direction

Inspiring Youth to Create a Better Future

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Contents

Contact Us

Montessori Society AMI [UK]
26 Lyndhurst Gardens
London
NW3 5NW
020 7435 7874

Email: info@montessori-uk.org
Website: www.montessorisociety.org.uk

From the Editor

In this edition of ***Direction*** we are happy to bring you, yet again, an edition that reflects the diversity of the application of Montessori's approach to life.

One thread seems to weave through many of the articles and that is that an understanding of Montessori principles can help us to help children to build characters that will help them to create a better future.

Donna Bryant Goertz blogs about how important it is to get the parent child relationship right if children are to be able to make good relationships with others and **Rob Gueterbock,** in **Urban Alternatives to Toasted Terantulas,** writes about about how parents can help their children to negotiate relationships with people in their community as they learn to go out and do things by themselves.

Regular writer, **Lori Woellhaf** talks about how important it is for children to be given opportunities to resolve their own conflicts. This is an essential part of the social development available in Montessori communities but now current science is validating the approach. Helping children to protect themselves from the messages that the media bombard them with daily can be challenging but psychologist, **Sharon Maxwell,** has some wise words to guide us in **Mummy I Need That.**

Reporting from the International Montessori Congress in Portland **Kristi McAlister** reflects eloquently on the 'big picture' that hope for a better humanity lies in allowing ourselves to be 'Guided by Nature'.

But the pièce de résistance is the report from the elementary children about their experience at the Montessori Model United Nations which gives children as young as 9 the opportunity to think about how we can create a better future. As one of the children said 'together we can change the world' When people all over the world are still resorting to violence as a way of resolving conflict it is the role of the young to keep us optimistic!

Louise Livingston

News

AMI Refresher Course: The Science of Reading - Back to Principles

The Montessori approach to reading follows the way in which the brain has naturally evolved to read. Furthermore, current research into best practice in teaching reading confirms that the 100-year-old Montessori approach has all the components that will not only help the child 'learn to read' but will also interest him enough in reading that he will still want to 'read to learn'.

In spite of this, many Montessori teachers seek resources outside of Montessori, mistakenly feeling that, somehow, it is not enough.

This year's Refresher will focus on Montessori principles and look at the things that we need to do if we want to fulfill Dr Montessori's vision that children should become 'total' readers - children who love reading because they can appreciate the totality of what is being expressed.

The Course will not just focus on what we can do in the Children's House. It will also look at what preparation has to take place in the child under three and will take a peek into where the child will continue his exploration in the Elementary. Participants will leave with a plethora of ideas for creating new resources, all based on the Montessori approach of course!

The Refresher will take place on the 9/10th May at the Maria Montessori Institute in Hampstead. To apply please visit www.mariamontessori.org and download an application form.

AMI Montessori Orientation to Adolescence Studies to be held in Sweden this Summer

The first 'Orientation to Adolescence Studies' programme to be held in Europe will be held this summer from 6 July to 2 August. The programme offers an overview of Montessori's approach to adolescents within the framework of human development. By exploring Montessori theory in depth for this age group, the participants will come to understand the contribution of the third plane as crucial to the development of the individual and will be significantly prepared to aid development during this important time of life. Participants of the orientation course will learn Montessori theory through both lectures and hands-on experiences. They will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of both Montessori principles and methodology as well as an understanding of the psychology behind adolescent development. They will write papers explaining theoretical principles, discuss readings of Montessori's writing [as well as the writing of others] and design frameworks for study and work appropriate for their community of adolescents. Finally they will synthesise their understanding and generate a record of course presentations by compiling an album representing the whole course of study for future use and reference.

An important part of the orientation is to experience the life of the adolescent: their studies, practical work, community life, and, particularly, their growing need for independence and to work side-by-side with adults. Through time spent in the prepared environment of the farm, participants will explore this need for independence and an awareness of human interdependence, both of which become concretely realized and internalized in Montessori adolescent communities that genuinely provide a 'school of experience in the elements of social life.' For more information visit www.montessori-namta.org

Aid to Life Update

The parent support website AidtoLife.org is now offering straight-forward advice about how to support your child's development in the first three years of life in 6 different languages as well as English: Chinese, Greek, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. Volunteers from different Montessori communities around the world are also working on the messages for the 3-6, 6-12 and 12-15 age ranges. The Aid to Life partners hope that it will not be too long until they are able to make further additions to the website.

News

From the Society

As we go to the printers for this Winter issue of Direction, we are happy to report that our annual seminar just past, sold out! We invited Miss Karen Pearce to share with us her practical insights on the role the adult plays in a Montessori environment, whether at school or at home and also the tremendous power language has as a tool to help direct the energies of the children in our care.

Former Head of School, Karen Pearce ran one of the Maria Montessori Institute's Children's Houses from 1990 to 2008. At The Montessori Place in Brighton she continues to mentor Montessori teachers. She is also a lecturer on the AMI 3 to 6 Diploma Course at the Maria Montessori Institute and the post-Diploma Course on Observation.

Karen possesses the unique ability to convey her experience with the children in an open, honest, intriguing, engaging way, interspersed always, with her amusing anecdotes drawn from her vast experience in working with children, teachers and parents.

She indeed worked her magic on Saturday, 8th February in the new location for us, which is SOAS. The School of Oriental and African Studies is part of the University of London and one in particular of the University's fours messages on the website chimes beautifully with the theme of our seminar this year, 'Embrace Colourful Language'. We are hoping to give you more of a flavour of her talk in the next issue of Direction.

We heard from a couple of Montessori alumni nearer to the end of the seminar. The students who were brave enough to come and answer the audience's questions about Montessori and their personal experiences were Zainab and Jonathan. Talking eloquently and confidently to the crowd of over 120, the 16 and 17 year olds took our breath away with the maturity of their responses reminding us all of the strength behind a Montessori education. Both students showed us glimmers of the peace, sincerity and centeredness that envelop their characters. We will be piecing their stories together for you in more detail for our next issue.

Our AGM is scheduled for Wednesday 11th June in the evening. At the AGM One AMI initiative we will be talking about the AMI initiative 'Cycles in Nature' which was announced at the International Montessori Congress in Portland last year, and is centred on the adolescent. However, AMI are keen to extend this out to all ages of children. We will be taking the opportunity at our AGM to describe in further details how schools can get involved in this wonderful fund-raising initiative.

A project that we would like to mention now is the setting up of a UK-based Montessori Research Initiative Committee. Emanating initially from the desire to place Montessori education in the UK more firmly on the Educational Research map, with the increasing demand for Montessori education, we feel that time now is ripe to extend the well known favourable anecdotal evidence Montessorian's share with others, to help start a project that collates information in a more scientific way. We are in the initial planning stages at the moment but we are excited about moving this new research project forward during the course of this year and ensuring that you, our members, will be the first to know what our plans will be and how your participation will be integral to the success of this potentially ground-breaking project.

We are also on the look out for somebody with great organisational and IT skills to take on about 10 hours of paid administrative work a week at the Society office. Please pass this message on to those you think may be interested and ask them to contact us!

Wishing you all a rather belated Happy New Year and hoping to catch up with many of you in June!

Emma Wong Singh
On behalf of the General Purposes Committee of the Montessori Society AMI UK

Save the Date: Montessori Society AGM

The Montessori Society Seminar will be held on Wednesday 11th June this year. They are also making a call for photos from the school and the home environment to help populate their website and this publication. If there is sufficient interest they plan to showcase the photos from each school at the AGM, providing the opportunity for schools to reveal to a wider audience the beauty of the Montessori approach. Please send all photos and covering letter to info@montessori-uk.org

Part-time Administrator Needed

The Montessori Society is looking for somebody with great organisational and IT skills to take on about 10 hours of paid administrative work a week at the Society office. If you are interested please write to info@montessori-uk.org

Your Letters

Answered by Emma Wong Singh

Is shared parental leave really that important?

There has been much discussion of late about shared parental leave. Nick Clegg announced in November that a new system of shared parental leave will commence from 2015, encouraging more men to take time off to care for children. What is the Montessori viewpoint on the role the father plays during the first weeks and years after birth?

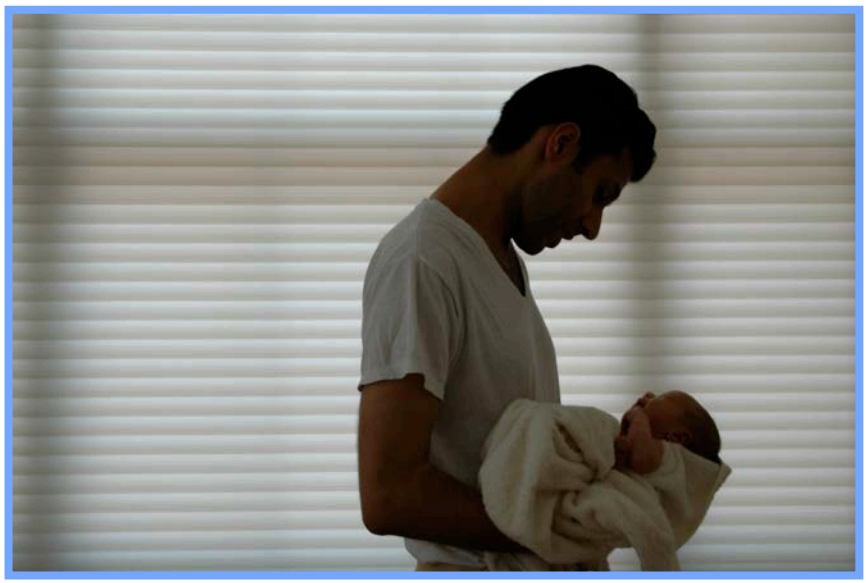
In the UK, the people who choose to work in the early years sector tend to be female [in day-care centres and pre-schools]. The main caregiver during the first few years is also usually the mother. The preponderance of one sex over the other during this period gives us reason to stop and consider the importance of the role the father [or uncle, male friend, grandfather or any other consistent male presence] plays. The 'father' here refers to the father figure represented in the family home. Whether there is a biological connection to the child or not, this should not matter.

Dr. Silvana Montanaro [a medical doctor specialising in Psychiatry and an AMI Trainer at the Assistants to Infancy level] has expressed the father's presence beautifully as representing 'the possibility of learning about the other half of humanity'. His collaboration is a natural continuation from his role in conception and the presence of both the mother and the father represents 'basic human society' to the child.

The father's role is an important one and remains so throughout the child's life. Medical advancements have taken away the requirement for two parent families and may have had the consequence of reducing the father's role to purely a biological one. The father performs a number of important roles, paving the way for harmonious development. Both biological and psychological considerations need to be taken into account.

During childbirth, the knowledgeable father can share the long hours of the dilation period and when the moment of birth comes he can support the mother's head and shoulders. The active presence of the father gives the message to the mother that she is never alone in caring for the child. During the first few weeks, the main role the father assumes is as a 'protective barrier' for the mother and the child to create the bond necessary for future life. Breast-feeding takes time and it also takes time to adjust to the new rhythms imposed by the creation of a new family. Nursing is one of the main ways bonding occurs between the mother and baby and because the father understands this he will ensure that calls from friends and family, however well- intentioned, are kept to a minimum and the mother is afforded undisturbed time to nurture this special relationship.

Helping this relationship to develop is important, but giving the daily bath, holding, rocking, talking and singing to the baby is just as important. The father enriches the child's life through these other means, thereby establishing a direct relationship with the child.



A different behavioural model is presented to the child in the father. There will be a different set of movement and language models for the child to experience. We must not devalue the role fathers' play in family life and in particular during the few weeks and years after birth. We are striving to provide meaningful human connections for the young child and for this to happen harmoniously, all sides of humanity must be represented.

Is verbal abuse as harmful as physical?

The Children's Commissioner for England, Maggie Atkinson, has said that the law gave pets and adults more rights to protection from violence than children. She said on the BBC News UK website that 'there was a legal loophole around the fact that you can physically chastise your child'. On the 28th December, she called for a total ban under which parents could face criminal action for smacking children. Under current laws, mild smacking is allowed but any which causes visible bruising, grazes, scratches, swellings or cuts is not.

Over the years quite a few politicians have come out to defend mild smacking, saying in one instance that to chastise children when they are bad is something their parents did and something that needs to be done. I understand that in Montessori environments respect for others is one of the core principles that is played out practically day after day, so smacking is not tolerated, however I wonder where we draw the line when it comes to verbal, as opposed to physical abuse?

Language is a powerful tool and as with all forms of power, it can be used with both positive and negative consequences. Being ever mindful of the type of language we use at home or in a more formal setting, such as a school environment, is a must, but one that is not always as easy to follow in practice as it is in theory. Maria Montessori said that the work of the adult is, 'a work of the will, which is difficult to follow'. By this she is referring to the degree of self-control necessary [in the adult] to stop ourselves short when we feel our language is veering to the negative. As Montessorians we know that our work with the children is helping to strengthen their will and their faculties of self control, however, how many of us reflect on ourselves? How much will have I exerted over myself this morning?

Let us be as mindful about ourselves as we are with the children in the exercise of our will. Language which offers choice, verbal challenges and open ended questions, helps to re-direct our objectives in a positive way. The use of positive language reinforces to the child that life is good thereby helping to build a positive view of life. A strong character is built on a secure foundation and the type of language we use as role models to the children plays a key role.

Comments, Questions?

Please send in your letters to:

Direction
Montessori Society AMI [UK]
26 Lyndhurst Gardens
London NW3 5NW

Email:
info@montessori-uk.org

Many parents of the children in our school ask for book recommendations to help them understand the Montessori approach. Which books would you recommend for parents as a source from which to familiarise themselves with her approach?

Susan Mayclin Stephenson has recently written two books, 'The Joyful Child – Montessori, Global Wisdom for Birth to Three' and 'Child of the World – Montessori, Global Education for Age 3-12+'. Susan has AMI diplomas at every level and has worked with children from birth through age 18 and with adults. Both of Susan's books are highly readable and contain immense wisdom clearly gleaned from her life experience. They are perfect for parents, because they provide a clear path through the principles of Montessori.

In The Joyful Child, Susan guides the reader through the joys of caring for a child under three years old, weaving her way through the developmental steps during the first year and then the subsequent years and the kinds of things we can do as parents to help guide our child in the psychological, physical and spiritual realms. She sprinkles her advice with myriad of beautiful quotations from Montessori and from other wise people [such as Rabrindranath Tagore, poet laureate of India, Kahlil Gibran, Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, Dr. Silvana Montanaro and Judi Orion], helping both to illuminate and enrich her messages.

Susan's easy to read and approachable style is also portrayed in her other book, and is similarly peppered with beautiful quotations and sound, wise advice for the child over three to the adolescent years. Both books come highly recommended!

Blog

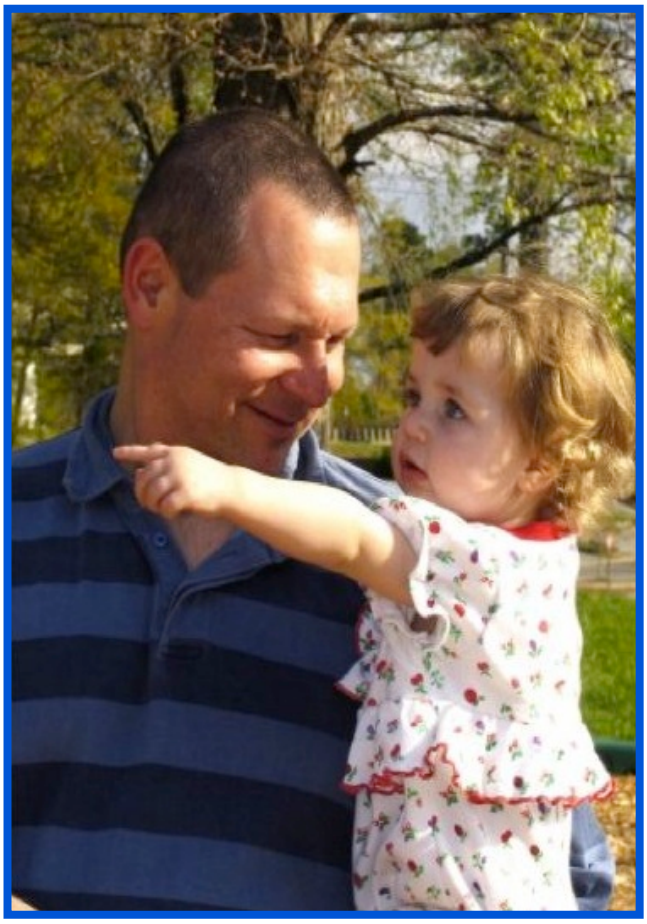
A Parent's Role

Donna Bryant Goertz, *Montessori teacher, mother and grandmother talks about the challenges of being a parent who wants to get it right*

I hold parents in awe and respect them for many reasons and on many levels. They pick up their children at noon, three o'clock, or the end of the day when everyone is tired and hungry and needy. They do their best to practice the skills that will help this major transition go well while neither catering to nor imposing on their children. Parents deserve support and sympathy, respect and solidarity for their efforts. They get up in the night with children who are frightened or sick, doing their best to give just the right comfort. They get children up in the morning who are sleepy or out of sorts. They connect with temperaments that are either too different from or too much like their own. Parents face an onslaught of issues that confound and concern them and do their best to make the best moment-by-moment responses they can.

Parents have the truly world-shaking responsibility of providing an ethical framework, a moral ambiance and a practical environment that provides for exploration, self-education and self-development for their children. All this they must provide in an emotionally safe environment and in a firm and cheerful manner.

Unlike the teachers at school, the parent lives with a child who changes over a twenty-four year period of time, and changes almost too fast to keep up with. A teacher at school gets to practice and perfect supporting children in the same three-year developmental period endlessly. That's why their advice can be so helpful. It's almost as if a parent spends today trying to figure out yesterday while the child has gone on to tomorrow. It's a challenge. And it just speeds up; it simply won't slow down. That's why parents need the school's and the teacher's help and advice.



At School

It's easy for the teachers to say "NO" at school. There's a large community of children living and learning in an established, clearly defined and cohesively developed culture where everyone belongs and participates. The "NO" is expected and accepted by the community of children. At home, the child is a bigger presence and a much stronger force within a changing and developing family culture. And the emotional connection between parent and child can be both mobilising and paralysing. Is it any wonder that the parents need a supportive community to help them decide when and why and how to say "NO" and how and why to stick to it? Is it any wonder that they turn to the school and the teachers for help to clarify and sort out issues before they make their decisions?

At school, the teacher has been confronted with a vast variety of situations, issues and personalities over many years. The teacher knows how to postpone answering questions to buy time to think through the implications, how to consider each aspect of the issue and weigh the implications and how to slowly consider situations and their consequences. The teacher has learned through a goodly number of errors! Additionally, the teacher knows how to approach a great variety of child personalities and temperaments as well as how to bear up graciously and effectively under their responses—or reactions. For the parent at home, however, it's always an unending series of 'learn as you go' and 'learn through your mistakes.'

The Family and the School

And then there's the family's entry into the school community. Often, a parent's life is temporarily made further complicated before it is made easier by the school's philosophy of child development and parent education programmes. At first

it may seem that the school is taking away from the parents all their familiar methods and means of traditional parenting and leaving them bereft. Then it seems the school is offering an entirely new set of skills, a suspect set of skills that have to be practiced with a mindfulness and constant awareness in order to become effective. Confusion can often reign in the family as parents work to break old habits and make new ones. In the midst of this confusion, anarchy could set in. The parents, temporarily weakened by the changes they are making, can become paralysed into inaction or rushed into poorly understood practices. In the meantime, the children could take over, resulting in anxiety, insecurity and bravado.

During this period of confusion, parents might offer their children choices that are not appropriate or even counterproductive. They might give them independence for which they have not adequately prepared their child. Parents could operate out of doubt and fear. Trusting the Montessori community of families too far, parents might allow their children to do things they should not be doing simply because they say other children are doing them or because some other children really are doing them. Parents are sometimes afraid their children will stop loving them if they say 'No.' They may be afraid their children won't be popular or well liked. Parents may be intimidated by their children's anger or frightened by their outbursts.

Without a strong community, enough contact and without dependable support from the teachers parents can easily get in over their heads while their children are very young and by the time they reach early adolescence the family's daily lives may have become problematic. By the time the child is sixteen and in possession of car keys, their lives can become out of control and dangerous.

Support For Knowing How and When to Say 'No'

When we parents learn to say 'No' to a five-year-old, we will be more likely to be able to say 'No' effectively and appropriately to a nine or a thirteen-year-old. When we parents develop and sustain a meaningful family culture within which to live and according to which to weigh and measure details of daily living when the child is four, we will be more likely to do sustain it through later years. A part of saying 'No' is learning positive ways of saying it. Another part of saying 'No' is establishing and maintaining a relationship with distinct and appropriate roles for parent and child.

I am the Parent, You are the Child

It is not always easy for Montessori parents to distinguish and clarify their own roles as parents from those of their empowered, independent and capable Montessori children. One child stunned his mother by telling her to step away into the next room until she was ready to calm down and cooperate with what he was asking of her. The mother was being calm and she was being reasonable, and what she was asking was appropriate within her role and appropriate within the child's role, reasonable for his cooperation.

Of course, our empowered, independent and capable Montessori children are going to try stepping out of their roles as children and into our role as parent, of course! And we parents have to be well prepared to be clear about defining those distinct roles. We have to clarify to the child what exactly our role is and where exactly the limits of his own role of child lie.

As for the confused mother in our story, the rest of the day didn't go so well. The next day, after much thought and a good nights sleep, however, she was ready to distinguish the two roles, that of parent and that of child. The mother chose a pleasant moment for a conversation, the first of many she would have with her child over the years.

Defining and Clarifying Roles

She said, 'We have something important to talk about. I'm going to tell you about roles, your role as the child and my role as the parent. It's my role as the parent to decide when there

will be a choice and to lay out the choices. It's your role as the child to choose among them. I will always consult you about the choices because there could be some good choices that I haven't thought of.' 'Sometimes there will be no choice and your role will be to accept that.' 'I will lay out the choices for the daily schedule, for what to wear to which places. I will always listen to your ideas. That's a parent's role. You tell me any ideas I haven't thought of. That's a child's role. And I will be the one to make the decision to include those ideas or not.'
'When I listen to your ideas, I will hear them when you can speak in a respectful tone of voice using respectful words. I will listen to anything you have to say and hear all your feelings. But I will make the final decisions about what we do in our family because that's a parent's role.'

This same conversation was repeated many times in many quiet and pleasant conversations over the next months. 'I will lay out the choices for what to eat, choices for what toys and activities we will have in our home, choices for which books and materials will be in our home, choices for where we will go, choices for who we will spend time with, choices for what kind of birthday party we will have.'

'You will suggest additional choices and lay out the reasons for them to be included. That is within your role as a child.' 'I will listen to your suggested choices carefully, think seriously about each one and decide whether or not to include it. I will tell you why or why not and explain my decision fully according to our family culture.'

And so over the months the parent made clear the distinction between the roles of parent and child including many, many other things. In this way the parent let the child know who was responsible for forming the family culture and who was responsible for living creatively within it with choices and limits, with expression of ideas and feelings.

The explanation was given for each new choice the child suggested but once that was done it was not repeated. 'You know why; remember, I explained it to you. Think it over yourself and remember. If I ever think differently, I'll let you know. If I don't come to you about it, you will know my decision and its reasoning stand firm. I hear that you don't agree, but till then, that's it! No more discussion.'

Collaborating with One Another to Discover Mutually Acceptable Solutions

The parent noticed a growing pattern of rudeness in the child's requests. The child seemed edgy and bossy. 'Take me home right now.' 'Find my blue hat.' 'I'm thirsty. Get me some apple juice.' 'Take me to the park to play right this minute.' 'These eggs are yukky.'

As usual, the parent made suggestions each time for more considerate, polite communication, such as, I like it when you say 'Excuse me, but I'm really tired. Could we go home, please?' Or, the parent said, I prefer to hear 'Could you help me find my blue hat?' Or 'Could I please serve myself some apple juice?' Or 'I don't care for these eggs. They're not to my taste.' Or 'Could we leave for the park to play really soon? When I wait so long, I feel impatient.' Instead of bringing the usual cooperative restatement, the parent's suggestions brought on balkiness and irritation.

At a pleasant moment the parent said, 'Sometimes you use a tone of voice that sounds unpleasant or words that seem abrupt when you ask me for something. I feel better helping you out when you are more polite and considerate in your tone of voice and words. But I notice that it annoys you when I remind you to say it in a nicer way. I thought we could plan together a way I could remind you that wouldn't be irritating. Maybe I could just say two words like blue bird or a compound word such as grasshopper or something like that to remind you. What do you think about that? Can you think of a word or phrase you like us to use?'

The child chuckled and said he liked the phrase dump truck better. 'Oh, dump truck, I like that,' the parent said. 'And if you don't like my tone of voice or the words I use, you can say dump truck to me and I'll know to say it over in a more pleasant tone of voice and nicer words.' The child was delighted and offered other ideas. Parent and child settled on a phrase and for a couple of weeks things went really well. One day the child was testy again and the parent asked if it was time to choose a new phrase. They settled on a new one and the next weeks went well. After the third variation the habit of politeness or of accepting a reminder with civility was well established. Of course, at that point in time, the child was on to a new issue. As every parent has experienced, life with a child brings on a new issue as soon as the previous one has been resolved. And so life goes with the parent and child.

Waiting for Calmness and Respect

At another time, things had gone off track in a different way: the child began displaying emotional outbursts. The parent thought things through and chose a pleasant moment for another conversation with her child to further clarify. 'If you are screaming or being rude I will say with sincere sympathy, 'I hear how upset you are and I

want to listen to you. I want to hear your feelings. As soon as you can speak in a regular voice and use respectful words, I will be ready to listen.' Then I will leave a glass of water and a tissue close by and wait at a little distance for you to calm yourself enough to talk. Until then, I'll be waiting in the next room to comfort you when you are ready to receive comfort.'

Listening as Soon as Possible

Experiencing complications of a different sort, further down the road, the parent offered new information. 'Occasionally, I will have to listen a little later because there is a reason I can't give you my full attention at that particular moment. It could happen because I'm in the middle of cooking dinner or because I'm driving the car. But, in order to make things easier, I will make and take most phone calls at night after you're asleep so I'll be available to you most of the time. In any case, I will always listen as soon as I can. That is the parent's role, my role. Your role is to wait until I can really listen. I'll always tell you a time that I can listen and you can depend on me to keep my word.'

Defining and Maintaining the Family Culture

As the child grew older, he encountered new and different ideas from friends or neighbours and began to mount campaigns for incorporating them into his own life, the parent gave further information. 'The older you get, the more new ideas you will have. Many of your new ideas will fit right into our family culture. We'll have to work on others of your new ideas to make them fit into our family or perhaps even tailor a bit or a lot to make them fit. But there will be many other ideas that won't fit into our family at all. You will have many friends who are allowed to do and to have things that we don't do or have in our family. I will listen to how you feel about that. But I will be the one who decides because that is the role of the parent.'

'I will spend time thinking about and discussing my decisions with our school community before I decide but then I will be the one to make the decision. It won't be up to you because you are the child. You may be upset, sad, disappointed or angry about my decisions, but I will stick to them because I am the parent and that's my responsibility. Maybe you will want to go someplace that we don't go in our family. You might want to have a toy or gadget we don't have in our home. You may want to have music or wear clothes that don't fit in to our family. It could be very disappointing or upsetting to you. I will hear your feelings about it. I will hear your ideas. But the decision will be mine to make because that's a parent's role. Your role will be to experience feelings of anger, disappointment or sadness, to express them to me strongly but appropriately and then to respect my decision. You don't have to like or agree with my decision, but you do have to respect it.'

Providing the Child Security and Sparing the Child Emotional Exhaustion

When the child spends time and energy in emotionally exhausting opposition, the parent carefully evaluates his communication and behaviour for clarity and resolve. It is unusual for a child to persist in behavioural campaigns that don't work. It indicates a lack of clarity in the parents thinking and presentation or a lack of evident resolve.

'I will try to be clear about what your choices are and about which of your suggestions will be added to the choices and which will not. I will try not to be wishy-washy or vague by saying "I don't think so" or "I'd rather you not" or "I'd rather you choose something I already offered to you or I wish you'd choose something else." I will try my best to keep you from the anxiety that comes when I give in or change my mind after a decision. I will remain steadfast when you display emotional outbursts or whine or threaten. I will make every effort to give you the security of knowing that your parent means what he says.'

'I will be the strong parent you need and spare you the emotional turmoil and energy drain of excessive begging, tantrumming, whining and pouting that develop when you know from experience you might be able to change my mind or wear me down that way.'

The On-going Process

And so it goes with the parent. Defining, maintaining, and clarifying the distinct roles of parent and child takes time and effort. But that's a parent's role. We are parents, we are bringing up children, unlike dogs or cats, birds or fish. And children are highly intelligent, powerful, driven beings who require that we provide and maintain an ever-evolving structure to hold a social and family culture with firm limits for them to push against. Children need their parents to define clear roles of parent and child within the family for the sake of their emotional growth and security. We, their parents, are the last ones, the last adults in their lives, who should grow weary and let them down. We can rest when our children are grown.

This Blog was first published on MariaMontessori.com

Mummy - I Need That

*Clinical psychologist, author, consultant on parent education and mum **Dr. Sharon Maxwell** talks about how we can protect our children from media and peer pressure*

On the way home from school, Sara [age 10] pleads with her mother to stop and get an ice cream. Mum agrees, thinking it will be nice to share some time together. But no sooner has the ice cream arrived than Sara begins to plead for a CD she's been wanting. This is followed by a request to be taken to a particular restaurant for dinner. The pleading becomes more intense until mother puts off an answer by saying she has to talk to Dad. 'Let me talk to him,' Sara replies, confident in her persuasive abilities. Finishing the ice cream, Sara announces that she desperately needs this really cool thing for a project at school. She absolutely must get it on the way home. Exhausted, Mum pays the bill.

Teaching Our Children the Power of Self-Discipline

Whether it's our 2-year-old melting down because he wants gum at the checkout counter or our pre-teen pitching for the latest fashion, our children are expending enormous amounts of energy getting us to satisfy their latest desires. Assessing when to say 'yes' and when to say 'no' is exhausting as we quickly quiz ourselves, 'Is it age appropriate? Do they really want it? Is it good for them?' In the busyness of the moment we often do what will give us a moment's peace - we buy.

Our children are flooded by an ocean of media stimulation and advertising, and we are flooded by their never ending demands for more. Advertisers are using sophisticated psychological strategies to manipulate our children's minds and desires. The message is simple: 'If you get this, you can be happy/popular/cool.' The effect on our children and our families is profound. In the case above, Sara has no real appreciation of the time she had with her mother, of the experience of enjoying each other or the thing that had been given. There was only the next desire and the challenge of trying to obtain it. The energy our children put into getting us to satisfy their desires can reach such a frenetic pitch that it seems as if their entire self-worth depends on it. And perhaps it does.

When we consider that children [ages 2 to 18] are averaging five and a half hours a day consuming some sort of media [mostly TV], it's not hard to imagine that the selling strategies used to pitch toothpaste and cereal are becoming the yardsticks that our children use to measure their self-worth. If these impressionable children aren't yours [or mine], they are our neighbour's children or the children on the bus. But in the end, they are all our children because they contribute to the enormous peer pressure on our children to measure their self-worth by how fast they can get what they want.

Manipulating their environment - finding new and creative ways to get someone else to satisfy their desires - becomes the primary means of feeling good about themselves. But because we have the means, because it pleases us and because we are always busy, we deprive our children of the tools they need to develop the self-esteem we so passionately wish for them.

Learning to Control Desires

One of the most powerful tools for developing true self-esteem is self-discipline. In a society where any

desire can be gratified, it's critical to help children build the inner muscle to take control of their desires. As a clinical psychologist, there is nothing more heartbreaking than to sit across from an adolescent who has absolutely no control of her desires; who has come into her sexuality with no muscle to deny herself anything and is outraged when her desires aren't met. We cannot indulge our children's every desire in childhood and then in adolescence tell them to 'just say no'.

Unfortunately, self-discipline doesn't come easy to any of us and is seldom rewarded by immediate gratification. [Just remember your last attempt at dieting.] We think of self-discipline as denying ourselves pleasure—but wouldn't a little more self-discipline give our lives more pleasure and freedom?

The first step in helping our children learn to control their desires is by not presenting desire as something bad. Desire is great! Learning to harness that energy is the true source of self-esteem. The desire to hit someone when we're angry is powerful and sometimes necessary for self-defense. But that same energy can be controlled and transformed into words or into physical exertion [karate, competitive sports, etc.]. We help our children become aware of this energy by articulating the power of their desires. Then we subtly challenge them to be powerful enough to hold this energy, even for a few minutes.

> We can't indulge our children's every desire in childhood then in adolescence tell them 'just say no'

Talking with our children about desire as a source of energy, and self-discipline as a way of harnessing that energy, allows both parent and child to find positive ways to deal the peer and media pressure.

Turning Energy into Action

Once children have the capacity to hold the energy of their desires [even a little], we can show them that they have choices about what to do with that energy.

One powerful choice is to transform their energy for wanting something into the energy of working for it. Even toddlers can understand that wanting something on the other side of the room means crawling over to get it. When we let them try—and verbalise the process and praise their effort—we are laying the ground-work for self-esteem. Knowing when to let children work and when they have exhausted their abilities, demands a watchful eye and a great deal of time and attention.

Older children need to be given real work that satisfies a real need. Having them help us prepare a meal when they are hungry or make something clean or beautiful in a way that is truly useful to themselves and their family, shows them that the energy of wanting can be the fuel for doing.

There are many ways to teach our children that they have choices in how they use the energy of their desires. Self-discipline can fuel our creative expression, build self-respect, sustain a friendship and give us real pleasure. For example:

Validate our 4-year-old's demand for sweets and ask him to turn the energy of his desire into a dance. Join the dance and watch the mood change.

Help an older child understand why some children have such a hard time staying out of trouble by explaining what happens when desires are in control [much like a horse being in control of the carriage].

On a long car ride, show everyone how their desire to move can be converted into a song, poem or some really silly jokes. Talk about how the energy is changing from one thing into another—that gratifying a desire is not the only choice.

Allow the energy to ripen once in a while. Make a wonderful dinner. When appetites are strong, sit down together and take a few minutes to really smell the food and feel the presence of your family sitting with such abundance. When you're ready to start eating, wait just a moment longer and feel, as a family, the energy building within you. Then, take the first bite as slowly as you can and look around at each other as you begin to really enjoy the food. Eating is so much more fun when we are hungry.

Guarding Our Senses

Desires come to us through our five senses and are constantly being manipulated by our environment. If our children are going to be intelligent media consumers, they need to know that the energy of their desires can be increased by what they see and hear. Even very young children can become allies in guarding their senses from inappropriate stimulation. A 3-year-old can tell you that his eyes want some chocolate cake but his belly says 'no.' Children as young as 4 can recognise that hearing a scary story can make them have a bad dream. Older children can be empowered to become detectives of media manipulation. When we look beneath the noise of their demands, we find that children are afraid of the strength of their desires and are looking for our assistance in finding positive ways of understanding and controlling them. They are eager to show us how competent and strong they are. When we take the time to help them develop the muscle of self-discipline, we give them the freedom and power to say 'no' and the true pleasure of saying "yes."

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The Power of Self-Discipline – Some Points to Remember

Talk to your child about how desire is a great source of energy and power. Let them know that you will help them learn to hold that energy and choose how they want to use it.

Validate the power of your child's desire by reflecting back the energy they express when they really want something. Have them rank the power of their desire on a scale from one to ten.

Once they are strong enough to hold the energy of their desires, show them how they have choices, in terms of what they decide to do with that energy.

Give kids a chance to transform their desire for something into work. Talk about how the energy of wanting can be the fuel for doing.

Allow the energy of desire to grow and then experience the true pleasure of gratification. Talk about how much sweeter it is to eat when you're hungry.

Teach your child how the energy of desire can be fueled through the stimulation of their five senses. Talk about how important it is to become guardians of their senses.

Help your children understand how the media stimulates their senses and manipulates their desire. Become diligent detectives of media manipulation.

Urban Alternatives to Toasted Tarantulas- Supporting independence in 6-12 year-olds

Rob Gueterbock, *a director of The Montessori Place in Brighton talks about how parents can support their children to go out alone*

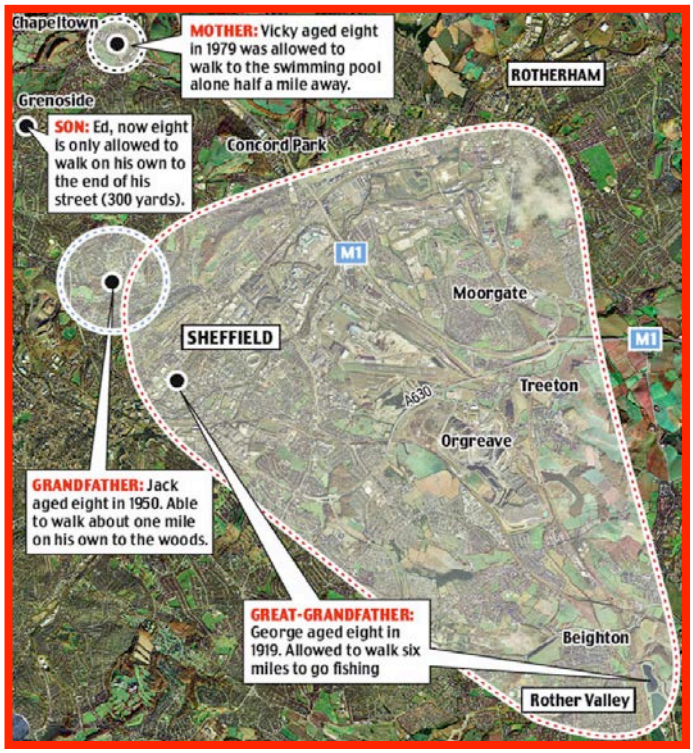
Apparently tarantulas are best served roasted, like marshmallows. All the hairs must be singed off so they don't catch in the throat. If you do a web search for 'Kids eat giant spiders' you'll find a lovely clip from a BBC documentary. The dialogue between the children goes like this: 'Watch out or the hairs will sting us!' 'Oww, I'm getting stung.' 'Catch it!' 'Oww! I'm really itchy.' 'Let's eat them then go to sleep.' 'Cooking spiders always makes that sound.' 'Mine's done.' 'Rosana, pass me the chilli.'

Whenever I think about how to support independence amongst 6-12 year-old children my starting point is always the lives of the millions of children that thrived in prehistoric times. 5,000 generations of children have passed from the moment those first truly human families walked out of Africa some 120,000 years ago until the rise of the first civilisations.

The BBC documentary gives a sense of the characteristics of children of this age – their strength and confidence, their desire to explore the wider world and their wonderfully straightforward outlook. At around 6 years, each of us has changed from a village-dwelling infant into a roaming child, endowed by nature with a body strengthened to take the scrapes and knocks of trees and tarantulas and with a mind that looks beyond the horizon, up to the stars and back into time. These same characteristics that were present in these children from the beginning are still present today.

Nourishing as it may be, rummaging around for some muesli at the back of the cupboard is never going to challenge a child in the same way as hunting for lunch. However, there is still much that we can do to fulfil the child's growing need for independence. By six, children can be personally independent; they can dress and clean themselves, take care of their laundry, prepare basic meals and snacks, wash up, load and unload the dishwasher. All this is achieved with varying degrees of encouragement and assistance depending on their mood, our mood and the weather.

From here on, the interest shifts to a wider social independence. His identity as an individual develops; he is no longer just part of the family, his horizon broadens to take in the wider community. In the realm of food, this means increasing independence in the buying or growing or food. Socially, it means going further from the home, exploring relationships with a network of older and younger children and adults. Meanwhile their minds are eager to go beyond the senses and understand the unseen structures and forces that govern our everyday lives; the laws of society, the rules of grammar, the formation of mountains. We often talk about the first-plane [0-6] being a sensorial age and the second-plane [6-12] an intellectual age, but it is important to remember that the strong roots of



intellectual exploration are firmly grounded in real experiences.

'There is no description, no image in any book that is capable of replacing the sight of real trees, and all the life to be found around them, in a real forest. Something emanates from those trees which speaks to the soul, something no book, no museum is capable of giving. The wood reveals that it is not only the trees that exist, but a whole, interrelated collection of lives.' [1]

Similarly, there is no substitute for the experiences found in our local communities noticing the contributions, seen and invisible, that bind our lives together; the gardeners in the park, street-sweeper, delivery driver, police officer or museum curator.

Contemporary Attitudes to Risk

There are numerous reasons why children have less freedom to roam than even a generation ago. Growing up in London in the 1970's I walked or caught the bus to school aged 7, often foregoing the bus to spend my 5p bus fare on sweets. By 8 I was cycling each day. I was not alone. In 1971, 80% of children in the UK went to school on their own. By 1990 only 9% were making the journey unaccompanied [2] The Daily Mail produced this map in 2007 further illustrating the change that has taken place over the space of four generations. In this example, great-grandfather George was walking 6 miles to go fishing while 5 years ago Ed, at the same age, could go to the end of the street.

Our world is filled with a million fears for our children's safety. Real or imagined, the fears feel just the same. Unfortunately, there is also no way of eradicating risk without squashing life itself. The focus on risk reduction has led to this hemming in of our children's lives. But there is another way of looking at risk. Life is full of risk, so the best way to prepare children for life is to ensure they know how to judge risk for themselves and know their own limits.

Tim Gill the author of *No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society* has coined a lovely phrase 'enabling risk' to replace the idea of 'risk reduction'. To enable risk is to acknowledge that risk is not bad per se. Perhaps we can go further still. If we replace the work 'risk' with 'life' our task becomes even clearer – 'enabling life' rather than 'life reduction'. Sure, there is a risk involved in catching a tarantula, but there is also a significant developmental benefit that even outweighs the nutritional benefit. It is in overcoming these challenges, in using mind, body and soul to their full extent, so that confidence grows and grows. In the UK we have become very good at keeping children alive into adulthood, but perhaps less successful at helping them thrive. Many studies reporting happiness levels in young people around the world suggest that in amongst our material wealth there may be something missing.

Supporting Independence in two Key Areas

There are two areas where we know a few small changes can make a big difference. The first gives children a chance to use their new capabilities to make a meaningful contribution to family life - acquiring food. For 100,000 years children have been playing their part in bringing food into the home. It's important for so many reasons, not least because of the paradox that contributing builds us up while consuming empties us a little. The other area – their social life – can also be set up for ever greater independence. As children's lives have become more indoor than outdoor, parents naturally become the gatekeepers, permitting access into and out of the home. Here too we can give them much more control over their lives.

Acquiring Food

Most people are familiar with the 'slow food' movement that prioritises the quality of the ingredients and thoughtful preparation over convenience and price. Well here's a way to slow food down even further. Of course you can order on line, but using local shops – or even just going to the supermarket provides some great experiences for your child. Your child has been bestowed with the new physical strength to go out into the world, and is keen to try out the subtle social skills required to select and purchase items in a shop. In other words, just as helping a 4-year-old dress herself takes longer than dressing her, so we have to take the long way round for the 7- or 10-year-old when it comes to independence in society.

A first step we can take is to ask her to pop into a small shop with some money to buy one or two items. Of course this doesn't have to wait until 6 years of age; Beatrice from our Infant Community recently succeeded in buying an onion without dad entering the shop.

Alternatively you might give her a precise list of items– using those new reading skills – and agree to meet at a particular checkout. Supermarkets are great for this as they are relatively contained but give scope for independence. There are also lots of ways to develop this. For example, instead of getting the cheddar from the shelf, you can add a little twist by building in the need for 300 g of farmhouse cheddar from the deli counter, with the caveat that he might need to ask the assistant's advice for something similar if they don't have the preferred type. Encouraging them to ask for (a few!) samples to taste really turns them into a hunter-gatherer. Little by little this can be extended until you wait by the entrance and entrust him with your

card and PIN or an appropriate amount of cash. If at this point you find yourself making a mental note to change your PIN regularly you probably need to focus your parental skills in other areas.

At the same time as supporting independence in the shop, we are also helping him to use the streets safely. This begins with the numerous conversations and reminders about how to cross roads and use pavements safely, how to use ears as well as eyes, making eye contact with drivers, how to decide where to cross and so on. Soon after each of these mini lessons it is important to routinely expect them to put the skill into practice. This has to quickly move beyond the 'is is safe to cross?' question to reach the point where they can arrive at the pavement edge and without prompting tell you when they think it is time to cross. Then comes the point where you are acting as a passive chaperone, intervening only as a last resort.

The final step is for him to also travel to the shop independently. At the same time that I was travelling to school alone, my brother and I took it in turns buying crusty rolls for breakfast on a Sunday morning. The baker was far enough away so that I had to cross one busy-ish road, but the distance also gave me just enough time on the walk back to pick out the warm dough from the centre of a roll. If you have a small local shop this kind of happy expedition is relatively straightforward. You can ease the way into the experience for you and him by talking with the shopkeeper together beforehand. If the journey is more complex you can play the beautiful role of a guardian angel, observing unnoticed from a distance for those first few adventures. My colleague Paul Pillai performed this service last year for an 8-year-old scooting home from the Elementary Community for the first time. Paul left a few seconds later – crossing the street so as to be unnoticed – and staying 20m or so behind. A mile later Paul was exhausted having kept up with a scooter and the boy was safely home. After Paul had played the unseen angel role a few times we were all confident the boy could scoot safely by himself.

In most of these examples the child has been alone, but since this is a very social age carrying out these adventures with a friend can work well. In the Children's House we speak a lot about the 'control of error' being in the materials, giving the child feedback on mistakes they may have made. In the second-plane the control of error is often the friend they are working with. This also applies out on the street where there are two heads to remember what needs to be done.

All of the dozens of steps and stages above obviously need to be introduced to the children. Fortunately Maria Montessori left us with a lovely set of tools to offer these kinds of instruction which we call lessons in Grace and Courtesy. They cover anything and everything a child needs to know to about how to function safely and considerately in society. These lessons, which begin in the first-plane, appeal to the children since they meet a very real need; finding out what language and behaviour to use in specific situations. Using appropriate language will not only get them a better response from the adult or child they are communicating with, it also gives give them confidence when faced with a new scenario. Practicing with them beforehand, either on the pavement or at home, allows for clarity and repetition. These little lessons also put the emphasis on teaching rather than correcting, which everyone enjoys more. The offering of a lesson will arise from either anticipating or noticing a need. These lessons are appropriate for both first-plane and second-plane children; the difference is that with the younger child you would offer specific language whereas for the older child, while practice of certain phrases still plays a part, the phrases may be generated by the child after a discussion about what is expected and, importantly, why.

Some parents have made a little rite-of-passage of this handing over of responsibility; a moment that conveys their trust and confidence in their child. Here's how the 'going into the mini-market' lesson might pan out for a 6 or 7-year-old child:

- *Ok, can you remind me what you have on your shopping list?*
- *Great. When you have found all the items do you think you will be able to find the start of the queue?*
- *Can you remember if this is a 'till number 6 please' or a 'next customer please' shop?*
- *Ok, so you've gone to the till number they called out. Who normally starts the conversation?*
- *Yes they often do, and they are often very polite. What could you say in reply?*

- *It's strange isn't it, they ask 'how are you?' they don't really want to know about all your bruises, but it is nice to have a little conversation. You could also ask them how they are; people don't always remember to do that. Let's try that out. Shall I be the shop assistant or the customer?*
- *Right, so maybe now they are helping you to pack the items in your rucksack, what would be the courteous thing to say while they are doing that?*
- *Then they will total it all up and tell you the amount.*
- *Now why do you think it's a good idea to tell them how much money you are giving them? Yes, and we can also make mistakes if we are in a hurry.*
- *And what do we also need to do when they give you the change? Yes, check they've given you what they said.*
- *OK, that's nearly that. You've got your change – and what else have you got? – yes, the receipt. What's the last part?*
- *Yup, and as well as 'thank you' you could also say 'good day' or 'good afternoon' which is really a shorter way of saying 'I hope you have a good day'*

Making arrangements with friends

The second area where we can easily empower our children is in their social lives. The second plane is an age when children are naturally drawn to groups, clubs and generally organising themselves socially. Just as there are steps to independent shopping and errand excursions, there are similar steps we can offer to support them in their social lives. Again, the main aim is to help our children become the 'driver' rather than 'passenger' of their forays out into society.

One specific area is giving them increasing agency and responsibility for making their social arrangements. With younger (Children's House) children parents naturally take on the role of Social Secretary; arrangements are made by parents and then confirmed or vetoed by the children. You may or may not like the responsibilities of this position with all the careful negotiations required as well as crossed fingers that your beloved daughter gets invited around for tea again despite *that* incident with the jelly. Like it or not, by Elementary Community age, parents can retire from this position while continuing to make themselves reasonably available as chauffeur or pedestrian/bike chaperone. Even the pedestrian/bike chaperone role can eventually be dispensed with as they master the skills of getting to and from a friend's house a few streets away.

Here are the practical steps that may be followed, which could be discussed at a regular family meeting:

Sarah has an idea that she wants to spend some time with Rose. Sarah has a calendar and looks to see when she might be free. She remembers, or writes down, some times and dates that she would like to meet up with Rose. She checks with mum or dad to see if those possible times fit with their needs, and, if transport support is required, mum or dad are free to accompany her to and from Rose's. Assuming the proposed times are possible she puts the proposal to Rose, who records the suggested dates and times, agrees to check her calendar with mum and dad, before calling back. Rose calls Sarah's home with a 'yes', 'no' or alternative suggestion. Rose and Sarah tell their parents of the confirmed plan. Rose and Sarah's parents quietly text each other on the side if necessary.

Like learning to dress oneself, each step will require extra support at the beginning until, gradually, the children manage the whole process. For younger children that won't happen overnight, nor will it happen consistently without gentle reminders and re-presentations of certain steps. Some parents have managed to go it alone, but it seems to work better if a group of parents agree to start together. The easiest way to start is just find one or two others who also want to give it a go.

Conclusion

For various reasons, screen-time has replaced outside-time in the lives of many children today. If the fantasy risk of games replaces real risk we may be creating a negative spiral that first reduces children's experiences in the real world, then their safety and ultimately their real-world independence. The growing busyness of our roads has necessitated a more cautious approach to going outdoors, but the child's developmental need to be out there in society, to be independent, means that it is important for us to find meaningful ways to offer real agency and responsibility.

They may not be able to stroll a mile to see if their friend is home, but they can certainly make the phone calls to fix up a date. Today they may not be ready to cycle to the swimming pool, but perhaps we can trust them to go to the next street. Each step is likely to require a discussion or a lesson, repeated as often as necessary. Every step however small is important. After all, each time we give responsibility or enable risk we are giving and enabling life.

References

1 Maria Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence* p19, Clio

2 Hillman et al *One False Move* 1990.

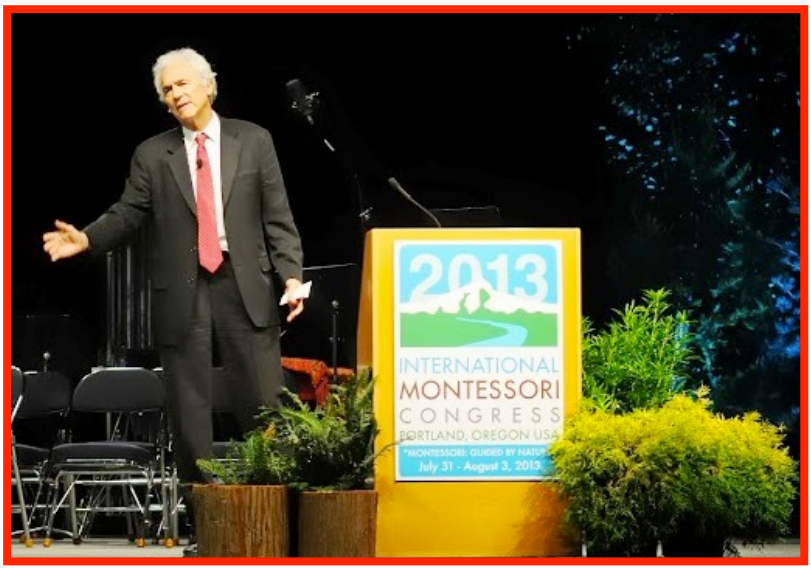
Guided by Nature

***Kristi McAlister** gives her reflections on the 27th International Congress: Guided by Nature*

It is evident that one has stumbled upon a universal truth when its elements are echoed like a fractal in every imaginable experience. I came to the 27th International Montessori Conference excited to connect with friends, gain a deeper understanding of the child in nature, and be inspired and reinvigorated to continue my work with children. I left with a shifted perspective and a deeper understanding of the very nature of our work and the nature of our cosmic task. From Brian Swimme and Lynne Lawrence's first lectures through the many breakout sessions and other keynote speeches, one unifying perspective became clear. If we truly observe nature and the creative energies at work in every aspect of nature be it the seed, the small child, or the Universe, we must shift our dominant way of being in the world from a mechanistic approach to an approach which simply supports the environment and conditions for these natural energies to emerge. This perspective is diametrically opposed to humanity's current mode of working based on external control and the illusion of a knowable endpoint. Luckily for Montessorians, this approach is entirely consistent with Montessori theory. We have only to remain faithful to the theory we know so well with the children and then extend it to our world at large. As Molly O'Shaughnessy quoted Dr. Montessori in her keynote, 'if we satisfy the constructive energies of man, the rest will follow.' I'd like to take this opportunity to share this experience with you and to reflect on its implications for our work and the nature of man's role in the universe.

As Montessorians, we have already recognised the need to make an intellectual shift from the mechanistic way of learning and teaching. We do not see ourselves as the guardians of the end point of knowledge. We know the child cannot be modified externally and moulded into our vision without great harm to him. We recognise that the child has within him the energies and motivation necessary to grow, develop and self-actualise. As Eduardo Cuevas described with great clarity in his keynote, we don't look to pour knowledge into the child, but to help him appreciate his own nature and develop his divinity. It is only the self-actualized individual that can recognise the harmony and interconnectedness of life. He quoted Dr. Montessori to remind us that 'The task set before themselves by masters has generally been to mould soft materials and fill empty vessels, but we must set ourselves to see the marvels hidden in the child and help him unfold them.'

As Rukmini Ramachandran said in her keynote, as Montessorians, we also recognise that 'every individual is interlinked' with nature and 'Education is the process by which we assist nature.' Our role then is to support the conditions which are conducive development and to protect the child from obstacles which could deviate or block those creative energies. This intellectual shift is crucial, but the work takes great faith to trust in the unknown nature of the child and great humility to let go of control and the illusion that we know the end point. We must go through a spiritual transformation in order to complete the shift and we must work every day being comfortable with the unknown and trust the power of nature. We all know this and also know how difficult it is to maintain this perspective in a world where end points to education are dictated yearly, if not sometimes monthly or daily by those who claim to know what a child should be or know at any given point of his or her development. Though this is not new to us, it is a daily struggle to remain faithful to it. Perhaps for this reason I took great comfort and found great inspiration in the fact that wherever there is creation and growth in the universe, we see this same pattern repeated and find ourselves in the



same role.

Brian Swimme gave an inspiring talk about the Universe and one point among many remains vivid months afterwards: we do not know how the universe first exploded into being and from what unknown potentials and energies it came forth, but we do know that if the conditions were off by just a little bit, the universe would have exploded or imploded. The conditions for creation had to be exact in order for the unknown to bring the universe into being. From the very origin of our Universe, we see the importance not of knowing the end point or even the beginning, not of orchestrating or building a scaffold for creation, but of the crucial connection between environment and conditions necessary to support the creative energies of the universe.

We see the same process in the little seed. Whether dropped by a bird, excreted by a mouse, or planted with great intention by the tiny fingers of a human child, the seed needs sun, water, and fertile soil to burst forth into life. We do not need to understand these energies or even know what that seed will become; we just have faith that with right conditions, growth happens. Observing and understanding these conditions allows us to help the seed fulfil its potential, but we are not in control of what it will become or what ripples its becoming has on the fabric of life in the universe. Dr. Swimme gave the example of the first small microorganisms that faced a more dire food shortage than we do now. Somehow, they began to harness the sun's energy and the first photosynthesising organisms developed. How arrogant of us, in the face of such creative power to think we can control the endpoint of a process so rich with possibilities that we cannot even imagine them, let alone construct them. How wonderful to live in a Universe where the sun's very energy can be harnessed and connected to life in such a tangible way by the smallest unconscious little beings. What great faith we should have in the living Earth.

Unfortunately we have lived in a world where profit and greed has created deviations in the human organism. As Vandana Shiva stated in her inspiring keynote, 'profiteering and greed have become the organising principles for humanity.' The examples of hurt we have done to the harmony of the Earth by taking from her is astounding. Likewise, the hurt we have done by not recognising natural processes at work for good is equally astounding. Our ability to look at one narrow end point of our own desires has allowed us to be ignorant of the web of effect we have. We have the illusion of financial or material end point that we know we can achieve and the ability to control these finite processes for our benefit. This has created an entire human network that works against the conditions of nature to achieve our own ends. Humans have had an incredible impact on the health of the planet. Paul Hawken framed our impact in a beautifully visual way when he showed the sphere 935 metres in diameter that represents all of humanity if we were all together without space in between us. We are a small part of the Earth, but we have a large impact when we work against nature. The illusion we hold of being separate from nature leads to a need to control and dominate nature. This is certainly due to greed, but it is also deeper than that. It is also due to a deep fear of the unknown. It is an understandable part of the human experience that what we cannot understand, we seek to control. It gives us an illusion of security. It is impossible to understand the entire web of connection of life on the planet and events in the universe. Likewise, we do not know what happens at the birth of a star, the moment life comes into being, the nature of consciousness, or the spark of life. These unknowable yet fundamental processes inspire awe and wonder in some, and fear in many. It is comforting to live in the known. By taking a piece of the puzzle and using it for our ends, we become masters of that one puzzle piece and this gives humanity control. We can fix that one piece if it is broken and we can maybe even connect it to another little piece and maybe even profit from it. It feels safe and good and we simply ignore the ripples our interference causes to the vast mystery of interconnectedness. When we begin to see the effects, we are overwhelmed because we do not know how to fix it all and often we then retreat again into our delusion. We become masters of that tiny thread of the fabric we tug on and ignore the unravelling it causes.

As scary as it is to let go of the mechanistic model where we are masters of our little worlds, it is comforting too to know that we do not need to understand it all or know the end point to help. We simply need to see ourselves as a part of the whole and continually seek to support the creative energies that are already present. We are not the ones who will fix the world. Our role is to stop working against it and to use our conscious minds and our wisdom to actively support it without a predetermined end point in mind, just as we do for the child. We must trust in the Universe's power of creation and take our rightful place within that system. How do we counter the fear and arrive at this point of trust? Dr. Shiva answered that point by saying that in order to change 'policy makers need to be guided by nature.' Ms. Ramachandran pointed out that 'a child raised in harmony with nature and not alienated from its roots can safely steward the world.' That future policy maker is the child who trusts in nature and sees these creative processes as awe-inspiring and yes, ultimately unknowable, but he can take comfort in that unknown due to a deep faith in the interconnectedness of life and the benevolence of creation. One of the most powerful aspects of the Montessori Elementary curriculum is that we do not initially focus on the Earth's problems or what we have done to the Earth. Instead, initially the child is presented with the entirety of the earth and the awesome power of creation and growth in Universe. The child understands there is harmony and beauty in the world and that these energies of creation were present billions of years before humans ever came into being. From this knowledge and the sensorial experience of awe and wonder at the creation of life, the child has a deep respect for the power of the Universe independent of Man's meddling. The child also sees that he is a part of this Universe in a primal way. As Brian Swimme stated, the child was born of stardust and as Lynne Lawrence echoed, this child is the embodiment of the sun's energy. Dr. Vandana Shiva asked us to cultivate the vision of a living Earth and to recognise the rights of Mother Earth. It is a crucial step to removing the fear of the unknown. We do not understand how the random current sent out by the beat of a butterfly wing influences weather patterns. We cannot understand how to create life or save life, but these children trust that the power of nature is good and that it works in balance and harmony. There is no need to control something you trust and love and feel is imbued with its own creative power. We all need to see that nature has the power to heal itself if the conditions for creation are supported. We should take heart in Mr. Hawken's little sphere of human influence. If our footprint can cause so much damage working against the currents of nature, what could nature do if humanity worked in support of her work? What could nature accomplish if our little ripple was pushing hers along as opposed to absorbing her energies to overcome our waves.

« We need to see that nature has the power to heal itself if the conditions for creation are supported »

This principle is echoed in the work we do with the child, but is imbued in every element of life. Certainly in politics, daily life decisions, policy and simply being with others, if we simply try to make the right decisions in support of life without having to know the answer, we will be living in this great interconnected network as opposed to trying to maintain the illusion that we control the little part we may have been able to understand. Judith Snow's talk was a powerful reminder of this. Ms. Snow's life work has been to champion the child that is sometimes unseen or even feared by even the most dedicated teachers. This fear is not due to any desire to cause harm, but because we do not know what to do for a child who is so different. Our tendency is still to want to control the outcome. How will this child achieve like the others? What will the effect be on others? How do we get this child with very different abilities from point A to point B? Of course we want to have some ideas about what we can help a child with, but the stories Ms. Snow told were a great example of how delusional we are and how much harm we can cause by clinging to those delusions of a known end point. The story Ms. Snow told of Eddie is a wonderful example of what can happen if we let go of our desire to control the outcome. As Ms. Snow told it, Eddie is a man who will never read or write. As part of an inclusion programme, he got a job delivering mail at a hospital. Of course since he cannot read, the mail often gets delivered to the wrong department causing people to travel to other floors and

redeliver the mail. Though this would seem to be a major problem in the mechanistic view of life, the CEO of the hospital corporation saw it another way. He said Eddie had done more for interdepartmental communications than any training programme he could ever have purchased. Further, Eddie's impact went even deeper. As he travelled the halls delivering mail, he would say to the patients 'Isn't it a great day?' Most people would not have had the nerve to say something like that to people who were very ill and clearly not having a great day. After a few days, patients would start to respond, 'Well, yes, it is a great day.' Statistic analysis showed that for some reason, during the time Eddie was there, patient outcomes improved and length of stay in the hospital post-surgery declined. 'Isn't it a great day!' What a wonderful lesson for us all. Do the right thing for the individual. Help the individual find a place in the world, a way to be connected and let the unknown unfold. The delusion is in thinking we know that someone is on the journey to point B. She may be going another path and as long as we clear the obstacles for her and work to support her natural energies, we are fulfilling our part in the network of life. We do not need to know where the journey ends. In fact that illusion will very likely cause a deviation to occur. This is not to say that we are irresponsible or abdicate responsibility for things we do know children need. Of course every child can benefit from our perspective and the fact that, as adults, we have been here a bit longer and know a few things about living in this world, but we do not need to set the course for a child's life. Personally I would admit that I am better at trusting in the inner guide of a child who is not challenged by physical, emotional or cognitive deficits than one who is. It is again the fear of the unknown at work. I do not understand that child as well and my human impulse is to control what I do not understand. It makes me feel better, but at what cost?

There are many people who want to help the world, but even these people wonder how to 'fix' it. This betrays a deep grounding in the mechanistic view of the world. It is assumed that we 'broke' the environment and we need to 'fix it'. Perhaps as Dr. Montessori said, we just need 'to learn to live better' and trust that by doing so the internal energies of the Universe can work. This removes one of our most frequent excuses for non-action. What can one person do faced with the vast problems of the world? It is true that one person choosing not to eat meat doesn't free up fields for grain to feed the world. Turning off a faucet doesn't save enough water to make a difference in a drought. Still, it may be the right action for that individual and it may be what that person can do to live better. We don't understand how all this works so we don't have the solution to fix it or the excuse that it won't work. Can you imagine the power of humanity if we all just chose to live better? As an integrated part of the universe, we can help create the conditions for life and growth and that is enough because it is all we can do.

Like a ringing bell, the notes of this unifying theme rang out from each lecture. Humanity needs to recognise both its power and its limits. We need to see ourselves as a vital and interconnected part of the Universe and to use our conscious minds just as Dr. Montessori did to observe the conditions necessary to promote growth, life and creation. As Montessorians we need to broaden what we already know to embrace the Universe with this philosophy and step into the world each day living it in small and big ways. Foster love and faith in the energies of creation present in our Universe, whether they are found in the child, in a seed, or in the birth of a star. Use our conscious mind to observe, discover, research, and learn how to support these energies. Let go of the illusion that we can ever know the outcome or determine the end point of a system so vast and awesome, but trust that there are powers at work and that those powers are essentially good and creative. Work always to remove obstacles and promote balance and then let go and trust in the becoming for that is our contribution to the Universe and our true nature.

Montessori Model United Nations - What Happened Next

***Emma Wong Singh**, Chairman of the Montessori Society AMI UK interviews participants of the recent Montessori Model United Nations, inspiring youth to create a better world*

During the last academic year students of the elementary class at the Maria Montessori Institute have been making preparations for their trip to the United Nations to participate in the Montessori Model United Nations [MMUN], whose mission is to inspire youth by giving students [between 9 and 15 years old] an opportunity to formulate, present, debate and revise positions on current issues that are affecting people of the world. They represented the Kingdom of Thailand and this is what they said about their experience:

Mahika: 'Today was the day of our first committee session and I was quite nervous... We were shown to our seats and the President of the UNEP [United Nations Environment Programme] called out names of countries that were represented...The session opened with the speakers list and it was also my turn to talk on developing sustainable energy in Thailand. I was nervous to talk but as I had practised my speech before a number of times, I did it well and was really happy. We also had a number of moderating and non-moderated caucuses to discuss the topic after which we had a break for lunch... I made a very good friend in the last 2 days and her name was Sydney. She came from the United States but represented Haiti. I took photographs with her and she also gave me her email so we can be in touch...Today was the Closing ceremony at the General Assembly and I was really looking forward to it because Surian and I got selected to be the flag bearer from the school. When the closing ceremony started, every flag bearer from every country lined up and we walked in to the music, which was called 'Waving Flag'. It was really and I mean REALLY cool... I was happy but also sad that this was the end of the MMUN. This was one of my best experiences and I hope to come back soon!'

Justin: 'On the 5th June 2013 we took a flight to Geneva and arrived at the hotel in the afternoon.... On the same evening we met in front of the UN building and were on our way to the opening Ceremony in the General Assembly room of the Palais des Nations. It was so impressive!!!...We firstly introduced ourselves and did the register. It was fairly formal. For example we had to stand up when speaking, "The delegation of Thailand is present and voting'.... On the last day, during the closing ceremony, the resolutions were voted and the UNDP resolutions all passed unanimously. I extremely enjoyed the MMUN and do strongly recommend it.'

Adam wanted to share his speech he gave on the topic of prevention of Malaria, here is an extract from it, 'Thank you Honourable President and fellow delegates. I represent the Kingdom of Thailand, which feels very strongly about malaria... The health effects malaria has, lead to poor education, low wage jobs, and prolonged poverty.... To raise the money needed to finance those actions, we need to educate the world about the dangers malaria poses to all. As Kofi Annan said, "Malaria can be beaten, the means exist. Together we can change the world..." Thank you.'

As this was the first delegation of students from the UK to participate in MMUN the parents of the students and some of the staff also travelled with them to Geneva. Some of the parents provided us with feedback on their experiences as observers of the entire event from the preparation at school to

the United Nations trip. Here are the questions put to them and the responses they gave:

What are the main things you think your child gained from the experience?
'My daughter Mahika was 9 when she was given the opportunity to go to the MMUN in Geneva. Her experience started right from the time the Head Directress spoke to them about the MMUN and what it was all about. She did not even know what the UN itself was before that, its role or responsibilities. Once she and her team got to understand that there was no stopping her! Once she and her team got to understand that there was no stopping her! They made decisions on what country to represent, what teams they would be a part of and spent almost three months preparing on their various topics and resolutions. She has gained tremendously from this experience - understanding and working on tough topics that affect the world. Concepts such as poverty, malaria, sustainable energy etc. were alien to her before but her knowledge and research has improved tremendously on these real life issues. She also gained confidence by speaking at the MMUN as she delivered her speech on sustainable energy in Thailand in front of all her fellow delegates. She got the opportunity at the conference itself to meet and interact with different students from various countries. She thoroughly enjoyed this experience and has become more confident and aware of world issues after her trip.'

Another parent said:
'Besides being immensely proud to be given the opportunity to participate, my son was immersed in representing the chosen country and convey its point of view. To him, the Committee sessions felt like a reward for a long and thorough preparation. The fact that during the committee sessions so many different points were made and discussed and finally to see a draft resolution emerging, felt like a big work had been accomplished.'

As you watched the proceedings did you see any skills developing? If so, which?
'I did see skills developing during the proceedings. Understandably it was fear of the unknown for the first couple of sessions so she was shy to interact initially, but once she got the hang of it, I could see her and her team getting more social and interacting with other students. Apart from social skills I could also see Mahika and her team mates understand the meaning of decorum and etiquette and practice it in this formal environment.'

And another parent responded,
'Very naturally it seemed, my child became part of the Committee group and acted as a member of such. The procedural rules, the 'smart clothes', the setting all helped but I was amazed how well my child adapted to this situation. Another point was that during the Conference my child learnt how important it was to share information and knowledge with other delegates and listen to their point of view. My child prepared in detail for the presentation of his speech and clearly enjoyed this side of things very much.'

What, if any, do you think the long-term benefits of the experience will be?
'Exposure to such an experience will stay with them for a long time to come. Travelling to Geneva, researching and understanding real life issues, working as a team, getting to have their opening ceremony at the Palais de Nations and sessions at the CICG itself has broadened their exposure. I think this experience will help them in the long term with confidence and social skills.'

And, another responded,
'The preparation for the Conference has raised the awareness of my child for the need of finding solutions. He has always been interested in world politics and this has motivated his interest even more: to try to make a difference.'

What did it feel like to be an observer?
'As an observer I was very proud of my daughter and all her teammates to be at such a forum and interact on such tough topics at a very young age. I felt that this opportunity was great for them. Mahika was chosen to be the flag bearer at the closing ceremony along with a friend of hers. Seeing her walking in with the flag made me cry! It was indeed a very proud moment.'

Another parent responded,
'I was a bit nervous for my son at the beginning as I saw a very diverse group. Children of very different ages (the youngest were 9 and the older children up to 15 years old), came from different Continents, had various experiences in preparing UN models and came with different commands of the English language. However, I watched with happiness the unfolding of good dynamics of the whole group. The serenity of the President of the Committee guided the group very well through the Committee sessions.'

Geneva was a life-changing event shaping each students perception of world affairs and also helping the parents see their son or daughter in a new, positive and different light.

It was a truly unique experience for all the students and one when repeated year after year, will help frame the example for the youth of today that resolution of problems through dialogue is the only means by which peace can be achieved.

Please find out what the students got up to by clicking on this YouTube link: http://youtube/RZ9I3zP8Gqc

It is clear from the words of the elementary students and these parents' honest reflections on the experience that the preparation for and the trip to

If your elementary class is interested in participating or just finding out more, please go to their website www.montessori-mun.org

Living in a Montessori Adolescent Community

Students of the Lära för Livet Montessoriskolan in Sweden talk about what it is like to be in a Montessori community for adolescents

My name is Vilma. I am fourteen years old and I live in Sweden. I am a student in the Adolescent Programme at Lära för livet Montessoriskolan. We have twenty-four students in our class and they are between the ages of twelve and sixteen.

What do you like learning about most?
My favourite subjects are: History because I really love to know what everything was like before I was born, Maths because even though it is a difficult subject our teacher Seth gives us really interesting problems to solve and English because it is such an interesting language with lots of fantastic things to read and discuss in seminar.

What is different about being in a Montessori secondary school?
What is different about school for me is that we have a Farm. I really love being up at the Farm because I can spend a long time with my friends. We live together for four days each week, and we have to share all the cooking and cleaning. We are responsible for looking after the animals: we have goats, sheep, pigs, rabbits, bees, ducks, hens and a big turkey which can be a bit scary. Sometimes it is hard at the Farm, like when it is my turn to get up early and light the fire, but because everyone has chores to do, it seems fair. We do not really have arguments. We sing a lot, and we are luckier than other students because we have time to really get to know each other.

Do you think you would prefer to be in a traditional school?
I cannot imagine what it would be like to stay in a classroom all day. We spend some time in our Farm Classroom, and then we go to work on the land or in the kitchen. I think that we learn much better when we can be outside moving around as well. In our Occupations we have lessons in Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Geography, History and Maths. It is much easier to learn things this way than it is just reading textbooks and listening to a teacher. I learn much more and do more work when I am up at the Farm.

Tell us what school is like for you Kristoffer
I go to school with Vilma. I agree that we have a school, which teaches us more than other schools do. We boys built a log cabin to sleep in, and now the girls are doing the same. We are all working with our technology teacher, Tomas, to renovate an old building which is our new art, craft and woodwork rooms. We are able to put in windows, make cement and even take old tiles from the roof. This term we are making a bread oven in there. It makes us take ourselves more seriously when we get to do adult work like this, and we learn what we are good at and what we enjoy doing.

What kind of things do you grow on the land?
We have a big garden and we try to grow enough vegetables and berries to feed our whole community. Actually I am the Land Manager and so I have to do lots of planning and organising. Sometimes we sell our produce at our market stalls. We also sell our honey and we make beeswax candles and do other crafts to sell.

How do you think this kind of work benefits you?
This gives us independence, which helps us to grow up. Managing our budget can be tricky but it is good to practice before we are adults.

It sounds wonderful, I am sure many people would love to see it
We have visitors stay at our Farm. If you would like to know more about Montessori teenagers, come and visit us. Vilma is our Communication Manager and you can contact her on montessoriskolan@läraförlivet.com. You can also contact our Head of School, Jenny-Marie Höglund or our Adolescent Programme Co-ordinator, Lesley-Ann Patrick [actually she teaches us English and Art also, and is the person who stays at the Farm with us].

Yesterday's Discoveries

Resolving Conflict - Child's Play

Whenever a visitor peeks into a Montessori classroom, a usual observation made is 'I can't believe how peaceful it is - how many children did you say there are in that room?'

One might be surprised to find that in the midst of that harmonious environment, glimpses of what appears to be 'non-peaceful' behaviour. In a quiet corner inside, 2 children engage in a heated and prolonged debate about the best technique for rolling the floor mat they have just used for their game. There is stomping of feet, fisted hands, raised voices, black frowns and cries of 'No! That's not how to do it!' It may puzzle the visitor to see that the Montessori directress, while continuing to observe, holds back from interfering and refrains from quickly moving both parties on to more 'peaceful' interactions. This holding back stems from an understanding of the difference between behaviour that is developmentally appropriate and beneficial and behaviour that is aggression.

In a traditional classroom, where it is up to the teacher to maintain order, moments of conflict would be quickly extinguished and children redirected to their academic work. An adult would step in and dictate the resolution and solve the social problem. It is easy and efficient to do so and a teacher's impulse is often 'These children are wasting time arguing, let me get them as quickly as possible back to learning.' But in a Montessori community, such situations are golden opportunities for children to practice exactly what they are trying to develop at this time - inhibitory control and cognitive flexibility.

When children are not made to sit still and learn by listening to a lecture; when in a community they are free to move, free to choose and have freedom to be involved in their own activity for as long as they like such golden opportunities for developing conflict management skills arise.

Maria Montessori explained the difference 'To them [traditional teachers], social life consists in sitting side by side and hearing someone else talk, but that is just the opposite. The only social life that the children get in the ordinary schools is during playtime or on excursions. Ours live always in an active community.' [1]

In her book 'Children Who Are Not Yet Peaceful', the Montessori directress Donna Bryant Goertz describes the interactions that arise in this active community: "The natural rough and tumble of the classroom that is typically suppressed in the traditional classroom becomes more pronounced. Time is spent on the thorny issues . . . Can we abide a member's steadfastly clinging to obvious error? ('No, ladybugs are mammals') How loudly is it okay to sing while you work? Who moves if the singing becomes annoying? How do you break a tie vote without asking an adult to vote? Time is spent learning how to listen, remember, inhibit impulses, relax, concentrate and attend.' [2]

The children's cry that Maria Montessori verbalised, of 'Help me to do it myself', is not just about physical independence. It refers not only to a child's joy of discovering 'I can put on my own socks!' or 'I can zip up my coat!' or 'I can pour myself a drink!' It is very much about the development of social independence as well. The Montessori teacher supports the development of physical independence by offering techniques, guiding practice, encouraging and respecting each child's efforts to care for himself and his environment. In the same way social independence is nurtured by 'grace and courtesy' role-play experiences presented to help children discover techniques of how to respond positively in potentially tricky social situations [e.g. how to let someone pass when going through a tight space, how to say 'Stop, I don't like that' or 'Excuse me, I was sitting in that place']. Despite all the presentations and practice offered, no Montessori teacher expects children to consistently act perfectly in all social situations. Like motor development, social development is a journey that requires not only the gaining of knowledge, but each child's strengthening of his will and gaining of self-control, qualities that only mature if given opportunities for exercise.

Because we are so careful of our children not getting hurt, we want to protect them and solve social conflicts for them. But by doing so we are sending the message that 'You cannot manage a social

conflict on your own, you need me to solve this problem for you.' In our efforts to keep the 'peace', we can resort to removing all opportunities for the strengthening of the will and for the development of our children's conflict management skills.

In their motor development, children start from being very clumsy, as movements little by little gain coordination. They will drop things, break things and bump into each other. However, in a Montessori class we find that children develop much greater motor coordination if they have opportunities for movement within the natural limits provided by a community.The same is true for social development. The process children take in conflict resolution will not always be pretty - there will be hurt feelings, there will likely be upset and in their initial efforts, the road will be quite bumpy. But, in order for children to build strong conflict resolution skills, they need a community where they have the freedom, trust, faith and support that they can solve social problems.

'Discipline must come through liberty . . . We do not consider an individual disciplined only when he has been rendered as artificially silent as a mute and as immovable as a paralytic. He is an individual annihilated, not disciplined." [3]

More so than with motor development, we can be less tolerant and less understanding of the initial shaky steps children make in social development. We can watch a 1-year-old's wobbly walk without feeling the urge to scoop him up and get him to the end of the room quicker, knowing that those shaky steps are an important part of the process. But it can be very hard to watch children try to reach a solution to a dispute and not step in with our quick-fix for the return of 'peace'.

It doesn't always look very peaceful! But this is how true peace comes about, from children able to work through a conflict, children able to build a peace through a conflict, not from having all possibility of conflict removed or magically solved for them by the adult, saying 'Let her have that, you can have it later'. It is through enabling children to find they can resolve a conflict that the peacemakers of tomorrow grow, children who as adults will be capable of negotiating, finding consensus, and reaching a fair and just peace.

Two-time Pulitzer Prize nominee, psychologist and New York Times science journalist Daniel Goleman is author of more than 10 books on education and leadership. In his book Emotional Intelligence he writes about promoting emotional literacy in schools: 'The assumption is that such moments [strife among children] are ripe opportunities to teach children skills. The immediate lesson is that there are impartial, fair ways to settle disputes, while the deeper teaching is that disputes can be negotiated and children can apply skills such as these throughout life. It has a more positive message than the ubiquitous, authoritarian 'Stop that' that too often slips unbidden from our mouths.' [4]

In the book 'The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter', Vivian Paley writes: 'Children learn these essential lessons for life - apart from any specifics of curriculum, using opportunities in and out of class to help students turn moments of personal crisis into lessons in emotional competence.' [5]

And with this mind-set, we can see the 'non-peaceful moments' - the flood created by the bucket of water being dropped on Nina's carefully laid out multiplication beads, Max's previously perfectly written poetry now marred by a stroke from when Anna bumped his table, Henry and Lena having a tug-of-war over who chose to work with the cube chain of 5 first, Erika insisting that she had cleaned the painting easel while Martin inexorably points out all the specks of paint she missed, Dino and Samantha arguing over whether the shape they have in front of them is called a hexagon or a pentagon, or the standoff Simon is having because he would like to have the larger number in the subtraction game ('I want to have 6000!') - in a very different light. Instead of distractions from academic work, they become vital opportunities for educating the emotions, for learning emotional skills, not just academic facts. We find time and time again, perhaps often to our surprise, the capacity children have for finding creative, peaceful, cooperative and inspired resolutions to a crisis - when given the trust, encouragement and support to come up with these on their own.

A Montessori environment is set up to maximise each child's potential for social development, in the daily opportunities for practice that arise in a free and actively interacting community. Maria Montessori was conscious that it is such individuals that the world desperately needs, that even as she lived through two brutal world wars, she saw humankind's potential for building peace. She knew that this hope would lie in the hands of children who had the opportunity to fully develop as peacemakers, freed from what she described as 'the greatest of all dangers', the passivity of 'making an adult responsible for his own actions, of condemning his own conscience to a kind of idle slumber.' [6]

And far from it being a burden imposed on the children, it is the secret to a truly harmonious and happy class.

'There are children who require talent, skill, attention, determination and time to integrate into the group and to involve deeply in work. We have aggressive children and those who leave others out, children who constantly report on others and those who treat the truth too lightly. We have children who bother the belongings of others. . . What great good, then does this much sought after group dynamic offer the child?.... Why should a group of children be expected to take on so much responsibility? Why shouldn't the adults take charge, punish the offenders and protect the victims? Why shouldn't the adults dole out rewards and punishments? We have found that children are happier and more productive, have higher and more soundly based self-esteem and feel more cooperative when they are part of a group that refuses to cast children in roles. They value human life more deeply and experience a solid sense of security when no one labels them or punishes the "bad"....Inclusion of more eccentric children in our classes affirms the human worth of all the children. It provides an opportunity for developing emotional maturity as well as academic skills. . . No child is blamed, and any problem is everyone's problem. None of the children is unmanageable. None of the children has a problem or is a difficult child.' [8]

Several research studies into Montessori graduates verify the greater capacity for social development gained from a Montessori education. Rathunde and Csikzentmihalyi's 2005 study revealed that Montessori middle school children are more likely than matched controls to claim that their schoolmates are also their friends. [9] In Lillard's 2006 study, 12-year-old Montessori students were significantly more likely to choose 'positive assertive responses for dealing with unpleasant social situations, such as having someone cut into a line.' The study also indicated that students at the Montessori school felt a 'greater sense of community' and that they respected, helped and cared about each other. The difference was statistically visible even at a young age, as 5-year-olds 'displayed better abilities on the social and behavioural tests, demonstrating a greater sense of justice and fairness', as well as much more emotionally positive play with peers on the playground. [10]

At the Montessori Model United Nations, a programme that enables Montessori students to use these skills by applying them on a global scale to tackling world problems and building international consensus, we see a glimpse of the potential these children have for not just an empty hope of peace, but a meaningful promise for the future. [11]

Lori Woellhaf, AMI Montessori Teacher

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Dear Maria...

Is childcare appropriate for young children?

The Office for National Statistics has released a report stating that not only has the employment rate for women in the UK risen from 53% in 1971 to 67% in 2013 [1], but that 65% of mothers in a couple with a child aged three or under are employed [2]. What kind of childcare facility would Dr. Montessori have approved of for such a young age?

Montessori placed immense importance on the first years of life: 'We must never forget that man does not develop only at the university, but begins his mental growth at birth, and pursues it with the greatest intensity during the first three years of his life.' [3]

In particular she drew attention to the opportunity for the mother and newborn child to bond during the first weeks of life saying that the security of his mother's arms and her loving response to his cries are indispensable: 'The mother radiates invisible forces to which the child is accustomed, and they are a help to him in the difficult days of adjustment.' [4]

Montessori thought that the first 6 weeks, what she called the symbiotic period, are sacrosanct and that no child should be away from his mother in this time. However, after this time the needs of the child start to change. This symbiotic period is followed by a series of stages of separation and attachment. It is a positive kind of separation through which the child lets go of something that he no longer needs and replaces it with attachment to something more appropriate. The first step is a gradual physical separation from the mother as the infant's own capacity for movement and his interest in his surroundings grow. He will advance from breast milk to solid food and his language will develop. If this progression of independence is recognised and encouraged both by his parents and by the childcare facility they choose his early childhood will be a time to celebrate his accomplishments and instil in him the self-confidence necessary for further exploration of the outside world, while continuing to offer him the safe-haven of the home. Montessori philosophy supports the idea that if a child is to go into a childcare facility the separation should be gradual and developmentally appropriate.

In thinking about the right kind of childcare we need to think about the needs of the growing child. For example, Montessori placed great importance on fostering independence in children.

We can foster independence by actively promoting the child's development of movement and language from day one so we should make sure that the childcare facility we choose does this. But first, we should make sure we send him off to the childcare facility dressed for appropriately because this can help or hinder movement; the infant needs light, loose clothing to allow him to roll, the crawling baby needs robust material to protect his knees and a child who begins to pull himself up to standing will be grateful for clothing that doesn't trip him up!

He will also need open space and the freedom to repeat his movements so that he progresses from slithering to crawling to walking. Initially he may need some incentive to move, such as pushing himself along on his stomach to get to a toy placed just out of reach, but once he is able to walk he will not want to stop.

A Montessori Nido welcomes babies from two months until they can walk well and are able to feed themselves. Floor mats next to mirrors with mobiles suspended overhead encourage movement and low, sturdy furniture is at hand for children to pull themselves up to standing. When they begin to walk there are purpose-built stairs with railings and pushcarts to offer more challenge.

The age of eighteen months brings great

enthusiasm for refining movement; 'A child between the ages of a year and a half and two can walk several miles and clamber up such difficult objects as ramps and stairs, but he has an entirely different purpose in walking than we do. [He] walks to perfect his own proper functions and consequently his goal is something creative within himself.' [5]

Childcare facilities can respond to these urges by taking by accompanying children on walks without any specific objective or rush. Any suitable childcare facility also needs to offer him chances for purposeful activity: dressing and undressing himself, pouring his own drink, laying the table for lunch and washing up, for example. If he wants to climb and descend the stairs over and over again, he should be allowed to.

The acquisition of language begins with a period of observation; we have all seen a baby's face light up when he is spoken to directly. From birth he is attracted to the sound of the human voice and when we take the time to speak to him face-to-face he watches attentively, absorbing the way in which we move our lips. In the following months the child begins to babble and for this to advance into his first words we must react encouragingly. We can enrich the language in his surroundings by singing to him, by reading books and by indicating objects and repeating their names. This richness of language must be abundant in any suitable childcare setting.

Montessori was so concerned about the fact that parents did not know enough about child development that she started to train parents in a course called 'Helpers in the Home' at the Montessori Society in Rome. When talking about the need for adults to speak to children in a clear and grammatically correct way she suggested that: 'One might arrange, as we do in our schools, for children of a year old to find intelligent persons who would talk to them intelligently. The difficulties the child meets with between one and two are not sufficiently realised, nor do we see how important it is to give him the chance of learning perfectly. [...] The new 'Helpers in the Home' for children from birth to two years of age must have a scientific knowledge of the development of language.' [6]

Language development plays a major part in both Nido and Infant Community, be it in one-on-one or group activities. As the name implies, the environment is one in which they can learn how to interact with other children in a positive way. Speaking out in support of childcare she said: 'So, once again, I urge the importance of having a special kind of "school" for children of one to one and a half.' [6]

She was concerned that the home might not meet the need for order. The young child thrives on consistency, both in his daily routine and in the layout of his surroundings, and when this harmony is disturbed it is greatly upsetting:

'A very important and mysterious period is the one which makes a child extremely sensitive to order. This sensitiveness appears in a child's first year and continues on through the second. [...] A positive manifestation of it may be seen in the enthusiasm and joy which children show at seeing things in their proper places.' [7]

For the overall healthy development of the child, the psychological as well as the physical needs require our attention. It is essential, for example, to allow the child to finish an activity, even if we cannot see what his objective may be. When we interrupt him it sends a signal to the child that we feel he is not capable of carrying out the activity and this in turn damages his self-esteem and dampens his interest in engaging with his surroundings. As Montessori says 'So difficult is it to find adults who will not interfere with infantile activities, that all psychologists agree in asking for places to be set aside for children to work in, where they can be free from interruption. For this purpose, day nurseries and infant schools are very important, especially for tiny tots of one and a half upwards. [8]

These days, over sixty years after the first training courses for 'Helpers in the Home', childcare is offered in 'Nidos' and 'Infant Communities', each run according to Montessori philosophy. There is an air of routine and predictability, essential if the children are to feel secure and confident away from home. There is less pressure on time than may be experienced at home; while parents have to run a household and may rush the child. Here, all utensils and furniture are proportional to the children's size and children are given the freedom to choose their own activities and repeat them as often as they wish. Some activities incorporate repetitive cycles that help establish patterns of sequence and logical thought while others improve control over their movements.

Montessori gave a model for childcare for the child under three and if current practice follows this model then one can only suspect that she would have approved!

Gayle Wood, AMI Diploma holder

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Montessori Society AMI [UK]
26 Lyndhurst Gardens
London NW3 5NW
020 7435 7874
Email: info@montessori-uk.org
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