


# *direction*



## Cosmic Education - Montessori from Six to Twelve

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# From the Editor >>>

Remember the times when Montessori was synonymous with nursery school because it was only thought of as being 'education for small children'? It seems that those days are rapidly disappearing. Since the celebration of the Montessori Centenary the idea that Montessori is education designed to support the life of the child from birth through to adolescence has started to gain ground. The Montessori elementary school has long been established in the United States but now, with new schools opening all the time, it seems to be emerging as a real option for parents to choose for their child in the UK too. The Conservatives have even promised that if they win the next election they will make alternative methods of education possible for parents!

With this in mind this edition of *direction* has focused on the Montessori Elementary or Primary School. A question and answer session tries to answer some of the most common questions that parents ask and we are pleased to be able to print an article by the AMI Elementary trainer, **Allyn Travis** on moral development in the elementary aged child. With an influx of elementary teachers into the market from the recently graduated AMI

6-12 course **Hadrien Roche** gives us some insight into what it is like to learn about teaching children of this age and in response to the demand for quality training at this level in the UK the Maria Montessori Institute are already planning the next 6-12 course.

For many of us it is rather daunting when the EYFS asks us to plan for the child's creative expression in the areas of dance, music and drama. We are not specialists in these disciplines and it is only too easy to be tempted into bringing in specialists. **Rukmini Ramachandran's** opening address to the AMI Refresher course gives us some good advice however, and helps us to understand what we can do to support the child's own innate creativity in these areas even though we may not be experts ourselves.

We hope you enjoy this edition of *direction* as much as we have enjoyed putting together for you.

**Louise Livingston**



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## Update on First UK Erdkinder in St Andrews

This summer has seen a further development made in Scotland as the Montessori School in St. Andrews took the decision to extend its Adolescent Programme into a full residential facility. The decision was made after extensive discussion with the project consultant, David Kahn, during the NAMTA meeting this July. The school is using the Hershey Montessori Farm School in Ohio as its model and plans to welcome its first boarders in August 2010. Plans are currently underway to prepare the residential site, which will accommodate up to twenty adolescents from the age of twelve. The current Erdkinder pupils will play an integral part in implementing the project. It is an exciting development for the UK as there are currently no residential programmes available outside the US, and NAMTA supports this as a good development for Montessori adolescents in Europe.

Montessori's appendices in Childhood to Adolescence on the prepared environment for the adolescent point towards the need for a residential community situated in the countryside but near to a town in order to fulfil the developmental characteristics of the adolescent, the social new born. Staff in St. Andrews are now closely following the guidelines laid out in the appendices and are following the inspirational model created at Hershey.

If you would like to know more about the adolescent programme or would like to be involved in this very exciting development for Montessori you can contact the school on 01334 650029 or [casadellapace.montessoriecoschool@virgin.net](mailto:casadellapace.montessoriecoschool@virgin.net)

All visitors are welcome.



## Dates for AMI Assistants to Infancy Course

As the 6-12 course closes another course starts. The Maria Montessori Institute turns back towards the first years of life and is pleased to announce the 5<sup>th</sup> AMI Assistants to Infancy course starting in August 2010 with Dr Silvana Montanaro as Director of Training. The course will be held in modules over three summers finishing in August 2012.

## Journey Across the Planes Geometry from 3-12

This autumn's AMI professional development day is entitled 'Journey Across the Planes - Geometry from 3-12'. The seminar, which will be given by the AMI elementary trainer Ann Dunne, will look at how experience with geometry in the Children's House builds a foundation for the understanding of geometry later on. The day is suitable for anyone with an AMI diploma at any of the three levels and will be held at the Maria Montessori Institute on 14th November.

## AMI Assistants Courses Outside of London

Due to overwhelming demand for the AMI Assistants Course which is held every summer term the Maria Montessori Institute has decided to hold the course in two locations outside London. The Scottish course will be hosted by the Casadellapace School in St Andrews and the Oxford one will be hosted by Small World Montessori.

## Normalisation - Fact or Fiction?

Make a date for your diary now. The next AMI Refresher course will be held at the Maria Montessori Institute on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July 2010 and is entitled 'Normalisation: Fact or Fiction?'

For further information and to register for any of these courses please contact the Maria Montessori Institute on 0207 435 3646 or email [info@mariamontessori.org](mailto:info@mariamontessori.org)

## State-Funded Nursery Opens in Bournemouth

Alex Shepherd reports.....

For the last two years I have been expressing interest to my local council in wanting to run a local authority nursery as a Children's House. Although they were very supportive of Montessori practice in the borough I had been making very little headway. In April 2009 Bournemouth Early Years put out an advertisement for organisations to put in a tender to run the nursery provision in a Children's Centre on the Townsend Estate in Bournemouth. This had been the opening I had been waiting for and I began to put together a viable proposal for the running of the provision. My principle criterion was that the provision must be completely free to parents. To achieve that, the nursery would have to operate during term time only as it would rely on Early Years Funding for its sustainability. Bournemouth Early Years wanted to pilot the two year old funding at this Centre which meant we would have an age range between two and five years. I proposed in the tender that we would have sixteen children, mornings only and the school would operate as non-profit.

We finally heard at the beginning of August 2009 that we had been awarded the contract to run the provision. After the initial excitement the reality of the immediate task in front of us hit home. We had one month to renovate a classroom and overhaul the outdoor environment, meet and build relations with the team at the Children's Centre and the parents and children who already accessed the setting. The Children's House had to be open by the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2009. Luckily we had a team of three already in place if our tender was successful. Our builder who had previously renovated two other buildings for us into Children's Houses was also ready to start the work straight away. We set about taking down walls to change two dark nursery rooms into one large class area. We put in Velux windows for more natural light and double doors to the garden. We put down a deck off the double doors with a roof creating an outdoor class area, which leads directly into a large garden. In three weeks the entire physical environment had been transformed. The cost for all of this and the Montessori materials was funded by a Quality and Access Capital Grant.

During that time many of the parents had been attending the Centre for 'stay and play' sessions and we were able to invite them in to see the changes we were making. Leading up to the first week we held open days, although the building work had not finished and our Montessori materials



had not arrived. We gave the parents an explanation of what a Montessori school is and described how a session could be for their child. The response from the parents was positive. We learnt through talking to them how they had been let down by the previous provision and we realised we had a lot of work to do to gain their trust.

As the first week began it was very exciting to see that the sixteen children we had attending were instantly absorbed. One girl of three painted for the whole work circle and another boy of three who was initially teary then sat and transferred for an hour. As we began with only practical life and art materials on the shelf the parents were asking where all the toys were. By the time we got to the end of the first week the parents were saying how calm their children seemed when they left. One mother made the point of saying that the previous provision had said that her son's behaviour had been unacceptable, but armed with a watering can and lots of plants to water he had found a purpose that absorbed him and he seemed very happy.

As the week went on more and more parents approached us for places we did not have so we decided to advertise for another Directress so we could take twenty children. We realised that this would still not meet the demand from the estate. We have another room in the Children's Centre with its own garden which we hope to open in January 2010 to run as a completely separate Children's House.

We could not have asked for a better start. We hope that over time, the community here will build a true affinity to this Montessori setting and this will then facilitate the opening of more Montessori settings in Children's Centres elsewhere. To be continued....

If you would like to take on a project of this nature for yourself and would like to find out more about how Alex made this happen you can contact him at [baytree@live.co.uk](mailto:baytree@live.co.uk)

## New Schools Open

There might be a recession but children always need to be educated and this means that new schools still continue to spring to life. Montessori on the Green opened its doors in Winchmore Hill in September. Sara Giwa McNeil, AMI trained head directress says that opening a school can be quite a daunting experience but she still encourages others to go out and do the same. She is grateful for the support being offered to her by the Maria Montessori Institute where she trained. As she says 'I can honestly say that the staff at the Maria Montessori Institute were and still are an amazing support. They really want the establishment of good Montessori schools..all the help, advice and support is out there...all you need to do is ask.'

Step by step Montessori is opening a new purpose built school in Mill Hill to complement their established school in Edgware. Proprietor, Kay Nanji says that, after years of being in a school hall and all the additional challenges that this brings to a Montessori school, she is excited that the children will now have a school built for their own purpose -

a real Children's House.

It is not just the youngest children who are getting new schools. Two new Montessori primary schools are due to open in the London area. The Paint Pots group presently have Children's Houses in Chelsea, Hyde Park and Bayswater. From January they will be offering Montessori to children over six in their newly established 'Picasso House' in Chelsea. This expansion will create additional opportunities for both 3-6 and 6-12 trained teachers. For more information contact [office@paint-pots.co.uk](mailto:office@paint-pots.co.uk)

The Maria Montessori Elementary School in Hampstead this year celebrates its tenth birthday and is spreading its wings to establish a new elementary class in Crouch End at Holly Park Montessori. Raven Lloyd, who has been working in the elementary class in Hampstead for the last three years will be running the class. She will shortly be holding open afternoons for interested parents. For more information contact the Maria Montessori Institute on 0207 435 3646

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## Montessori Accreditation - Why Do It?

For most of us I am sure it is true to say that the worst part of our job as Montessori teachers is the paperwork. We came into this business because we wanted to work with the children. If we had wanted to be paper pushers we'd have applied to work in the civil service! So why then would we choose to put ourselves through another session of form filling followed by assessment and someone else telling us how to run our school? Is it helpful then to go through Montessori Accreditation or is it just another inspection process to endure? Lets hear from some schools who have recently gone through this process with Montessori Education UK. Lizzie Kingston, of the Maria Montessori Children's House in West Hampstead felt that 'MEUK representatives were warm, supportive and keen to put all staff members at ease during their visits. It was clear that the aim was to help us raise our level of practice with helpful suggestions, not at all the cold, judgmental process that an inspection often conjures up in the mind.'

When you choose to have your school accredited by Montessori Education UK you are choosing to take on a partner who will not only thoroughly explore your Montessori practice with you but will also support you in raising this practice. You are choosing a process that will validate what you are doing that is good but rather than just giving you a 'rubber stamp' it will also help you to reconnect with those Montessori principles that may have been buried under all the paperwork. You will feel confident that you have been thoroughly examined but in a positive way. As Sutinder Lal, Head Directress of Milton Hall Montessori, said 'The assessing process was thorough, and precise, and their observations were detailed and easy for us to respond to.' She went on to say 'We totally recommend the MEUK method of Accreditation. It has made us feel satisfied that we are delivering a true Montessori experience for our children and families - and that is what really matters to us.'

To find out more about Montessori Accreditation with Montessori Education UK and register to receive an Information Pack please visit [www.montessorieducationuk.org](http://www.montessorieducationuk.org)





## On Graduation

*Newly qualified Elementary teacher, Hadrien Roche, reports from the graduation of the recent 6-12 course at the Maria Montessori Institute*

On some levels, graduations don't matter much: the important part is the training. No new knowledge is imparted to you on the day, no last minute ancient techniques whispered in the ear, no secret handshakes (or at least I didn't get any). It's fair to say that your classroom skills are the same whether you attend or not, whether graduation will leave you soaked in tears or bored to death. So, why? Why a graduation ceremony? The answer is manifold.

The first aspect is spiritual. Graduation is an initiation. An initiation is important, because it gives you an identity. Many teachers, and in fact a massive lot of young professionals suffer from the 'impostor syndrome'. My personal experience with it was when I found myself in my first classroom (not in Montessori, after a public school training with no graduation in the end) and before the first children came in, I started having this growing knot in my stomach, and my thoughts started to run wild on the lines of 'What am I doing here? I'm going to face a class full of children! They need a teacher, not me!' Of course, when the children are here, and your preparations prove adequate, it starts to melt away, but it took me an awful long time to realise that yes, being a teacher is mostly being someone who goes in front of children and teaches.

Like all initiations, graduation transforms you. Like the boy who kneels as a squire and stands up as a knight, like the apprentice who receives his badge and becomes a policeman, something does change.

When I finished my 3-6 training, I felt that I could take on a classroom with absolute confidence. A lot of it was the skills I had acquired all year long and the trust I had in it, but a lot stemmed from the fact that I had been baptised as a Montessori teacher during graduation, taken to the fonts when I received my diploma.

The second aspect is social. I used a baptism metaphor before, which for Christians is about welcoming the new child into the community. Graduation is also the moment where we leave our mini-community of the training course to join the bigger group of Montessorians all over the planet, just like the child leaves his family to embrace all of mankind. This connection is important, and it's too

easy to simply leave your training course, and work for yourself, your school, and nothing more. We all know what happens when the community aspect of our work is lost. We just end up toiling day after day, with our eyes stuck to the road in front of us. The bigger picture fades away and disappears. With it, usually goes the grand and lofty ideals of building World Peace with our Pink Towers and our Chequerboards.

The third aspect is simply personal. A training course is both a harrowing and wonderful experience. Insane amounts of work, sacrifices, alternate with wonder, sheer joy and exhilaration. Though it's entirely possible to just walk away from it once it's completed, it's a shame to not give that special time and these special people a proper 'good bye'.

Our course was extraordinary. Of course, I say it because if someone completes an AMI course and doesn't think it was extraordinary, something went sadly wrong. The Maria Montessori Institute wanted the group to reflect the Nazione Unica ideal of Montessori. So we came, from 21 different countries, birds of all kinds of feathers, different in ages, in beliefs, in experiences, in cultures...

The fact that we came from such starkly different backgrounds meant that we would rarely get caught in the shallow and we bonded on a much deeper level. There were moments when I would be sipping tea in the lunch room, after learning how to extract a Cube Root, and before investigating the difference between drupes and berries, where I would just watch my friends chat: Pakistani, Indian, American, Slovenian, English. We celebrated Maria Montessori's Centenary the first year of the course. While watching my friends sharing jokes and stories, I felt filled with wonder and gratitude. I would picture the world a 100 years ago, where Europe was mad with imperial power, and about to rip itself apart, where people who believed in a One World, in Peace, in such harmonious meeting of cultures as took place in Hampstead for three summers were just utopians and their aspirations barely more than pipe dreams.

So the first two aspects were important when thinking about this graduation but really, what we wanted, was an opportunity to say 'good bye' to each other, and thanks to everyone who allowed this wild journey to happen in the first place, and those who helped make it such an incredible ride.

Rain played hide and seek all day, but finally left us in peace. We wanted it to be playful, we wanted it to be emotional. We had gifts for everyone, trainers and trainees. Raven, our resident artist, drew a massive image of whirling destinies, then cut it into pieces and gave one to everyone of us, emphasising

again how we felt like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Now was the time where we could contemplate the beauty of the accomplished puzzle, and it was of course tinged with the sadness that we will soon unmake it to put the pieces back in the box. She was not the only one, so many people had last minute tokens of affection for everyone else that we left Graduation with our arms full.

Lynne Lawrence made a beautiful speech, prepared and carefully written; then Ann, our trainer, spoke, in her Irish spontaneous kind of way, and one could feel that she was rambling a little extra longer than usual, not really wanting to finish. We received our Diplomas, we hugged and we cried. Then we sang, because everything should end up with a song.

And then, of course, we had to say 'good bye'.

There are countless metaphors about 'good byes', about endings and beginnings, so I'll let you choose your preferred one because ultimately, as hopeful and full of promises as they can be, they're still sad, slightly horrible things.

For me, though, what makes me happy is knowing that when the sun sets on Rukmini in Chennai, it is rising for Sarah in Dallas, that when I'm describing the mighty Alps to my children, Aasiya is telling hers about the Hindu Kush, that our world is indeed One, that there is friendship and love everywhere on it, that this course weaved a beautiful fabric and that Graduation tied the final knot and gave the final snip.



## AMI Elementary Training Course



Would you like the opportunity to become the kind of teacher that has time to let children follow their interest until it becomes a passion?

Do you wish to become a teacher whose class is filled with independent children, curious and creative, working without the constraints of a lesson bell?

Can you imagine a teacher who is able to give children the big picture of life in our universe whilst continuing to build the literacy and numeracy skills necessary for meaningful exploration and research?

  
Maria  
Montessori  
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For further information and to register Interest for the next Elementary Course please contact the Maria Montessori Institute on 0207 435 3646 or email to [info@mariamontessori.org](mailto:info@mariamontessori.org)



*I was interested to read your response to your readers enquiry with regard to the Early Learning Goals for the use of the computer [Direction 3] and I quite agree that children of this age do not need to learn how to use computers but I understand that the EYFS says that children must have access to computers. My child's Montessori nursery refuses to have computers in the classroom for children of this age. Are they in contravention of government rules?*

The EYFS states that children should 'find out about and learn how to use appropriate information technology such as computers and programmable toys that support their learning.' This has been misinterpreted to mean that it is compulsory to have computers in the classroom at this age. However, this is a myth. In fact, as the DCSF document, 'EYFS - Everything you need to know' says 'There is no requirement in the EYFS to use computers or any specific form of technology. The EYFS says that most children should have the chance to play and find out about the everyday technology through their natural curiosity. This might be through exploring how a light switch works, for example, but ultimately it is up to those who are actually

working directly with the children, which activities they choose to encourage and which toys or facilities they provide.'

It is also important to understand that, contrary to current understanding, the EYFS is not compulsory. Recently Steiner schools have won the right to opt out because it clashes with their philosophy. One of their many objections was that they do not believe that we should introduce 'electronic gadgetry' to children before they are seven. This decision undoubtedly opens up the possibility for any school who believes that a set of goals for children of this age is inappropriate because they develop at different rates to opt out.

*In the process of looking for a nursery school for my child I have visited a number of different types of nursery school. I have been struck by the atmosphere I find in the Montessori Schools. I can imagine how the order of the environment might encourage the natural development of the child and how it caters for independence. I am interested to know if the same attention is given to the preparation of the outside environment or is there a more 'free play' approach outside?*

the phenomenon of 'nature deficit disorder'. Interestingly enough Montessori also emphasised how important it is for children to be exposed to nature. For this reason she advocated that the outside environment should be planned with the same care as the inside environment. She suggested that there should be an inside environment, an inside-outside environment and an outside environment. The inside-outside environment should be a sheltered area where the children could start to venture outside and could take some of their activities with them. The outside environment should have some different areas. A cultivated garden area where the children could plant and tend to vegetables, fruit and flowers and a more wild area where they could just experience the sheer joy of discovery of the natural world. There should be lots for the children to do outside and these activities should be offered to them in the same way as they are inside. They should

be arranged in an orderly way so that everything is clear for the child to see and choose and they should be shown how to do these things in exactly the same way as they would be shown how to scrub a table or build the Pink Tower inside.

## Comments, Suggestions?

Please send in your letters to:

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We read a lot these days about the importance of nature in children's lives and psychologists have described

*Recent reports in the press that children of working mother's do not do as well as those whose mothers stay at home and look after them has prompted me to reflect on the Montessori approach to childcare. I know that there is a course for studying specifically about the child between the ages of zero and three and that this includes the idea of putting the baby in an 'infant community.' How does Montessori practice reconcile itself with the fact that the baby will not be with his mother?*

Montessori put great emphasis on the relationship between the mother and child during the first six weeks. At this time the baby has just emerged from the safe environment of the mother's womb into a new and strange world. He needs to get used to this new world and understand how things work in it. When he first detaches from the mother his only familiar points of reference are his own body, particularly his hands and his mouth and his mother. He needs to adapt to the different atmosphere outside of the womb. The light, the sounds, the temperature - everything is different. He needs to get used to a new routine where there are times and places to feed, times and places to look after hygiene, times and places to feed. The mother is the one constant thing for him in the these first six weeks and only she can be his guide. He needs her for food and he needs her for security. Maria Montessori referred to this period of time as the symbiotic period since, at this time, the mother also needs the child. The suckling at the breast helps the mother's body to return to normal after the birth. So, at this time in particular, Montessori does not advocate that the mother and child are separated at all.

Montessori said that the first three years of life are the most important in a human beings life. It is at this time that the

child's character is being formed. By the time the child has reached three he has laid all the foundations of his personality. He has taken in many impressions of the world and he has used this to form a language which he now speaks. He has taken on the characteristics of his culture and has some idea of how to be in the world. He has developed the ability to be able to control his hands and his body and he is starting to be able to make decisions and act for himself. The little human being is formed and now all these things can be refined and expanded. These first three years are vitally important. Montessori suggests that the child should be with the mother at this time but also suggests that a very special kind of expertise is required if we are going to help and not thwart development. The Assistants to Infancy course was originally devised to do exactly this -

train people to help the mother with the first three years of life. Some people who have done this course do in fact work in the home with mothers. However, with the growth in the need for a 'creche' where working mother's can send their babies when they go to work the Montessori approach has been adapted to provide this help in a setting where the mother can leave the baby. This is usually called an 'Infant Community' but in fact it is divided into two areas - one for the non- walking babies and one for the walkers. In this community the adults are trained to facilitate the natural development of the child and everything is geared towards the development of the child's independence.

The next AMI Assistant to Infancy Course will be held in London at the Maria Montessori Institute next August and will be given in blocks stretching over three summers.



# Features

## Creative Expression - through Dance, Drama and Music

*Rukmini Ramachandran spoke profoundly and movingly, at this year's AMI Refresher at the Maria Montessori Institute, about the importance of drama, dance and music to the fulfillment of the child's potential. This excerpt is taken from the opening keynote speech.*



### The Inner Power of Creation

When we study the world of nature we realise that Nature is both creative and inventive. The dragonfly larva which has spent most of its life swimming about in the water climbs up a convenient stem into the sunlit world above carrying a small backpack. Clinging tight to its perch it arches and eases out of the old casing into a new life, in the new body it has created. As the outer layers of the creature peel the transformation of the creature is obvious. Biological processes ensure that the creature has all that is needed for the new life of its changed circumstances. Gossamer thin wings open up and glisten damply in the heat. These new creations efficiently carry the beautiful insect into the air. All that has been created in the earlier stage within the backpack in the water is now given a new expression as the dragonfly begins a new phase in its existence in the open air. Surely this great creative intelligence that we see over and over again in all aspects of nature, its timing, its wisdom and its beauty, are a part of human life too.

Education we know is aid to life. As Montessori educators we are here because we share this belief. Our prime objective is to assist the children towards a good life. The child is in process of creating the self and it is the very first human work undertaken. What does the child use in this complex act of

creation? The child finds all that he needs in the human environment. All that has been created by humans become the mental food of the young child. The extravagant sweep encompasses the accumulated work and knowledge of all the humans who lived before. Everything humans do, everything humans like, everything that humans undertake, become fodder for the mill. There is nothing too small or too big that escapes inclusion. Never till Dr. Montessori set out her educational plan had anything like this been suggested for the enrichment of the lives of children. She understood education to be the support extended to a child engaged in creation on a grand scale, creation that is almost too vast to comprehend.

A human being begins as a single cell. The cell divides and multiplies and the first bubbling creation of life begins. The child creates himself. That which was not there at all before, now magically comes into being. Each physical organ is created. Each successive stage is created directed from within. Nature guides the creative process and the plan unfolds in accordance to the fixed inner timetable. The senses, the brain, the lungs, the arms, the legs, the hands, the nails all grow exquisitely formed. The totality of this work will make a unique individual. The womb is a perfect environment which supports creation, providing all that is necessary and making available physical and psychical food. The ready nurture is mostly unknown and occurs harmoniously in the protection of the hidden world.

Maria Montessori outlined for us the unique stages of creative development that each human being passes through. Each stage is unique and creative, bringing into being a new part of the physical or spiritual life of the child. When the child is born he is as yet incomplete, a spiritual embryo. He is blessed with the great powers of the Absorbent Mind and the Sensitive Periods. As he grows into the next plane he builds a powerful imagination where creation is on the new level and held in a greater





realm. The adolescent distils his personal creative energy in trying to define himself as an individual and in the final stage the mature young person is able to create his own work, find his own meaning in life through serving the community as a human worker.

« Singing songs from time to time, wiggling hips and waving fingers .. have crept in to substitute the highest aspects of human achievement »

As educators we are privileged to have a ringside view of these essential creative powers at work and to examine their processes. The human child has a protracted journey to full adulthood – twenty four long years. At each crucial axis moment during this journey to maturity the children change and new creative rhythms begin to beat within them.

Art is born deep in the human soul. It is the outpouring of that which is most ephemeral in us. It is a reflection of life. It does not grow well removed from reality. It is based in human relationships. It is the essence of human creation and represents the work of the human intelligence. However, that which is inside the individual must be made available on the outside. Inner consciousness and understanding is not enough. That creativity within seeks structure and is finally poured out to tie the audience with the performer. The great inner processes finally are given outer expression through the vital building of experience we can externalise.

Music, dance, drama are born from human language and human movement. These two essential human characteristics are the child's creation in early childhood. By assisting the building of the basic human characteristics of walking and talking through the planes of development we help the children prepare for art physically, intellectually and emotionally. The arts mirror life. They involve the physical body and engage the imagination. They enhance and elevate the spirit to a higher plane.

'Art has to be created just as life has to be created. What is not creative is dead. The growth of art is evolution. Philosophy should be creative, life should be creative. When we are free and alive, not dead in our ideas, we automatically become creative. This creative spirit is evolution, because we only create as we evolve. It is really that urge which is inside

expressing itself, that makes us grow and create. We are eternally finding inspiration within ourselves and if we are tapping that eternal source then we are automatically creative.' [1]

We are studying Dr. Montessori's plan for education at a time when education is in crisis. Art today seems to have no place in the world of the child. It appears in schools as a mere shadow of greatness, often half-hearted, weak in moral fibre and value. Singing songs from time to time, wiggling hips and waving fingers, parroting the words and tunes that are taught by rote, these have crept in to substitute the highest aspects of human achievement. During the crucial time of childhood, the great potential of the child to come into art and to hold it within the self is lost. Instead of the holistic development of the individual, it seems we are obsessed by success. The system forces the children along predetermined routes. Creativity and inventiveness become threatening labels in artificial environments.

In our busy lives we seem to have no time for art. No time for family, no time for holidays, no time to travel, no time to cook, no time to clean, no time to wash. We buy DVDs we have no time to watch. We buy CDs we listen to as we dash to work. We listen to snatches of music on the radio while we clean the house. It is art on the run. The parents become managers of their children's time as the children are driven to violin lessons and dance classes between their Kumon maths sessions and tennis coaching in an effort to give them the opportunities denied to them as children.

We are eager to offer our children opportunities we did not have as children. Often we take on ambitions for our children that spring from our own adult disappointments. We become certain that our children must be the violinists, the pianists, the actors, the 'successful' performers that we could not be. We attempt to relive our own lives through vicarious means. We must understand that we have no hand in the future life of our children and have faith in the creative inner power of the children who will be self-directed and self-motivated. We must offer them the opportunity to truly enhance the quality of their lives by loving the performing arts, a love which will help them satisfy their deep spiritual needs. Human beings since time immemorial have responded to art forms that help them to express their inner being. Art must feed the human spirit. We must base all art education on higher inner goals.

We love the children who are in our care. Yet it seems that we are not confident to be ourselves. We feel inadequate. We feel we cannot do enough. We feel that we do not understand art and we think that it is better to outsource the teaching of art,

particularly the performing arts, to experts. A good teacher is found and the classes begin, once a week, twice a week. Visions of performance and success dangle temptingly in the dreams of the caregivers. The tutus, the shoes, the instruments, the accessories, the clothes, are bought. Unfortunately, this is not enough. Our own sense of inadequacy is this is not enough. Our own sense of inadequacy is a problem which is not solved by ambition or money.

The problems in art education which we are seeing increasingly around the world, come out of certain key misunderstandings. These misconceptions are both misconceptions about art as well as of the child and his development. We also believe that the goal of art is to perform and share the art with others. We know that to learn a performing art is difficult and that to conquer the arts, technique and practice are important.

We remember that to acquire mastery we need practice. Relentless practice is required to twist the body into the positions we need to express all that lies within. The technique may be acquired only through effort. We believe that through continuous repetition we will get better. We remember the body but we forget the mind. Motivation does not spring from drudgery. Forced practice can kill interest and the desire to learn. The inner drive to keep on going when the body is tired comes from the deepest well spring of inspiration. We forget that to practice with a deep understanding of the self we need to tap into inner creative reserves. To express that which is within is the second phase of creation. Art education is about working on inner processes, and finding love for the art within. Technique comes about through repeated practice.

The skilled teacher may teach the child how to play the violin during the weekly session. Is that enough time to teach the child to long for more? Can she teach the child to practice for hours with aching cramped fingers with a sense of joy? Can she teach the ears to listen to the slightest variation of sounds? Can she teach the inner calm of discipline? Or the mindful practice guided from an inner space which defines true art?

The truth is that art education cannot be outsourced. We cannot outsource the teaching of love. All art education is centred in love. The practice of art is guided from within by love. The hard work which exhausts the physical reserves of the body leads to self conquest and the refreshment of the soul. An expert can teach the children a technique. She can demonstrate a position of the fingers or the feet. The expert cannot teach love. Money may buy the classes but in the hour long tuition the very love for the art by which the child's life must be enriched may be compromised.

We need to give our children our time, our love, our inspiration. Art is a life process, it is work done with the collaboration of the mind and the body, it leads the child to an inner success, inner harmony. All adults who come into contact with children are art teachers. We are the teachers of our own children and all the children who are in our society.

We must embrace the arts, embrace the leisure, embrace the inner quiet of song. We must share our artistic values. They cannot be taught through instruction within the narrow confines of a classroom. We need to live the arts. If education must lead to a good life, art must be on offer. It is a choice which must be available to the child. Art is life, part of human society. It supports and nurtures the whole developing human personality.

### **Preparation of the Senses; Preparation of the Soul**

The senses stand on the threshold between the inner and the outer life of the child. The distance between true perception and complete unawareness is the very threshold of consciousness. On the one side we are dead to the stimuli in the world, dead to its beauty and divorced from all that it has to offer. On the other lies a life of inner bliss. The senses make a contact with the outside world and what is gathered is a great wealth of impressions which build a great storehouse within. The impressions are gathered and then classified and organised into a treasury from which all can be retrieved when required. The work of perception takes place deep within the human consciousness. This inner work of the child makes us human and helps us to make sense of the outer world. Within the child is the



power of love, love for the environment of which he is a part.

'... [the child] sees all the things he did not see before, jump out before his eyes. The preparation of the mind of the child by this method is like the spectacles, which helped the man to see. Even as the spectacles are carried along with the man with defective eyesight, the child does not leave his new perceptions at home; he takes them along with him perceptions at home; he takes them along with him into the world.' [2]

This inner consciousness which burns within each of us as adults is the gift to the adult from the child we once were. The work of the senses aids the construction of the intelligence, the creation of our innermost humanity. Through the gripping reality of material life to which we are deeply attached we must detach and ascend to higher spiritual non-material life. We become sentient and able to think and work with ideas instead of the objects with which our world is filled.

We must look on the whole human and his growth and ascent. It is from the chaos and confusion of incoming impressions, from the fragmented view that they present of the world that we create the order and begin to assemble our own personal jigsaw that will build our love for the environment and for human society of which we are a part.

When we listen to a piece of music that we have never perhaps heard before - *Symphony No 9 in E minor Op 95 From the New World* by Antonín Dvořák - we need to let the music speak to us. We must give it enough time. We must learn to listen. We must learn what is being expressed and share in the expression of the artist.

The first early impressions of art are not organised but taken in spontaneously as the child is exposed to a variety of simultaneous experiences. The initial



understanding is therefore chaotic, and disconnected from a holistic vision of the world. He must classify and order these random impressions, and so we help the child towards sensorial exploration to fuel his journey towards a more unified view of the world.

'I compare the effects of these first lessons with the impressions of a solitary wanderer who is walking, serene and happy, in a shady grove meditating; leaving his inner thought free to wander. Suddenly a church bell pealing out nearby, recalls him to himself; then he feels more keenly, that peaceful bliss which had already been born, though dormant, within him.' [3]

His reasoning and his imagination are in formation. They combine forces to strengthen the child's inner character, to build his soul, to nurture his work guided by the intelligence, work which can touch and transform his environment.

At an early age the child attempts to use his senses to serve his need to seek beauty. Humans have created art and they appreciate its truth and beauty in many creative forms. The child is introduced to colour, shape, dimensions, lines and sounds - all of which hone the child's abilities to appreciate his world. He becomes attuned to beauty and can recognise it in his environment and respond to it. The basis for this - his exploration of the reality in his world by means of his senses.

Human beings gradually develop the ability to make judgements. Using appropriate criteria we forsake impulse and come to decisions after weighing the situation from all possible angles. To build up a sense of right and wrong, to build a critical temper, we must be able to discriminate and arrive at our own conclusions. To appreciate art we must have the ability to think for ourselves, to judge our own actions. With an appreciation for the world we are awake to all the beautiful achievements of human artistic creation.

As adults we come to this from different situations. Can we all love art? Can we all learn to love it? Yes, we can. However, love is a big step. Once there is love, there is fuel to sustain interest. Love will bubble within. However till it takes root, the love of the arts must be nurtured in the soul of the child by the love of the adults around him who show real appreciation for music, dance, drama and poetry.

The form in which art appears in the environment is deeply significant. If it is perceived by our senses and forms a segment of our soul, it must appear in the prepared environment as a part of human life. Our role is to sow seeds in the fertile earth. We do not prescribe with what the child will fill his life. It needs to be studded with what we love. Thus the



door is open for the child to love what he will.

Purposeful work in orderly, harmonious surroundings which is undertaken to transform the environment gives the children the possibility to gather accurate information and gain valuable experience. This in turn forms and shapes the intelligence, and it affects the way in which the child will make contact with the world.

We move with the children from a vision of the whole to each little part, each small significant detail. We cannot drag the child into the wider world to experience everything. So key experiences are essential which will support the child's growing ability to think in the abstract. These early real experiences will anchor the growth of the child's imagination, a power of the second plane child. We cannot provide everything so every experience needs to be carefully offered. The children need sensorial keys by which they are enabled to explore on their own.

Dr. Montessori gave the name supranature to the human environment built upon nature. Supranature sweeps across everything that is created by humans, everything that is born from human intelligence, all human achievement. It is to this dynamic and interdependent web of life which every child belongs.

Culture is an inclusive expression of all human work. Every human group in essence share the same universal needs. The fulfilment of these basic needs of the groups in diverse circumstances results in the rich diversity of human culture that is unique to the group affecting their daily practical activities, science, art and language. The stories, the poetry, the music and the dance of people weave a rich tapestry of collective experience and begin to represent all the special characteristics which they share. The children need to experience their art and from it we must extract for them the essential sensorial keys by which they may internalise and understand their culture. To help the children become aware of the impressions they have absorbed, to help the children raise themselves into consciousness of the experience they have had, we offer language to give expression to what they know. The experience is finally named and forms the handle by which the child can hold onto what he has and in turn express himself and explore his new understanding with clarity.

It does not take much looking in terms of external resources in order to learn about music, dance and drama. We are still

surrounded by these and they are there for the looking. However we are not looking for *information* about the arts. We have set our goal higher. We would like our children to enjoy, appreciate and love the arts. To help the children we must be living examples. It takes tremendous inner discipline and seeking for inner resources to take an interest in the art world. We must discover the entry points and fuel our spirit. It takes a lot of practice before we learn to love it. Adult transformation is possible only because of love. We can change for the sake of the children. We can exert the discipline over ourselves for their sakes. We cannot be windsurfers on the day we place the surfboard in the water. To sail effortlessly across the water and to love the sport takes devotion and many painful hours of great effort. The interest becomes a driving force that supports the tedium of practice. It is only when we have made sufficient progress that we experience the first glimmers of joy.

1. Some selected speeches and writings of Rukmini Devi Arundale Vol 1 p180
2. Montessori, M [1998] Vol 1 p122 Kalakshetra Publications, Madras
3. Montessori, Maria Discovery of the Child p166



## What is a Montessori Elementary School?

*When they hear the name Montessori school most people think of nursery school but Montessori primary schools are becoming more and more common in the UK. How does Montessori work for this age range? Here are the answers to some of the most frequently asked questions:*

We hear the terms Montessori Elementary School and Montessori Primary - what is the difference between these?

*There is no difference at all, the names are historical really and the name chosen for a particular school may depend on where the teacher did his or her training. In the UK you will hear both terms being used but they both refer to Montessori Education for children from the ages of six to twelve.*

How does the Elementary School differ from the Children's House?

*It is quite different in many ways because it is based on Montessori's understanding that the child between six and twelve has different developmental needs and a different learning style to the child under six. The child under six has what Maria Montessori called an Absorbent Mind since he literally soaks up everything that is around him in an effortless fashion. In the Children's House he learns through his own activity with developmentally appropriate materials that are offered to him through his senses. By the time he is six he has a developed intellect and a mind that can reason. He has a huge imagination and the ability to think about things in an abstract way. He can imagine things that he cannot see or touch because they are far back in time, or on another planet or just too small for him to see with the human eye. This is quite different to the child in the Children's House who was interested in what things are and needed to hold things in his hands to find out what they were. The six year old wants to know about the relationships between things and why things are the way they are. So the environment of the Elementary School is prepared to appeal to this type of child with this kind of mind. It offers stimulation for his imagination and opportunities for exploration*

*across time and space. But in other ways it is still similar to the Children's House - the children have freedom to follow their own interests in an environment that is prepared to respond to the specific characteristics and needs of their age. They are put in charge of their own education by a teacher who is there to guide them to explore for themselves. This is, after all, the Montessori approach to education - that the child is in charge of his own development.*

In the Children's House there seems to be much emphasis on individual education - but in the Elementary School the children all seem to work in groups.

*This is true - the first six years are the years for development of the individual but during the next six years the child needs to start to find out how society works and for this reason is driven to be with other children of his own age. Montessori observed that children of this age would naturally form groups with other children and would use these groups as a way to explore how to co-operate and interact with others. In the Elementary classroom we capitalise on this characteristic by organising things so that children can always work together or in groups. In contrast to the traditional school where children will be expected to receive a lesson from the teacher and then work on the information imparted to them by themselves the children are encouraged to work together. In this way they start to understand how to interact with others, how to lead and when to follow, when to*



*compromise and when to enforce their point of view and how to respect each other's differences.*

If they are allowed to choose what they do how can you be sure that they learn all they need to learn?

*It is a common misconception that children in a Montessori environment are allowed to do whatever*



they want. Typically each child has an individual plan for a short period like one or two weeks, which will cover language and mathematics activities as well as opportunities to do their own project work. The teacher puts this plan together based on observations of the child's contribution during group or individual lessons and the child's subsequent work with concepts that have been presented. Records are kept of all presentations given to the children and their apparent understanding and these are used to plan for future presentations for the child. The children have to cover what is in their individual plan during the allotted period – but they can choose when to do it. If they want to do all the mathematics on one day and then not do mathematics for the rest of the week that is fine. They will have to keep a diary of the things they have done and at the end of the period they will have a conference with the teacher to discuss what they have done and how they assess their own progress. They will be expected to take responsibility for anything they have not covered and agree a plan for the following week. In this way they feel that they are in control of their own education and yet there are some checks in place to make sure that all essentials are covered.

## « decision making shifts away from the adult, to the child »

### What is Cosmic Education?

Cosmic education is the whole basis for the Elementary class. It is the means by which the child is helped to understand the interrelations of the things in the universe and to develop respect for it and an awareness of his place in the grand scheme of things. He comes to understand that if everything in the universe is interdependent, each having its part to play then he must also have an important part to play – he must also have a cosmic task. The implementation of Cosmic Education is driven by the psychological characteristics of the child at this age – a huge intellect, the need to acquire culture, the ability to think in the abstract, the power to reason and a strong imagination. Cosmic education is delivered by means of the 'great stories' which are stories about the universe and all of its components. These stories spark the child's imagination and driven by his need to understand more about the world and aided by a powerful reasoning mind he is prompted to explore. Through these stories the child learns about the coming of the universe and the earth. He learns about the coming of life and the coming of man and all of the stories about how human culture has been established. The traditional subjects such as Geography, History, Science, Botany, Biology, Mathematics and Language become integrated because everything the child comes

across has, for example, a geographical location, a mathematical fact, a historical foundation or a scientific basis. So the child who starts by studying the habitat of locusts ends up discovering how their wings are structured to fly and how they have evolved through the ages – he is involved in Geography, Mathematics, Science and History all at the same time because these things are all dependent on each other – they don't exist in isolation. Through these stories he starts to see how all things are interrelated. He starts to understand that if the life of all things is dependent on something else for its very life and if, in turn, each life serves another life in some way then surely man must be dependant on something and his life must be here to serve others. This leads

the child to the idea that he too must have a cosmic task.

It is common practice for children of this age group to have homework – how will they manage in senior school if they haven't had practice at doing homework?

Generally, in traditional primary schools, homework is given to gauge whether a child has understood a particular lesson. This is necessary when a teacher gives a lesson to twenty or thirty children at the same time. However, since in a Montessori school the teacher is giving lessons individually or in small groups and also because the materials are self correcting there is no need for this kind of check on the child's understanding. Sometimes homework may be given in the form of a project to be completed over a period of time but this work is never graded or assessed. In order to be successful with homework children need to be organised with their time, skilled at prioritising and able to focus.





*Because the Montessori environment utilises these same skills on a daily basis, the child should be well equipped to manage homework when it is given.*

What about sport – children of this age need to run about and play competitive sport, don't they?

*Children of this age really enjoy team games because it gives them the opportunity to work out rules together and collaborate. They can be given activities to help build their sporting skills and opportunities to play team games. In some schools this may be offered within the school day but in others it might be given as an option at the end of the day.*

Why are children of different ages mixed together in Montessori elementary?

*Just as in the Children's House children with a three year age span are mixed together the Elementary class also mixes children in three year age spans – typically six to nine and nine to twelve. The mixed age group is an essential part of the Montessori approach. The older children are able to share their knowledge and skills with the younger children and this is a very validating experience for them. We all know that when we can show someone else how to do something we know that we really know how to do it ourselves. The older children also get the opportunity to take responsibility for the community and this is the real way that responsibility develops within a person. Children do not just become responsible because we tell them to be – they need to live it for themselves. In return the older children provide role models for the other children. The younger children coming into the community love to emulate the older children and by watching them they learn what to do and what might come next for them. The mixed age group also fosters and provides many opportunities for social development. Learning how to be social is done naturally and spontaneously by living together as a community and this fosters an atmosphere of cooperation rather than competition.*

If they don't do exams how will they be able to sit exams to get into senior school?

*As the Montessori approach does not condone the practice of subjecting the child to continual testing and examinations, children will need specific instructions and guidance on coping with tests. We feel that this preparation can be given to the child within the classroom as part of their weekly schedule but that it should not commence until the beginning of the final year in Elementary school. Emphasis needs to be placed on time management skills, multiple choice questions and experience at prioritising questions worth more marks. Children will be free to practice past test papers with*

*consideration being given to time limits and will receive help from their teachers with areas of difficulty. The results of tests are not usually circulated or ranked as this is not part of Montessori practice. However, children get the opportunity to gain skills in a relaxed environment that will prepare them for the process of exam taking.*

How will they cope with senior school if they are used to doing what they want to do in school?

*Montessori is 'education for life' and this means preparing a child for the myriad experiences he or she will encounter, both in and outside of school, which of course includes moving from a Montessori Elementary classroom into Senior School. A child who's been in a Montessori classroom since age 3 has had many years of daily practice in working cooperatively, negotiating with peers, being a leader or a follower depending on the requirements of the situation and learning how to learn. Self-reliance and perseverance have had opportunity to develop as this child made decisions about what to work on and paced himself with the activity. All of these are skills that will serve the child in Senior school, higher education and the workplace. Children aren't encouraged to compete, or to work simply to achieve a reward or avoid a consequence. Instead, the child has an opportunity to develop internal motivation, another valuable attribute for Senior school and the years beyond. A child leaving Montessori Elementary at age twelve to attend Senior school will be leaving at a natural transition point. Again, all the children will be new to the next school and the different routines and expectations there. Some differences a Montessori child might have to adapt to include remaining seated in class, working on a lesson or activity with the entire class or a large group and having work choices made by someone else (often the teacher). But a child who has been in a Montessori school usually has no problem in adapting to these kind of things – they have learnt how to cope with whatever life throws at them.*



# Features

## Moral Development in the Elementary Child



*The moral development of children is of concern to every parent and yet it is not something that can be put on a school curriculum like maths or geography. Allyn Travis, AMI trainer at the Elementary level, talks about the Montessori approach to moral development in the child from 6 -12.*

There cannot be a more relevant topic for us to consider in today's world than that of moral development. Dr. Montessori was very aware of the development of morality in her work with children and she came to recognise that it is intimately connected to social development, human unity and to the possibility of world peace.

The foundation of moral development takes place during the earliest years of a child's life, just as the foundation for all later developments are laid during these early years. This foundation is mostly based on what the child sees and experiences in the home environment. This means the parents and family are the first important influence on the moral values developed by the child. In *The Absorbent Mind* Maria Montessori wrote:

'When therefore, the child absorbs the customs, morals and religion of a people what does he really absorb? . . .The child in the post-natal period of his embryonic life absorbs from the world about him the distinctive patterns to which the social life of his group conforms....and once the patterns have become established within him, they remain as fixed characters, just like his mother tongue. Later on a man may develop himself indefinitely, but it will always be on this foundation. In the same way his mother tongue can be enriched indefinitely, but it will always be in the basic pattern of those sounds and grammatical rules which were laid down in the embryonic period.'

The growth of moral formation comes from within the child, and every adult in the child's life either nurtures that moral development or hinders it by putting obstacles in the path of its development. In the first plane of development the child needs to experience a moral life being lived by the family and within the Children's House and then he needs to be helped to live in the same way. The young child is focused on himself and his own construction. He needs to be helped and guided towards independence and towards making good choices for himself.

Beginning around the age of six, Dr. Montessori observed changes in the child, changes that indicate the he is passing on to the next stage of development or what Montessori referred to as the second plane of development. These changes are necessary because the child's development is taking a new direction. The child's focus changes from one centred on individual formation to development as a social human being and this is the construction that goes on throughout the years from six to twelve. Where the younger child explores the concrete, the second plane child is ready to begin exploring the



abstract. All of the child's behavioural tendencies serve these new purposes.



We also find new powers appearing in the children to facilitate these changes. The psychological characteristics of the child change to those that are now needed to direct the child's interest to specific aspects of self-development. The absorbent mind of the first plane, that mind that soaks up facts and images and qualities of the world, changes to a mind that can reason. This is the kind of mind the human being has for the rest of his life. This reasoning ability leads the child to want to understand the functioning of the environment and the world and the relationships within it. The children now are found to ask 'how', 'when,' 'where' and 'why.' The children are searching to understand the reasons behind the facts they learned in the first plane of development.

What exactly does this reasoning ability permit us to do? Reasoning allows us to organise facts and ideas in relation to each other. It means we can compare, analyse and arrive at conclusions. At the elementary level we see this exhibited in the children's interest in searching out the interrelatedness of things. In *To Educate the Human Potential* Dr. Montessori describes these children as,

'Entering into a new world, the world of the abstract. It is a rich world in which the acts accomplished by human beings will interest them more than the things. . .before they were interested in things. Now they will occupy themselves mainly with the how and why. All that used to attract them sensorially now interests them from a different point of view. They are looking for what needs to be done. That is, they are beginning to become aware of the problems of cause and effect.'

With this reasoning power a whole new world of abstract thought and discovery opens up for the child. Second plane children become reasoning explorers of the abstract and the realm of conceptual ideas intrigues them. This new interest in the abstract extends to the development of an understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Their ultimate goal is not the facts of right and wrong as perceived by their parents or teacher. They want to use their developing powers of reason to come to their own conclusions about right and wrong. This is a process that they go through that initially involves questioning their parents and teachers in some detail about their responses to certain situations.

A consequence of this search for information about what is right and wrong is a phenomenon, which adults often refer to as telling tales. This characteristic is most strongly exhibited between the ages of six and about seven and a half. If we think about it we can see the relationship between this behaviour and the developing moral sense and reasoning power. The child's interest is in distinguishing right from wrong.

In *From Childhood to Adolescence* Dr. Montessori says:

'It is at seven years that one may note the beginning of an orientation toward moral questions, toward the judgement of acts. One of the most curious characteristics to be observed is the interest that occurs in the child when he begins to perceive things, which he previously failed to notice. Thus he begins to worry about whether what he has done has been done well or poorly.'

But is what's good and bad the same for everyone? What exactly do we mean by 'morality'? In consulting the American Heritage dictionary, I found morality defined as 'a system of ideas of right and wrong conduct.' But who determines what is right and wrong conduct? The etymology of the word morality is from the Latin word 'moralis' meaning custom. As we all know, customs are particular to a group of people. They are developed by distinct groups of people around the world and throughout history. They are what help identify cultures, societies, and civilisations. They come into being because of the particular environment a group finds themselves living in and the way of life that they develop in this environment. The customs identify some of the similarities within a group or culture, or what is considered to be normal. Dr. Montessori said that morals are the rules of society. They do not exist without the structure of a society. Good and bad is what can be done to society, otherwise there would be no morals. Morals, therefore, are derived from interpersonal relationships. One could say that the core of morality is the recognition that





others have interests as we do – that they ‘feel want, taste grief, need friends’ as Shakespeare put it – and therefore they have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of their interests.

It is important to remember that what is considered moral differs from group to group and culture to culture. Learning the morals of society is part of the child’s adaptation to the society. All human beings have to adapt to their group, to their culture, in order to feel secure in that society. We have a need to be accepted by the others in our society just as we must accept them if we are going to live harmoniously together. If people move from one culture to another, can they completely retain their own culture and live harmoniously in another? Certainly not always. Customs or accepted morality may need to be adjusted if we want to assimilate into another society. Developing a universal sense of morality and acceptance of others is necessary if we are ever going to be able to have a peaceful earth.

«moral values begin to develop quite early and continue to change and evolve throughout life»

In *Education for Human Development: Understanding Montessori* Mario Montessori, Jr. writes about a detailed study done by the French psychiatrist Dr. Andre Berge in which he explains how human beings can only find their way in a world that they can conceive of as structured, physically as well as psychically. Human beings need a certain order. Dr. Berge sees in this basic need for order the universal root of the moral phenomenon, a phenomenon that initially appears as an organising principle. It is eventually incarnated in the moral apparatus of human beings and permits us to exist with a minimum of damage to others and to ourselves. It can, moreover, be the source of a special kind of pleasure: that of doing what we believe to be right. Hence, morality is not simply an internalised penal code. The great motor of our moral apparatus is love. This love is shifted, more or less, from the senses to the spirit; but it is nonetheless this same force that enables an individual to reach beyond himself and towards something from which he will get no personal benefit. This kind of love is one of the gifts Dr. Montessori thought human beings have been granted: the ability to love not only our family and friends but also people we have never met and to wish them well. One of the goals of our work in Montessori at the primary level is to help the children recognise their own self worth and then the value and significance of all other human beings. Unless one recognises his or her own significance and value, one will not recognise the worth of

anything else, so acceptance does need to start with acceptance of self.

There seem to be many experts who also agree that moral values begin to develop quite early and that they continue to change and evolve throughout one’s life. Childhood is the time, however, when moral values are learned, ethical principles are tested and religious beliefs are established. It is also the time when the various parts of the brain – emotional and intellectual – become better connected, allowing children to think through their various reactions, setting moral values and then acting on them. As Robert Coles said:

‘It is a real passion for them. . . In elementary school, maybe as never before or afterward, given favourable family and neighbourhood circumstances, the child becomes an intensely moral creature, quite interested in figuring out the reasons for the world, how and why things work, but also how and why he or she should behave in various situations.’

The work of the children in the primary class centres around small groups of children. Working in groups fosters debate and discussion. These discussions are naturally extended into the moral realm as the children deal with day-to-day happenings. Regarding social behaviour, Montessori said children need to reason through to their own moral values. She wrote:

‘A second side of education at this age concerns the children’s exploration of the moral field and discrimination between good and evil. They no longer are receptive, absorbing impressions with ease but want to understand for themselves, and are not content with accepting mere facts. As moral activity develops, they want to use their own judgement, which often will be quite different from that of their teachers. There is nothing more difficult than to teach (by direct methods) moral values to children of this age; they give an immediate retort to everything that we say. An inner change has taken place but nature is quite logical in arousing now in the children not only a hunger for knowledge and understanding but also a claim to mental independence, a desire to distinguish good from evil by their own powers and to resent limitations by arbitrary authority. In the field of morality, the child now stands in need of his own inner light.’

It is through the realisation of the human gifts, intellect and will, that children develop moral

integrity. Their reasoning powers allow them to form their own judgements of good and evil; their will enables them to exercise the self-control to live by those judgements.

Our approach to the moral and spiritual development of the children needs to be the same as it is in any of the other areas: the teacher needs to appeal to the intellectual powers and the psychological characteristics of the child's plane of development. At the second plane this means that we appeal to the child's reasoning mind and interest in the exploration of society and those who have contributed to it, and the values of compassion and gratitude.

Social life within the classroom provides another natural opportunity for the children to discover moral values. Constantly working in a group and abiding by the classroom rules encourages exploration of moral attitudes. The freedom in the classroom makes it possible for the children to discuss their relationships and behaviour openly with each other on a daily basis. Facilitating the openness of such discussions is a principal responsibility for the primary teacher. Working out emotional or social issues needs to be just as much a respected part of the classroom as the activities that go on there.

In today's society we need to remember that children need free time to make up their own activities and their own games, their own entertainment. This is important because one aspect of this is that the children will make up their own rules for games. This is an aspect of their developing moral sense. They will make up rules that they can abide by, that make sense to them. They might make up rules that appear strange to us because they are trying them out.

In any game children will spend most of their time working out the rules. If we don't understand what's going on here, our natural inclination might be to tell them to stop fussing and play the game. But you see, working out the rules is the most important part of the whole process for their development.

The classroom environment itself offers the children a society in which they have to learn to live and work with others beyond their family. The children should have a part in making up the rules for the classroom. These should be few in number and should be worded positively so that the children will find it easier to follow them. Rules stated negatively set this age child up for rebellion.

Dr. Montessori said that often at this age the children will form groups on their own. This happens in the classroom and in a neighbourhood. The children will make up their own rules for membership in the group, they might make up their own coded language, have a secret treasure (often something strange to adults) and they will make up their own rules and rituals for these groups. This is a practice society for them; they are practising for that time when they will take their places on their own in the society of their culture. They make up rules that they can stick to. The teacher must allow these groups to form and must be respectful of them.

We can attempt to influence these groups by pulling together different groups of children for our presentations. Varying the groups means introducing the children to working with others with whom they haven't yet worked. Maybe they share an interest that they didn't even know about and this lesson opens up that avenue of exploration. Every time the child is in a different group situation, he has the opportunity to be a partner in a human relationship, sharing ideas and ideals.

The 'going out' aspect of our primary classes directly helps the children develop their sense of morality. Dr. Montessori realised that a classroom environment is not enough at this age to meet all of the child's needs. He must get out into the society around him as well to experience how people are working, how they are living their lives, and to begin to practice these aspects while he is out there. It involves something very different than just teaching something to the children or exposing them to an aspect of academic learning. These are not field trips, trips out of school planned by the teacher on which generally the whole class goes. 'Going out'



trips are planned by the children themselves and need to be connected to their work inside the classroom. The children themselves think through what is needed, what needs to be taken care of, what is appropriate and what is not. The teacher doesn't abandon them in this process but rather guides them and helps them think through the various aspects for themselves. The children who have the opportunity to be active in a true 'going out' programme develop a tremendous amount of independence and responsibility, qualities that are certainly beneficial in their development of morality.

An aspect of the 'going out' program at the nine to twelve level is community service. Because this age child has such a keen sense of justice, he can be made aware of those who are less well off in our society. The possibilities here are really endless. The children can visit people who are shut in, take food to someone who is ill, read to someone who has lost his sight. It is vitally important to the child's development that he has these opportunities to develop compassion, care and service to others.

Young people growing up in today's world are going to face more and more challenging moral issues as

our scientific and technological expertise continues to expand. We are going to need reasonable, thoughtful people with a high level of integrity to make the decisions necessary here. We owe it to the children; we owe it to the world, to help future generations develop the ability to make these choices. These will be the leaders of tomorrow who will be able to lead us to peace on earth.



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## Is Too Much Screen Time Damaging our Children? - Sue Palmer Saturday 30th January 2010



We seem to be raising a screen-age generation. Recent surveys of the amount of time the average British child spends in screen-based activity ranges from 5 to 9.5 hours. There is no doubt that technology is exciting - it makes our lives easier and allows us to do the most amazing things. But what is it doing to our children? Might 'junk play' and 'junk culture' be as damaging for our children's minds as junk food has proved to be for their bodies?

Sue Palmer, renowned writer, broadcaster and consultant on the Education of young children talks about how many scientists and educators are becoming uneasy about the levels of screen-based activity that our children are exposed to - might too much too soon be causing more problems than it solves?

### The Montessori Society AMI UK's Annual Seminar . . .

**Saturday, January 30th 2010** in the Main Hall at:  
Hampstead Town Hall Centre  
Inter Change Studios  
213 Haverstock Hill  
London  
NW3 4QP

The doors will open at 9.45 and the Seminar will start at 10.30 and finish at 1.00. The cost for the seminar is £45 (Montessori Society members: £35) and includes light refreshments.

A range of books on Montessori theory and child development will be on display and available for purchase.

Our sponsors, the AMI-approved Montessori materials manufacturers, Nienhuis and Gonzagarredi will be present, and in addition, the Muswell Hill Children's Book Shop.

*This Seminar is suitable for teachers, parents, students and anyone who is involved in the lives of young children.*

**For reservations, please contact:**

**The Montessori Society AMI UK  
26 Lyndhurst Gardens  
London  
NW3 5NW  
020 7435 7874**

**Or email to: [seminar@montessori-uk.org](mailto:seminar@montessori-uk.org)**

## Montessori Madness! A Parent to Parent Argument for Montessori Education by Trevor Eissler

Trevor Eissler is an unlikely author of a book about Montessori Education. A business jet pilot and flight instructor for fifteen years, Trevor turned his hand to writing after searching for a school for his three children - the first, born prematurely and with many special needs, was quickly followed by twins who 'grew like weeds'. This book is not written for philosophers or professional educators - though all could benefit from it. It is written to convince parents of the need for overwhelming change in modern mainstream education.

Eissler cites the historic work of John Taylor Gatto, author of 'Dumbing Us Down' and comes to the same sad conclusion that modern schooling has little to do with education and everything to do with teaching children to conform to the economy and social order. He points out that little has changed since the 'Factory Model' of mass education was introduced at the start of the Industrial Revolution and that scoring, ranking, standardisation and often humiliation are the shocking reality of today's school system. Eissler compares how conventional schools and Montessori schools address the same problems and opportunities. He illustrates how Montessori children find learning and activity intrinsically rewarding, rendering external rewards unnecessary.

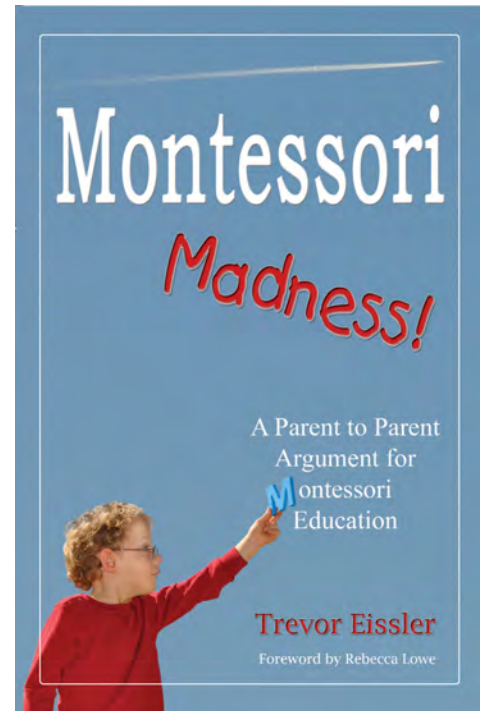
The choices are stark: what would our communities look like if they comprised people who are skilled, knowledgeable, caring, self-motivated, self-disciplined life-long learners; people who 'don't especially need others' approval', yet who feel a strong connection to the people around them?

For parents new to Montessori, all the mainstays of Montessori education are included; sensitive periods for children's learning, the child's absorbent mind, the prepared Montessori environment, concentration, responsibility, freedom, discipline and a comfort with 'error'.

Eissler has a real talent for stating the obvious in ways which are meaningful for modern parents. He describes the traditional teaching style of US children's soccer coaches; the children line up to take a shot, the rest of the team stands in line, hands on hips, bored, the coach *picks up the ball* (in soccer?) and rolls it to each player in turn, the

insists the player gives the ball back to the coach after kicking it.

M a r i a Montessori might have made clear a few important rules; use only your feet, stay within the boundary of the field and no tripping others. After h a v i n g demonstrated how to kick the ball she would likely have stepped back to observe the players get a feel for the ball on their own, passing, dribbling, shooting, blocking, seeing what worked and what did not. The players would have had fun.



Eissler shows us how Montessori principles can be applied to all areas of children's lives. He makes a timely and welcome contribution to the wider international debate about alternative education and an impassioned plea for Montessori.

**Wendy Fidler**

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# Essay

## How does the Children's House support the development of respect in the child under six?



*Maya Lakheerham recently graduated from the Maria Montessori Institute with a diploma at the 3-6 level. This is an excerpt from her research essay on social development*

Respect can be demonstrated on different levels. Respect for self, respect for the environment and respect for others. Montessori Education places much emphasis on respect. Children are encouraged to show respect in all areas of the children's house. From the Practical Life activities and Grace and Courtesy to the snack table, stories and songs, respect is a underlying quality instilled in the Children's House and becomes a part of the children themselves.

Self Respect refers to the overall appraisal and value a person gives to his own worth. We can value ourselves on a psychical level, mental level, and spiritual level. Self respect is a means of self acceptance and it equips us with the confidence to overcome our fears and achieve our aspirations. A person who has self worth is not governed by the limits placed upon him by others, but can judge for himself his own ability and his own personal limits.

The children's house promotes physical self-respect through Practical Life activities such as care of person. A child understands that it is important to look after himself for reasons such as aesthetics, hygiene and building of esteem. Brushing hair, washing hands, blowing noses, putting on clothes and shoes all provide the child with ways of looking after himself. Through the execution of these activities he feels content with himself both through process as well as product. The Children's House not only allows a child to develop self respect on a physical level but also on a level much deeper than this. A level in which he can develop his self worth as a whole. Children develop their self esteem not through praise from teachers or parents but rather through their own achievements. The Children's House is designed for children to do their own work, explore their own limits and work out their own solutions to problems. They respect themselves based on a value that they place upon themselves knowing their own potential. The lack of comparison or constraints of grades and assessments give the children the sense of individuality and promotes self growth. The child's esteem is built by his own hands.



The child entering the Children's House quickly learns how to respect his environment. He is entrusted with precious materials that scream 'handle with care'. He is given Practical Life activities to care for the environment. Washing dishes, washing clothes, watering plants, dusting, folding sweeping, the list goes on and on. The child realises that each activity is as important as the other. The function of each activity is dependent upon the other and it is warranted with equal value. The child establishes a pride with his environment and understands that as long as he cares for his environment and his community, it will provide for him what he needs. The Children's House is equipped with only one of each activity, and the child learns that if he doesn't look after an



activity then it will no longer be available not only for him but others as well. He treasures the materials that don't belong just to him but also belong to his friends, and he discovers the value of communal ownership.

The Children's House promotes respect for others on a level that allows the child to discover for himself the capacity of his social strength rather than just following rules. Children discover how to do their own work and not disturb others. They learn how to respect others work and work space. They understand the value of hard work and that respect should be granted towards others intuitively. They develop intuitive respect. Intuitive respect implies that a person instinctively grants another person respect until they are given cause not to. Many people these days act under reasoned respect, that is respecting someone after they give you reason to. The Children's House not only facilitates intuitive respect but also harvests a culture of overall respect towards the function of each child's place within the community. The child identifies himself as an individual part of the group and he begins to think more of the success of the group rather than seeking personal success. This is what Maria Montessori refers to as social cohesion.

Respect is an innate quality within the child. Children exist within a state of mind lacking prejudice and judgement. Maria Montessori says that 'Normalised children show the strongest attraction towards good.' The environment around him can either facilitate or suppress the child's divine directive. Montessori education provides the environment and the opportunities for the child to follow the natural construction of personality and social life. Firstly, the child develops his self respect and individuality, he learns how to feel satisfied with who he is and accept his place in the community. He doesn't feel bounded by the pressures of competition and rank, thus harvests no desire to overthrow another's role or fear of someone else stealing his. The child understands his own function within the community and knows that he provides a valid and important service to the community. Secondly, he respects his environment and knows that as long as he cares for his environment it will continue to provide for him. For it is a fact that without humans, the world will still exist but without the world the human cannot survive. Thirdly, the child respects others within his community, he understands that just like him, each one of the members of the community hold their own individuality and their own function which is as equally important as his. He knows that he belongs to the group and it is the collaborated effort of each member of this group that catapults the community towards success. As Maria Montessori says:

'Good laws and a good government cannot hold the mass of men together and make them act in harmony, unless the individuals themselves are oriented toward something that gives them solidarity and makes them into a group'.

In my opinion, a more peaceful Humanity is not a vision of everybody smiling, holding hands and singing Kumbaya around a camp-fire. Humans do not exist in this fashion, we are all unique individuals, we all have our own beliefs, our own desires and our own opinions. We agree with each other and disagree with each other, we love each other and hate each other. We have friends and we have enemies. However within the Children's House we can see that social cohesion amongst unique individuals does exist, that conflicts can be solved without violence or pain but rather through acceptance and respect.

Maria Montessori says:

'Goodness must come out of reciprocal helpfulness from the unity derived from spiritual cohesion. This society created by cohesion which children have revealed to us, is at the root of all social organisations'.

This organised social cohesion that we see alive in the children, we can only hope to carry forward towards adulthood. This is where a more peaceful humanity lies, amongst a united group of unique individuals who respect themselves, respect their world and respect their fellow people. For a peaceful humanity is not one without enemies nor without conflict, but rather one with acceptance because even the greatest of enemies can still show respect.



# Regulars

## Yesterday's Discoveries Today's Science

### Can Children's Learning Really be Enhanced by Movement?

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There appears to be a recent awakening in education to the benefits of movement in the classroom.

In the early spring of 2009, several news reports proclaimed the innovation of the 'stand-up desk', the desk that allows school children to stand while they work. The desks were the idea of a teacher who had observed that one boy preferred to 'shift his weight from one foot to the other as he figured out his fractions', and another who 'liked to lean on a high stool and swing his right foot under a desk'. [1]

Teachers who decided to give the desks a try were stunned at the impact on focus and improvement in classroom behaviour. There was a rush of orders and positive feedback - 'We've probably been inhibiting their learning because of how we've organised classrooms in desks and rows' reflects Amy Hamborg, principal of E.P Rock Elementary School in Hudson. 'You get these 15 minutes of recess and that's it, you have to be still. We're realising how important it is for kids to move.' [2]

The growing movement of teachers in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota report greater attentiveness, fewer behavioural problems and more enthusiasm in the students, with the most noted improvements in children habitually fidgety or those diagnosed with attention disorders. These observations are backed by educational researchers who believe the new desks may help children stay more alert and feel more energetic, burning off energy with a resultant reduction in behaviour problems as well as contributing to fighting childhood obesity. [3]

Many teachers are responding as well to a research project of James Levine, M.D., Ph.D, of the Mayo Clinic, that explored the question 'Do children really need to sit at desks to learn?' The prototype 'school

of the future' that he designed, inspired teachers to experiment with using children standing up at workstations in the classrooms or bouncing on stability balls instead of chairs. [4] Dr Levine believes that the most significant advance comes from giving the children the chance to move at school. 'Children are so amazing. They actually love to learn, we just have to let them move naturally.' [5]

A 2009 Mt Sinai study revealed that as recess time increased, less trouble making was recorded. Dr John Ratey calls recess the body's natural Ritalin, and attributes the results to the role of exercise and movement in fuelling and driving the mind. He noted the effects of movement in helping prepare the learner, control impulses, improve attention, lessen fatigue, lighten the mood and combat stress. He joined in the chorus for standing desks and gym balls for chairs, going so far as to suggest 'treadmill conference tables'. [6]

It is a little sad, though, that given the recognition



of how important it is for children to be able to move, and the proven benefits on both behaviour and academic achievement, the furthest traditional classrooms are able to go is a longer recess, a bouncing ball for a chair, or a standing desk. It seems very difficult to develop a method that not only allows movement, but embraces it. The freedom of movement that is proving so important to children's optimal functioning seems to be something very difficult to accommodate in conventional classrooms.

We are very lucky that over 100 years ago, Maria Montessori observed this need in the child. She designed a method of education that not only respected the child's drive for movement, but used and harnessed it to aid academic learning. In the



Montessori classroom we find not only freedom of movement, but children using movement to enhance their learning and understanding. In the Children's House, we find children independently walking about, carefully avoiding floor mats that friends are working on, transitioning freely from indoor to outdoor space, choosing to go to the toilet or have a snack without needing to ask permission. One child heads into the cloakroom, pulls on his Wellington boots and goes outside to rake autumn leaves. Another child finishes off one last sum at a table, pushes in his chair and replaces the Addition Chart on the shelf, then takes a mat to begin counting the Hundred Chain on the floor. A little girl rubs out the last trace of the letters she has been writing on her chalkboard, and executes a joyful flamenco step as she goes to replace the



« children love to learn - we just need to let them move naturally »

Sandpaper Letter on the stand. A little boy breathes heavily as he with the greatest effort, heaves the lunch trolley up the step and drags it towards the scrubbing table to be cleaned – saying to all who try to help him carry it ‘No! I want to do it myself!’

But Montessori went even further than this freedom of movement. She observed that when movement was part of the learning activity, children were focused and engaged, and understanding deepened. And thus, in the Children's House, we find a little girl reading an Action Card that says ‘jump’, and jumping energetically around the table before she returns to read the next card that instructs her to ‘gallop’. We find a boy taking ten trips back and forth from the shelf to his mat to bring each cube of the Pink Tower before attempting to grade them in sequence – and in those ten trips absorbing a clue about the workings of the decimal system. Another child listens intently to a Sound Box on one table, and walks halfway across the classroom to another table, where he listens to several before deciding on which is the pair. A couple of children count out the quantity of beads they have added together on the mat, and head off to another mat to fetch the cards to match 5,793.

Many have remarked on the spontaneous self-discipline that arises in the Montessori environments – many have remarked with wonder at

how it is possible these environments are calmer and more peaceful than traditional classrooms where children are made to stay seated and immobile, and where there would seem to be less potential for noise or disturbance. It seems many are now discovering the paradoxical secret about movement.

**Lori Woellhaf**

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# Regulars

## Dear Maria...

### How do you assess children's learning?

A report comparing assessment in English schools with that in twenty-one other countries found that external testing in England begins at a younger age and occurs more frequently than in any other country [1]. If assessment seems to be such an integral part of education how is progress monitored in the Montessori approach where testing is not condoned?



subjects are assessed and neither is there any

characteristic into her activities that enables the child to check how successful he has been without having to confer with the teacher.

Although England is not alone in using assessment to monitor standards and evaluate its education system, it is only in England and the United States that results of the assessment appear in league tables. The resulting ranking of schools is reported in school prospectuses and in the media, the intention being that parents use this information to select a school for their children. Thus testing becomes more a way of holding schools to account than of helping pupils to progress and worse still, much of schooling becomes an exercise in preparing for tests, rather than the wider educational experience it should be. As this Cambridge University research group points out, 'memorisation and recall have come to be valued over understanding and enquiry, and transmission of information over the pursuit of knowledge in its fuller sense' [2]. Are our children becoming experts in passing exams rather than gaining an education?

Just as the league tables give a very narrow insight into the quality of the schools - not all

mention of facilities relating to sport, music or art - so the testing method is only a snapshot method of assessment. Of course, there is ongoing teacher assessment through the year, but this is not reported alongside the results from the one-off external examinations and the fact remains that the external tests evaluate a pupil at one moment in time. The fear that many children suffer intolerable stress because of these tests was voiced by Mick Brookes, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers: 'There are schools that start rehearsing for key stage two SATs [Standard Assessment Tests] from the moment the children arrive in September. That's just utterly ridiculous.' [3]

The Montessori approach is very different: it facilitates the child's own exploration which leads to 'self knowledge' rather than imposed knowledge. Dr Montessori wanted to offer the children 'auto-education' whereby the child learns to self-judge and to self-evaluate. She made this possible by incorporating a fundamental

A good example can be found in the Cylinder Blocks: ten cylinders of different sizes corresponding exactly to ten different sockets in a wooden block. A three-year-old child begins by placing the block on the table in front of him. He removes the ten cylinders one by one and places them in a random order on the near side of the block. The challenge is for him to return the cylinders to their corresponding sockets; if there is a mistake in replacing the first nine cylinders, the final one will be left over. When the child sees this, he realises that he has made a mistake and so removes the cylinders again and repeats the activity until he gets it right. It is the material itself that shows him how successful he has been and the first time that he completes the activity his feeling of elation is enhanced by the fact that he has done it without any correction or help.

Montessori referred to this characteristic as a 'control of error'. In some activities, such as the Cylinder Blocks, the control

of error is concrete; similar to when a DIY enthusiast, after building a wardrobe, finds a leftover bag of nuts and bolts and realises that his wardrobe is not destined for long life. In others the child consciously checks his work: for example in mathematics the slips of paper for writing down addition, subtraction, multiplication and division equations have corresponding control charts on which the answers are laid out in a logical manner. Developing this habit of checking his work will serve the child in good stead in later years. As Dr Montessori pointed out, 'the control of error through the material makes a child use his reason, critical faculty and his ever increasing capacity for drawing distinctions. In this way a child's mind is conditioned to correct his errors even when these are not material or apparent to the senses.' [4]

The child learns that making a mistake does not equal failure - it simply prompts him to look for a better solution to the problem. He learns not to give up, but rather to try again; the art of lateral thinking is born. He sets standards for himself rather than seeking adult approval; the process of repetition for improvement's sake becomes a lifelong habit. Moreover, the less he needs to ask for help, the more his self-esteem grows and he confidently moves forward to take on further challenges.

Dr Montessori pointed out that 'the aim is an inner one, namely, that the child train himself to observe; that he be led to make comparisons between objects, to form judgements, to reason and to decide; and it is in the indefinite repetition of this exercise of attention and of intelligence that a real development ensues.' [5] She felt that children learn better in a positive environment and believed that in the traditional schools 'all the crosses made by

the teacher on the child's written work, all her scoldings, only have a lowering effect on his energies and interests.' [6] Sadly, children in traditional schools today still tend to be taught that it is only the end result that counts and when they receive a six out of ten they are disappointed and turn away from study. In the Montessori classroom, realising that something has gone wrong is an open challenge to tackle the problem again right away!

The Montessori child is given the freedom to travel along a path of learning at his own pace. Some children return day after day to the same activity until self satisfaction and full comprehension is achieved. Dr Montessori observed that little children repeated the exercise of the Cylinder Blocks up to *forty* times without losing their interest in it. During these prolonged periods of uninterrupted work the child begins to focus both mind and body on what he is doing, becoming deeply engaged.

Of course, there is a need for active monitoring of progress by adults and the Montessori teachers are trained extensively in the art of observation. Dr Montessori believed observation to be an integral part of the teacher's work: not only did she value it through her own experiences as a medical doctor - in her day there was no sophisticated equipment - but

she believed that each child fundamentally has the potential for self-development. It is the role of the teacher to follow the child and offer him opportunities for work that will unleash this inner potential and help him blossom.

Finally let's hear from someone who has experienced both the Montessori and the traditional approach to assessment. Here she reflects on her first test:

'During the first test I took, I was sent to the principal's office for 'cheating'. I had gone to the encyclopedias in the back of the room to look up a question I didn't know. 'Kristin - you cannot use your books to answer the test question. That is cheating!' I didn't have a concept of cheating because it simply made sense to me that if I didn't know something I should look it up and learn it. Why was it necessary to have to show a teacher what I knew? At my Montessori school the teachers knew what I knew because we discussed it, they read the reports I wrote, watched the skits that we performed and were inextricably involved in the daily process of learning, discovering, experimenting and researching. I realised that at this new school the tests were given because they did not trust me to learn.' [7]

**Gayle Wood**

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