules of the classroom protect each child and the community of children as a whole.

Classroom freedoms are foundational in the sense that they provide and protect the child's possibilities to choose following his inner guides. Thus there is a supportive ambiance for the arrival of the ultimate freedom in which the child's spirit becomes deeply engaged with the outer world wherein he will find all that is needed for realisation of his potentialities as a human being. This deep engagement with the environment in itself brings about the integration of the physical and psychical energies and unifies the personality. And as Dr. Montessori observed a unified personality is the fundamental basis upon which spiritual life is built up.

From the act which the child makes of his own accord development of the personality proceeds. The child's act is self-motivated, self-directed and self-controlled. Discipline is being established. The child is not focused on an external result but is driven by the need to develop himself. Through purposeful work he builds up his body, his mind and his spirit. He strengthens his body and coordinates his movements by using muscular energy. He strengthens his mind, a mathematical mind, by working to be exact, by making comparisons and establish classification. He strengthens his will by making choices and decisions. As the child strengthens so does self-discipline.

Discipline enables the child to use and enjoy the freedoms of the class. In this sense the freedoms are derivative from the pivotal moment when the spirit of the child engages deeply with the environment. The profound connection between the human spirit and that which it seeks in the world is a spiritual process. The child detaches from the world in concentration, but by so doing attains a stronger union with it. The child who concentrates is moving on the path to self-discipline. The child will have a sense of his own individuality, will see the world as an exciting place full of possibilities, will have a heightened sense of others and will have a growing affection for the people and things of his world.

This is the child my neighbour saw when she visited the Montessori class. In fact, she saw a whole roomful of these children. What she didn't know was the process which brings the children to discipline and the freedom which rests on it.

« The child is not focused on an external result but driven by the need to develop himself »

Poems for the Children

Autumn

Yellow the bracken,
Golden the sheaves,
Rosy the apples,
Crimson the leaves;
Mist on the hillside,
Clouds grey and white.
Autumn, good morning!
Summer, good night!

Florence Hoatson

Autumn Song

October is a piper,
Piping down the dell
Sad sweet songs of sunshine
Summer's last farewell.
He pipes till grey November
Comes in the mist and rain,
And then he puts his pipe away
Till Autumn comes again

Margaret Rose

Yesterday's Discoveries Today's Science

Do Young Children Need Computers?

We've all faced the seduction of the educational software advert that promises to transform our children into technically savvy adults:

'At Leapfrog we believe that kids don't just grow up, they think up..with Clickstart, you're practicing computer skills, numbers, letters, shapes, the stuff you're going to need for preschool.' [1]

Governments everywhere are pushing computer literacy and use in classrooms. We are fed the arguments that computers improve both teaching practices and student achievement. There is an urgency to their demands that computer literacy should be taught as early as possible, to 3 year olds; in order that children are ready to become tomorrow's work force in an increasingly high-tech world.

If you find yourself succumbing to this pressure and ready to rush out and buy your child the latest Leapfrog, or his first Apple, you may want to check out first a 99-page report called 'Fool's Gold: A Critical Look at Computers and Childhood.' It was written by a group called the Alliance for Childhood, which includes 75 educators, child-development specialists and physicians - many of them nationally renowned leaders in their fields - plus a handful of technology experts. The report calls into question an assumption almost universally accepted among mainstream political leaders, the education establishment and, of course, the high-tech community; that the more computers we put in our schools and homes, and the more our children get to use them, the better off they will be. We need to ask 'Is there research that shows such computer use benefits my child?' On the contrary, over the past few decades, the accumulation of opinion - from scientific researchers to computer professionals - actually warn of the detrimental effect of computer use on early childhood development. While an 'impassioned argument'[2], the report is 'thoroughly grounded in the scientific understanding of human development.'[3]

Neurological research confirms Montessori's observation that different developmental issues are primary at different ages. In preschool children, sensory and motor skills, and the neural regions most related to them, are paramount. By pushing computer use at such a crucial stage for brain development, we are depriving our child's intelligence of the actual food it needs for optimal growth. Fool's Gold asserts that children need to learn their way first around the real world – 'their bodies, their communities, nature - not cyberspace; they need hands-on experience, not simulations and content delivery, however rich in multimedia flourishes.'[4] At the time when the child's brain needs to be absorbing how the natural world works, and adapting to human culture of its place and time, computer use can prevent the link. The report quotes from an article published by the National Science Board:

'Computing and cyberspace may blur children's ability to separate the living from the inanimate, contribute to escapism and emotional detachment, stunt the development of a sense of personal security, and create a hyper-fluid sense of identity.'[5]

The educational psychologist Jane Healy spent years doing research into computer use in schools, and expected to be blown away by how children's learning had been enhanced by computer use. She found exactly the opposite and was dismayed by the lack of research and how children's use of so-called educational software showed dubious value for learning. While she remains positive about some forms of computer use for older children, Healy is upset that preschoolers are being urged to log on. She feels strongly that 'time on the computer might interfere with development of everything from the young child's motor skills to his or her ability to think logically and distinguish between reality and fantasy' [6]. Her book Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds for Better and Worse, is an objective look at both the benefits and problems of computer use at home and in school and their impact on children's health, creativity, brain development, social and emotional growth.

Montessori talked about the ordering that takes place in the first 6 years, during which the child works to create the mental structures and classifications into which to sort all the impressions that he is absorbing. Computer scientist David Gelernter says that instead of bombarding children with more information through internet access, we need to help them develop the ability to intellectually manage such complex data pools. He maintains that children need less surfing, as they already have more data than they know how to handle: 'Virtually everything the Internet is selling, our children already have too much of and are choking on. What they most need is persistence, concentration and careful analysis, none of which they will learn by surfing the Internet. [7]

It is striking how people who have achieved immense success in the technological field – innovators and pioneers of new forms of computer use – come from a Montessori background, where they did not use computers in their early childhood experiences. Even more striking, when we look at the work of such Montessori graduates as Jeff Bezos [the founder of Amazon], Jimmy Wales [founder of Wikipedia], Sergey Brin and Larry Page [founders of Google] is how their advancements seem to reflect their childhood experience of ordering, sorting, searching through and classifying information. Only now they are doing it on an immense scale and have designed ways of helping other people to do the same.

According to Google lore, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, co-presidents of Google, were not very fond of each other when they first met as Stanford University graduate students in computer science in 1995. They soon found a common interest: retrieving relevant information from large data sets.

Some of the most passionate arguments against computer use in early childhood come from people who are technology experts themselves. Peter Nitze, global operations director at AlliedSignal (an aerospace and automotive products manufacturer), made just that point in speaking about his own elementary education in a hands-on environment that de-emphasized technology: 'If you've had the experience of binding a book, knitting a sock, playing a recorder, then you feel that you can build a rocket ship— or learn a software program you've never touched. It's not a bravado, just a quiet confidence. There is nothing you can't do. Why couldn't you? Why couldn't anybody?' [8]

Fool's Gold urges parents to consider 'what every experienced technology instructor knows: all of these skills can be taught in a one-semester course for older students. Must kindergarten students really be trained to operate high-tech machinery to get a jump start on job skills? Is our economic outlook really so desperate and the development of our children's autonomy so inconsequential as that?' [9]

Some computer experts go even further and attribute their success in their field to their Montessori education, and not to any childhood computer classes. Mark Malsee reports in The Story of Sergey Brin: How the Moscow-born entrepreneur cofounded Google and changed the way the world searches: 'He [Sergey Brin] gravitated toward puzzles, maps and math games that taught multiplication. I really enjoyed the Montessori method, he tells me. I could grow at my own pace. Brin adds that the Montessori environment—which gives students the freedom to choose activities that suit their interests—helped foster his creativity.' [10]

On the Barbara Walters ABC-TV Special "The Ten Most Fascinating People of 2004' Larry Page and Sergey Brin, credited their years as Montessori students as a major factor behind their success. They said that it was going to a Montessori school, where they learned to be self-directed and self-starters, that Montessori education allowed them to learn to think for themselves and gave them freedom to pursue their own interests. Will Wright, designer of the groundbreaking computer game The Sims, has said 'Montessori taught me the joy of discovery...It showed you can become interested in pretty complex theories, like Pythagorean theory, say, by playing with blocks. It's all about learning on your terms, rather than a teacher explaining stuff to you. SimCity comes right out of Montessori—if you give people this model for building cities, they will abstract from it principles of urban design.' It is thought-provoking that even in such a field as computer games, which have a reputation for being violent, war-oriented, and competitive, a former Montessori child instead develops a game oriented towards building a community.

Will Wright's actual TED speech included an introduction of how his own Montessori education was 'the high point of my education'. He reports that when he became a computer game designer he became very interested in Maria Montessori and her method, how she 'found very valuable for kids to discover things on their own rather than being taught these things overtly. She would design these toys where kids in playing with the toys would actually come to understand these deep principles about life and nature through play. And because they had discovered these things it really stuck with them so much more. And also they would experience their own failure . . . that was very important. And I really want them to be presented in a way more where kids explore and discover their own principles.' [11] To the Montessori community, that sounds pretty familiar!

Lori Woelhaf

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2, 3, 4. Kid's Need to Explore the Real World Henry Knorr San Francisco Chronicle
5. 'Children, computers and cyberspace' Science and Engineering Indicators p 8-231998 published by the National science Board
6. 'Once a Champion of Classroom Computers, Psychologist Now Sees Failure' Pamela Mendels Sept 16 1988
7. 'The Great Technology Mania' Forbes magazine 23rd March 1998
8, 9. Fool's Gold Chapter Four Technology Literacy: Educating Children to Create their own Future
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11. http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/146

Regulars

What you should know about your child

Rewards, Praise, and Punishments: the Power of the Adult

Walk into almost any home with children under twelve and you are almost guaranteed to find a reward chart, a time out chair, and a report with the words 'Well done!' scrawled in red next to the title. This is exactly what countless sources have recommended that we do to ensure good behaviour and high self esteem in our children. There is no doubt that all of the praise and rewards are rooted in a deep love for the child and a true desire to be a good parent or teacher. Unfortunately, these methods are not only misguided, but they may very well be quite damaging to the normal development of the young child. In an era where modern developmental and neurobehavioural research continually 'discover' new theories that Dr. Montessori elucidated years ago, why do we remain so far apart on the use of external discipline?

The psychological basis for rewards, punishments, and praise are quite solid though there are debates about the long-term effectiveness. They are based in the work of behaviourist B.F. Skinner who believed teaching could be more effective if children were given immediate feedback and positive reinforcement. To change behaviour, one must change the external motivation by giving a reward or praise. Sadly, this method does work in a limited way to control the behaviour of some struggling children and so we parents and teachers, often tired and frustrated, use it. The result is often a short-term positive change in behaviour followed by the eventual return to the same behaviour whereupon the parent consults another source and tries another method. Unfortunately, because they are all based on external rewards, praise and punishments, they fail to address the root cause of the behaviour and eventually fail.

As Dr. Montessori pointed out, these rewards are generally irrelevant to a child who is at work and is in tune with a deeper inner motivation:

'When the environment, as in the Houses of Children, induces and prompts the required activity, the problem of discipline solves itself.' [1]

The actions of this child are guided by a subtle, but powerful internal guide and when the child finds deep satisfying work, he makes that internal connection. Unfortunately, using rewards and punishments do not lead to work done in accordance with an internal need and thus the problem of discipline persists. The underlying principle of behaviourist discipline is that the child will not be intrinsically motivated to do what is asked of him so the adult must create an external impetus to sway the child's will to work towards the adult's aim. In the case of praise, one major reason for offering it is that we don't really believe the child will keep doing the good behaviour unless we let him know we approve.

The fact that this thinking is so commonly accepted is exactly the reason it is so necessary for Montessorians to speak out against it for it is against everything we believe in. If we truly believe that the child has an innate desire to develop, then rewards and punishments as a motivator become an impossibility. If we really have this faith in the child, then we must know that a child's behaviour flows from this sacred impulse to develop. If that sacred impulse is supported, we see beautiful behaviour. When there are obstacles, we see the child's behaviour deviate often to the destructive, but it is the obstacles to which we must give our attention, not just the behaviour. When we focus on behaviour, we place ourselves as superior and see the child as small and weak and in need of our guidance, but as Dr. Montessori said, it is 'to the creative energies that we must give ourselves, not to the child'. [2]

The behaviour is but a symptom. We can give a treat to the child and get the behaviour we want, but this does not change the fact that there is something blocking the natural impulse of the child which resulted in this problem in the first place and by ignoring this, we quite possibly create so much more deviation as the child suppresses his own needs to give us what we ask for. If we give a treat to the child to change the behaviour, it is like giving morphine to a person who has a broken leg. He may walk on it and we feel good because he is 'fixed', but the bone twists as it heals and he will never walk normally. It is not about the behaviour, and that is the only thing rewards, punishments, and praise can affect. In essence, by giving external motivation, we are teaching the child that simple good behaviour is what is most important to us and we in turn change his focus from the internal motivation and resulting frustration or joy of his efforts to the treat we hold out to him.

It is this turning of attention which is doubly damning. The child has a natural quiet joy that he feels when he is acting in concert with his natural energies. This is his own special reward that only he can experience. We see it in his desire to repeat actions that seem to have no external reward. We see it in his concern for others and his natural tendency to help even when there is no benefit to him. But this sensitivity is subtle, easily ignored,

and needs concentration and space to develop. The comment of a parent or teacher, the sugary temptation of a sweet held out, a star placed on a chart, or the threat of time in isolation can easily distract the child from that very subtle quiet joy. When we do that, we teach the child to value our word or our gifts above the natural rewards of his efforts. It is a terrible theft of his ability to self-regulate. Repeated over and over, we destroy his internal compass and leave him only with the opinions of 'superiors' or the transitory external and often material rewards of our world as motivation for his actions. No parent would willingly do this, and yet we do it in subtle ways each day. This is important because parental praise is not always motivated by a belief that the child will not continue good behaviour without it. Often it comes from the sincere desire of the adult to express his appreciation for the child's work. Even in this case though, we must be careful of praise because the child loves the adult so much that it is easy for him to lose himself in the desires and opinions of the adult.

We must beware the awesome power of the adult born from the child's deep love. Dr. Montessori pointed out that 'every victory and every advance in human progress comes from some inner compulsion... no one who has ever done something really great or successful has ever done it simply because he was attracted by... a reward or by the fear of a punishment.'

So what can we do? I realize that parents and teachers often turn to rewards and punishments because there is a behaviour or set of behaviours which are intolerable to the adult and often destructive or harmful to the child. We certainly cannot let the child continue the behaviour. Though it seems paradoxical, rather than imposing rewards and punishments or praising good behaviour, we must go back to the core of our philosophy and trust the natural energies of the child. Trust that the behaviour is a natural consequence of good energies becoming frustrated. If you trust what we, as Montessorians know, then your role as a parent or teacher is not to bribe or punish, but to examine the obstacles that may be diverting his energies into destructive works.

Practically speaking, how do we do that? In our hearts we must first cultivate a calm and loving presence in the face of great frustration. We must step back and consciously remind ourselves that the person before us is not the person the child really wants to be right now and it is our responsibility to help clear his path of obstacles. Dr. Montessori wrote that 'a child's liberty should have as its limit the interest of the group to which he belongs. Its form should be consistent in what we call good breeding and good behaviour.' [3]

Once appropriate limits are set, impose natural consequences for the child's actions and be lovingly firm and consistent. It is simple really, but so difficult and so very subtle. It is not as flashy as stickers on a reward chart, the child will not talk about how hard he is trying and the parents do not get to comment on his daily successes in behaving better. It is not clear or easily laid out in a plan of action, especially in comparison to a reward chart or time-out prescription and maybe that is why those methods endure. However it is this consistency, order and love unencumbered by irrelevant and distracting external stimuli which allows the child the space and the sensitivity to find his way.

When you are tempted to use the rewards, punishments and praise - and yes, we all are sometimes - keep in mind that you are not meant to be the beacon by which the child finds his way. If you try to legislate every behaviour and highlight every success, he will begin to look only for your light and will be confined by your vision of his path and motivated only by the treats that he begins to crave. Trust that he is on his own inspired journey and you are there to stand beside him and occasionally clear the path in front of him so that his own internal beacon shines true. In doing so, he will be led to works beyond your ability to conceive. If you are able to follow him on that journey, it will have been worth the work.

Kristin McAlister Young

Additional Reading:
Montessori Talks to Parents: The Road to Discipline published by NAMTA
[Several good articles in this packet along with workshop questions for Parent Nights.]
The Discovery of the Child by Maria Montessori, chapters on Discipline and section on
Rewards and Punishments.

References:
1 What You Should Know About Your Child by Maria Montessori
2,3 Secret of Childhood by Maria Montessori

Dear Maria...

Do Children need Nature?

*In his book, 'Last Child in the Woods', Richard Louv writes about the tendency of children today to spend less and less time outdoors and about how inadequate contact with Nature results in a wide range of behavioural problems. He introduces the term 'Nature Deficit Disorder' to describe this phenomenon. The government's Early Years Foundation Stage [EYFS] **acknowledges that "Although the developmental needs of children have not changed, the current fears among adults** about increased levels of traffic and the perceived increase in the threat of child abduction have led to a shift in society's attitudes towards children's access to and use of the outdoors. A growing interest in media equipment, such as television, videos and computer games has also contributed to the creation of a society where many children live sedentary lives with few, if any, opportunities to access outdoor spaces or benefit from being outside. Despite this cultural shift away from outdoor play and learning, it remains essential to children's health, development and well-being." Why is there such a need for children to have contact with Nature and how can we help?*

A common thread throughout all the literature written by Maria Montessori is a great respect for Nature, which is not surprising given her training in medicine and anthropology. In The Discovery of the Child she comments on what a pity it is that adults segregate children from the natural world; children are taught to stay inside when it is raining, to keep their shoes on rather than feel the morning dew on their bare feet and to sleep after the sun has risen rather than know the joy of waking at sunrise. Their limited contact with Nature comes about when they are pushed in a pram to a public park or are occasionally taken to the seaside. Dr Montessori wrote this in 1915, but Mr Louv would probably say that the situation of today's children is much the same.

Children are born with wonderful potential and just as their speech blossoms if they are exposed to articulated language, so will their innate love of the natural world through appropriate contact with Nature. Dr Montessori recommended that 'a child needs to live naturally and not simply have a knowledge of nature.' A simple knowledge of Nature does not give rise to a love of Nature; a child whose perception of Nature is restricted to the pot plants in his home kills an insect or harmless animal without thought. On the other hand, extensive time spent outdoors will lead to an understanding of the world around us and how it functions according to systems of interdependency. The child will grow to appreciate its beauty and in this way will develop a respect for all living things, from plants to animals to other human beings. We remember Montessori's own dictate that children learn best through active experience:

'There is no description, no image in any book that is capable of replacing the sight of real trees and all the life to be found around them, in a real forest. Something emanates from those trees which speaks to the soul, something no book, no museum is capable of giving. The wood reveals that it is not only the trees that exist, but a whole, interrelated collection of lives.'

Going on country walks is an ideal way for children to spend time outdoors. Throughout Dr Montessori's writings we are reminded of the importance of stimulating both mind and body. She suggests that the pursuit of walking outdoors satisfies both criteria; it offers the child the opportunity to observe the natural world first-hand and it provides valuable exercise - one of the alleged symptoms of Nature Deficit Disorder is increasing obesity in children. She points out the difference between walking in the city and walking in the countryside: when a child is surrounded by people 'who walk about him silent, indifferent and without a smile' he becomes lethargic and has no enthusiasm for the outing, but children as young as two years of age will walk for miles in the countryside when stimulated by the joys of Nature - the warm sunshine, a small flower or a donkey grazing in a meadow. Even an infant pushed

in a pram will be attracted to images such as the gentle sway of trees in the breeze.

In Montessori school environments today we aim to sow the seeds of an appreciation of Nature. There is no reason for indoors to be for work and outdoors for play; the outdoor environment can also be prepared with great care so as to offer children the opportunity for purposeful activity. For children under six these are not only Practical Life activities such as gardening or looking after animals, but also extensions of Sensorial activities; real colours in Nature can be linked to the Colour Tablets and real shapes can be linked to the shapes of the Geometry Cabinet or the Geometric Solids. These children are sensorial explorers and should be given the opportunity for exploration outdoors: there should be both cultivated and wild areas, niches for peaceful contemplation and space for physical exertion. As in the classroom they should be given freedom of choice and ample time to make discoveries independently.
If we prepare the children for the outdoors their outdoor experiences will be greatly enhanced. When on a walk Dr Montessori proposed:

'teaching, for example, the names of colours, the shapes of leaves and their veining, the habits of insects, birds and other animals. All this opens fields full of interest: the more the children know the more they will see and then the further they will walk.'

In the Children's House the Classified Cards are used to introduce the names of plants and animals and their parts. Nature appears in artwork, songs, stories and poems as well as in activities such as pressing flowers or going outside to identify leaf shapes. Children help care for the plants in the classroom from an even earlier age. In the Infant Community the activity of watering plants is presented to the child when he is eighteen months old. The child thus begins to understand that other living things depend on him to sustain life. At the Elementary level children build on what they already know: they learn about evolution through the story of 'The Coming of Life', they study the vital functions of living creatures and they have access to a wide range of books for research. There are outings to farms and museums, and the outdoor environment is used to enhance classroom-based learning when relevant. Montessori herself suggested activities such as orientation using the sun or a compass, studying animal tracks and route-marking for other children. When children reach adolescence, their school environment is a farm-based community and they learn about life through working the land.

It is sad that the interaction of today's generation of children with Nature is of such low quality that the term 'Nature Deficit Disorder' has come about. Contact with Nature is important for physical and for spiritual development; Richard Louv still remembers the sense of wonder he felt as a young boy turning over rocks to see a universe of bugs living underneath. As adults we can help by taking our children outdoors from an early age; just giving them time to observe and listen and smell the outdoors nurtures the beginnings of a lifelong relationship with the world around them.

As Maria Montessori says:
'...it is necessary for his psychical life to place the soul of the child in contact with creation, in order that he may lay up for himself treasure from the directly educating forces of living nature.'

Gayle Wood

1. www.standards.dfes.gov.uk: Enabling Environments / The Learning Environment / Outdoor Learning
2. Discovery of the Child; Nature in Education p.69
3. From Childhood to Adolescence; The Passage to Abstraction p.19
4. Discovery of the Child; Nature in Education p.71
5. The Absorbent Mind; The Miracle of Creation p.149
6. The Montessori Method p 155

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